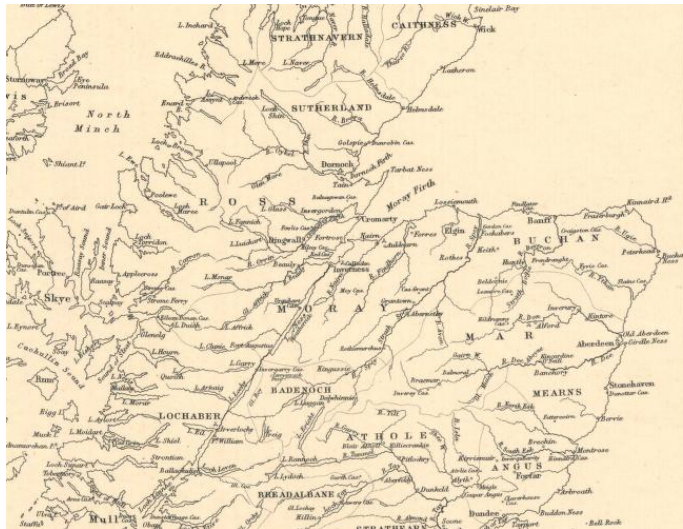


The History of the Earls of Mar

The Territory of Mar

The territory of Mar includes is made up of mainly the river valleys of the Dee & the Don, from the royal seaport of Aberdeen on the coast of the North Sea where the two rivers converge to the majestic Cairngorm mountains in the west. Mar both defensively divided Moray & Buchan to the north from Athol and the Mearns in the south and also joined them together by protecting the routes of trade & commerce.



The Mormaerdom was divided into five “Lordships”. The Strathdee (the valley of the Dee) & the Strathdon (the valley of the Don) are the valleys to the north & south. Midmar (the plain of Mar) comprised most of the land between the rivers. Cromar (the sheepfold or sheep pen of Mar) is a bowl shaped area around Tarland that is still a rich farming area. Braemar (the hills of Mar) are the forest & wild highlands of west Mar. Each lordship was controlled by a castle. The Doune of Invernochty that protected the Strathdon including Marchmar (the borderlands of Mar to the north) is now just an earthen mound, but at one time rivaled Windsor as a great hilltop fortification. Aboyne Castle that controlled the Strathdee is now in the hands of the Marquess of Huntly, the chief of the Gordons. Midmar Castle in Midmar still stands and is a private residence where they raise Red Deer. The great castle of Kindrochit in Braemar is now a ruined pile of scattered stones. It was replaced in 1628 with Braemar Castle which also still stands. Kildrumny was the seat of the power of Mar and was one the greatest of all Scottish castles. It was dynamited after the '45 Rising to prevent it being a center of rebellion in the future.

The Mormaers of Mar

Prior to the twelfth century the Mormaers were the rulers of districts or territorial divisions in Alba. A Mormaer was a Pictish dignity inferior only to the king himself. Their power over the inhabitants of the district was vested in the connection of the tribe with the land, and the succession to the Mormaership seems to have been limited to the descendants of the founder of the tribe. Thus the Mormaer was the ruler of all the people within the territory of the tribe. The Book of Deer and early fragments of other chronicles contain references to the Mormaers of Athol, Angus,

Moray, Mar, Buchan, and other districts. By the end of the eleventh century, the central government of the king had obtained some control over the Mormaers and the local tribes between the Forth and the Spey. After the eleventh century the Pictish title of Mormaer began to be superseded more feudal titles. Some used the French title of Comes or Count, while others used the Scandinavian title of Yarl or Earl.

Tradition has preserved both the earliest mention of a Mormaer of Mar and one of the most unusual stories of revenge in the same tale. About the close of the ninth century, Sigurd, the first Scandinavian Yarl, or Earl, of Orkney, had conquered a large part of the northern territory of Pictland. Eventually he invaded the provinces of Mar. Melbrigda, the Mormaer of Mar at that time, brought an army out against the Vikings, but lost the day and was himself killed in the battle. Sigurd found Melbrigda's body, chopped off his head, hung it from his saddle, and rode off in victory. It seems, however, that Melbrigda had a large, prominent tooth which inflicted a nasty wound on Sigurd's leg as he made his celebration ride back to and around his camp. The wound later festered and eventually killed Sigurd. Thus Melbrigda was able to strike a final mortal blow to his enemy from beyond the grave.

Another interesting connection to Melbrigda is the Hunterston brooch discovered in 1830 buried in Ayrshire near Glasgow. It is one of the oldest and finest pieces of Pictish artwork ever found. It dates from the 700s, but it must have come into Melbrigda's possession for on the back of the brooch is scratched the words "this belongs to Melbrigda" in Norse runes. It may have the property of this early Mormaer of Mar.



In 1014, Donald, son of Emin, Mormaer of Mar, sailed to Ireland to assist the Irish in repelling the attacks of the Danes. He fought and died in the battle of Clontarf. This tragic story suggests that the family name of MacEmin is associated with the Mormaers of Mar.

In 1065 Martachus, Mormaer of Mar, witnessed a charter given by Malcolm Canmore to the Culdees of Lochleven, one of the first references that comes down to us in writing.

The First "Earl" of Mar

About 1114, in the reign of Alexander I, Ruadri (or Rothri) became the first to be recorded as Earl of Mar. Even though the Lords of Mar stretch back beyond the very origins of Pictish and Scottish history, the accepted numbering of the Earls begins

with him. However, in some lists he is numbered as the fifth Earl, though no list of succession exists for these previous mormaers. Earl Ruadri is noted as one of the Earls who gave consent to King Alexander's charter for the foundation of the Abbey of Scone in 1120.

Ruadri died about 1141 and was succeeded by his son, Morgund, who became the second Earl of Mar. There is a strong tradition that Morgund was actually Ruadri's nephew, the son of Ruadri's brother Gillocher or Gylocher. Many sources state that the great family that ruled the Earldom of Mar was known only by the name of their territory and are without a surname, but the surname McEmin is sometimes used. However, many genealogies use the surname MacGylocher and most accounts give the 2nd Earl's name as Morgund MacGylocher.

Another strong tradition has the surname of this great family of the Earldom of Mar as Ehislach. The origins of the surname Ehislach are unknown, but is listed in the genealogies of at least three daughters of Mar who married into the leadership of clan Sutherland, the Bruces, & and the Stewarts. In fact Alesta Ehislach, the daughter of Morgund, married Alan fitzWalter, 2nd High Steward, in the late 1100s. Their descendant later founded the Stewarts.

Morgund died March 30, 1183 and was succeeded by, Gilchrist as the third Earl of Mar. Gilchrist may not have been Morgund's son, but his successor was.

The First Attempt to Seize the Earldom of Mar

About the year 1224, Gilchrist was succeeded by Duncan (MacGylocher), Morgund's son, becoming the fourth Earl of Mar. A dispute arose between Duncan and Thomas Durward. Durward asserted that Morgund and his son were illegitimate and, on that ground, claimed the Earldom of Mar for himself by right of his mother, wife of Malcolm Lundin, the King's hereditary door-keeper. Thomas's family took the name of Durward from their hereditary office of doorkeepers to the King and for a time the family rose rapidly in power and influence. It appears certain that the King supported the claim of his doorkeeper to help break up the old and powerful Celtic earldom of Mar. The dispute for a time was settled by a compromise by which Thomas Durward obtained a great deal of land in Mar stretching from Invercanny on the banks of the Dee to Alford on the Don, and from Coull on the west to Skene on the east. Even so, the Durwards were not satisfied and would later attempt to press their claim for the whole Earldom of Mar.

Earl Duncan died February 7, 1244 and was succeeded by his son, William (MacGylocher), fifth Earl of Mar. He is included among the great barons of Scotland in the letter of fealty granted by Alexander II to Henry III of England in 1244. During the adolescence of Alexander III, William came into conflict with Alan Durward, Thomas Durward's son and Justiciary of Scotland. Alan Durward was a powerful and

dangerous man. In 1233, he boldly assumed the title and style of Earl of Athol. He also married a natural daughter of Alexander II and had attempted, in 1252, to secure the succession of the Crown of Scotland for his daughter. In 1257, not content with the very large estates that his father had obtained for him in Mar, he attempted to claim the whole Earldom for himself. He petitioned the Vatican and the Pope directed that an inquest be held. In spite of Alan's great efforts, the Pope ruled against Alan Durward, Earl William continued as Earl of Mar and the Durward family failed in their ambition.

Despite their personal conflicts, both William of Mar and Alan Durward continued as influential men in Scotland. The Earl William held the office of Great Chamberlain of Scotland in 1252, and again from 1263 to 1266, and was one of the Regents of Scotland.

Earl William died in 1273 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Donald (MacGylocher), as sixth Earl of Mar. In 1270 Earl Donald was knighted by Alexander III at Scone. He was also present at the meeting held at Scone on February 5, 1284, in which the barons and bishops acknowledge the king's granddaughter, Margaret, the Maid of Norway, as the heir to the Crown of Scotland. After the death of the Maid of Norway, in September, 1290, the Earl of Mar became a supporter of the claims of Robert Bruce of Annandale to the Crown. In 1291, the seven Earls of Scotland, which included Donald of Mar, petitioned to Edward I for reparations for the burning and plundering in the towns and lands of Moray by Edward's under-wardens of Scotland, as well as the slaying of many inhabitants.

The Earl Donald was also present in the chapel of the Castle of Berwick, on August 3, 1291, when Edward I insisted that his offer to judge the claims of the many candidates for the Scottish Crown did not diminish his right as the Supreme Lord of Scotland. That same year, on the 24th of July, he was in the Church of the Friars at Perth when Edward I received the fealty of Mary, Queen of Isle of Man, and Countess of Strathearn. Later, on April 26, 1296, Earl Donald fought at the battle of Dunbar and was shortly afterward taken as a prisoner by the English.

Mar in the Scottish Royal Bloodline



Robert the Bruce & Isabella of Mar

Donald died July 7, 1297 and was succeeded by his son, Gartney, seventh Earl of Mar. Gartney married Christian Bruce, a sister of Robert I, while Robert I himself married Isabella, Earl Gartney's sister. And so the blood of Mar became mixed with the Scottish royal line. In fact, the Stewarts owe their claim to the royal lineage to Margaret, the daughter of Robert I & Isabel of Mar. Margaret married Walter Stewart & their son became Robert II, the first Stewart king.

By marriage to the Bruce's sister, Earl Gartney also received the lordship of Garioch, pronounced "Gair-ē", a territory between Mar & Buchan to the north of the Don.

The Earl and his wife had two daughters, Ellen and Janet, in addition to their son Donald. The elder daughter, Ellen of Mar married John Monteith and their daughter, Christian Monteith, married Edward Keith, the Great Marischal of Scotland. Edward Keith's daughter, Janet Keith, married Thomas Erskine and their son, Robert Erskine, as a descendant of Ellen of Mar, eventually became heir to the Earldom of Mar. The Erskines did not win their claim to the Earldom of Mar until a century after Robert Erskine's death.



Kildrummy Castle in its glory

Earl Gartney died in September of 1305, while he and members of his family were captives of the English King. He was succeeded by his son, Donald II, eighth Earl of Mar, who was then a boy. Edward I ordered that the young heir of Mar should be kept in the Castle of Bristol, but soon after ordered that Donald "accompany" the king under house arrest. He was detained as a prisoner in England until after the

battle of Bannockburn. In 1306, while Earl Donald II of Mar was still

a prisoner in England, his uncle, Robert Bruce, took command of the Castle of Kildrummy as he embarked on the retaking of the kingdom of Scotland.

Earl Donald II finally returned to Scotland in 1314 and later led one of the divisions of the Scottish army which invaded England in the summer of 1327. After the death of Robert I, the Earl of Mar joined the cause of his cousin, the young prince, David II. In 1332, the current Regent of Scotland, the Earl of Moray, died and the Earl of Mar

was elected Regent in his place. Unfortunately, shortly after he was slain at the disastrous battle of Dupplin.

Donald II died August 12, 1332 and was succeeded by his son, Thomas, ninth Earl of Mar. Thomas married Margaret Stewart, but they had no children together. In 1358 King David II reconfirmed the Lordship of Garioch to Earl Thomas and his heirs, if he should have any. In 1359, the king also made Earl Thomas Chamberlain of Scotland. However, by 1361 there was a serious dispute between Thomas and his cousin, David II. The dispute escalated to the point that the King besieged the Castle of Kildrummy. King David succeeded in taking the castle and appointed Sir Walter Moigne temporary keeper of the fortress. Though reduced in stature, the Earl remained a man of influence to the end of his career.

The Five Contenders for the Earldom of Mar

Thomas died June 21, 1374, leaving no heir. As the last in the male line of the old Celtic Earls of Mar, the title passed to his only sister, Margaret of Mar. She was already married to William, first Earl of Douglas when she became tenth Countess of Mar and Baroness of Garioch by Thomas' death. Thus William Douglas became the Earl of Mar by his marriage to Margaret of Mar. The couple had a son James and a daughter Isabel. However, William also had an illegitimate son, George, by Margaret Stewart, the widow of the late Thomas, Earl of Mar. George would later be a contender for the Earldom of Mar.

When William died in 1384, he was succeeded by his son James, second Earl of Douglas, and would have been eleventh Earl of Mar by right of his mother upon her death. In 1388, Earl James died leading the Scots at the battle of Otterburn.

Because James had left no heir, his sister Isabel succeeded to the Earldom of Mar and the Lordship of Garioch, upon her mother's death in 1391 or 1393, as the eleventh Countess of Mar. Isabel married Malcolm Drummond, a brother of Annabella, Queen to Robert III. But the marriage produced no heir.

This is where the contest begins concerning the five contenders for the Earldom of Mar.

The first contender is, of course, Malcolm Drummond, who became the Earl of Mar only by right of his marriage to Isabel of Mar.

The second contender was George Douglas, Isabel's illegitimate half-brother. Margaret Stewart, the widow of Thomas, the late Earl of Mar, was a woman of great ambition and few scruples. Margaret conceived her illegitimate son, George, by the late William Douglas, Isabel's father. She was the Countess of Angus in her own right and wished to promote her only son at any cost. In 1389 she resigned the Earldom of Angus, with the Lordships of Abernethy and Bonkill, in favor of her son.

But not satisfied with this, she continued her efforts to obtain the disputed lands of the House of Douglas for George and, above all, the wide territorial possessions of the Earldom of Mar.

After the death of her first husband, William, first Earl of Douglas, Margaret of Mar married John Swinton. He, with the assistance of his wife, became the third conspirator in the struggle for Mar and Garioch.

Thomas Erskine is the fourth contender. As the husband of Janet Keith, the granddaughter of Ellen of Mar, the late Earl Donald's sister, he worked hard to protect his wife's, and his own, claim.

On March 18, 1391, Thomas Erskine began to press his claim before the King in a Parliament sitting at Scone, stating that if Isabel should die without an heir, the Earldom should pass to his wife as heir through Ellen, the sister of Earl Donald, and not to George Douglas or John Swinton. The King promised that he would do nothing to prejudice the right of Thomas's wife. Thomas Erskine had a notary public present who formally recorded the agreement. Again, on November 22, 1395, Robert III, declared in a letter to Thomas Erskine that he would not recognize any resignation by Isabel Douglas of the Earldom to anyone other than the heirs of Thomas Erskine. Even so, less than two years later, on May 24, 1397, the weak King entered into an agreement with Margaret Stewart that if George Douglas, her son, Lord of Angus, should marry one of the King's daughters, then the King would give him all the lands of the Earldom of Angus and would secure from Isabel of Mar all the lands, rents, and possessions she held within the kingdom of Scotland for George. The king did this even though he had given a letter promising the contrary to Thomas Erskine.

Such was the intrigue surrounding the Earldom of Mar and the Lordship of Garioch towards the close of the fourteenth century. But even more startling surprises were to follow with the appearance of the fifth contender for Mar.

In 1390, Robert III granted to Malcolm Drummond, now Earl of Mar by right of his wife, the Countess Isabel, a license to erect a tower on the lands of Castletown of Braemar. In 1402, while Malcolm was residing in his newly completed castle, he was attacked by a band of ruffians, instigated by Alexander Stewart. Malcolm was overpowered and thrown into a dungeon where he shortly died from his wounds.

After the murder of her husband, Isabel moved her household to the protection of the castle of Kildrummy, the chief seat of the Earldom of Mar. In the summer of 1404, Alexander Stewart swooped down upon the castle. He captured the castle, seized the Countess, forced her to marry him, and then extorted from her the Earldom of Mar and the Lordship of Garioch with all the lands and



privileges belonging to her. A charter confirming the "agreement" was dated August 12, 1404. The immediate effect of this charter was to override the claims of the Erskines and the other three remaining contenders to the Earldom of Mar.

This outrage upon the Countess and the extortion of the charter were too flagrant to stand without protest. Fortunately for Alexander Stewart, he was related to the Royal Family, as a natural son of the late Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan, the "Wolf of Badenoch". Because of the power and influence of his uncle, the Duke of Albany, Alexander was saved from any actual punishment.

Even so, on September 9, 1404, Alexander Stewart orchestrated a bazaar ceremony. The Countess, accompanied by the Bishop of Ross, Sir Andrew Leslie, Walter Ogilvie, other gentlemen of the district, and a multitude of the local inhabitants, proceeded to the meadow outside the great gate of Kildrummy Castle. Alexander then came out of the castle, advancing to where the countess stood and then, with an exaggerated show of sincerity, delivered over to her the castle, placing the keys in her hands and publicly announced that the castle was no longer under any constraint. This having been done, the Countess, holding the keys in her hands, then publicly announced her choice of Alexander Stewart as her husband and gave him, "of her own free will", the castle, the Earldom, and all the lands which she possessed. This grotesque ceremony was confirmed by a new charter dated December 9, 1404. However, this new charter contained the reservation that the title, Earl of Mar, would continue through Isabel's heirs if she and her husband had no heirs. This proved to be a crucial provision.

All these bazaar events were confirmed by a separate charter granted by Robert III on January 21, 1405. Thus Alexander Stewart, the last of the contenders, became Earl of Mar.

The Countess Isabel died about three years after her marriage and left no heir. Even so, Alexander continued to hold the Earldom and made every effort to secure the succession for his illegitimate son, Thomas Stewart.

The Battle of Harlaw

Alexander Stewart was an active supporter of his uncle, the Duke of Albany, who was then Regent of Scotland. In 1411, the family quarrel between Donald, Lord of the Isles, and the Duke of Albany came to a crisis. The Duke ignored the lawful claim of Donald, Lord of the Isles, to the Earldom of Ross, in right of his wife, Margaret Leslie. He wanted the Earldom of Ross for his own son. Alexander Stewart supported the Regent with a large force he had raised. Alexander, Earl of Mar, would prove to be both a great leader of men and a very capable general.

The Lord of the Isles pressed his claim at the head of about six thousand men and crossed the water to the mainland. He marched through the Earldom of Ross, in

which he received much support, and greatly increased the strength of his army. Proceeding south, he advanced through Moray, crossed the Spey, and continued his advance through Banffshire and the higher grounds of Strathbogie and the Garioch, finally pitching his camp on the Hill of Benachie. At this point Donald's army numbered some ten thousand men. On the other side the Earl of Mar was at the head of a force not quite as numerous as Donald's host, but much better armed and supplied. The leading chiefs of northeast of Scotland were there; the Forbeses, the Irvines, the Burnetts, the Lesliees, the Hays, the Gordons, the Ogilvies, the Leiths, and others. The Battle of Harlaw was fought on July 24, 1411, upon a moor in front of the hill of Benachie. The fighting was long and furiously contested with great loss of life on both sides. Only nightfall put an end to the desperate struggle. There was no great victory for either side, but Donald and his followers retreated, leaving the field to Mar.

While the Battle of Harlaw was a great battle to be sure, it changed very little. It was mainly a personal and family quarrel instigated by the greed of the Duke of Albany. In the end the Duke of Albany failed to attain his aim and the Lord Donald of the Isles retained possession of the Earldom of Ross, and his son Alexander succeeded him in 1420. To add a note of irony to the story, on May 27, 1425, Murdoch, the new Duke of Albany and the late Regent's son, was tried in the Castle of Stirling and sentenced to be executed. Alexander, the late Earl Donald's son and now Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles, was one of the jurymen who passed judgment on Murdoch. Despite the Battle of Harlaw being romanticized in legends and ballads, the only thing it really accomplished was the slaughter of many of Scotland's great leaders of that time.

For his role as the reputed "victor" of the Battle of Harlaw, Alexander Stewart, the Earl of Mar, was rewarded by being appointed Admiral of the Realm of Scotland. It appears that he used this new position to order the attack and plunder of several English vessels at sea between Berwick and Newcastle. In addition to his other honors, Mar was also appointed Lieutenant of the North by the King.

The Crown takes Possession of the Earldom of Mar

Shortly after the return of James I, Alexander resigned the Earldom into the King's hands in order to win his royal favor. This was excess of his rights according to the 1404 charter he and Isabel of Mar signed. He, however, evidently succeeded, for on May 28, 1426, the King granted a charter to Alexander returning the Earldom of Mar and the Lordship of Garioch to be held by him during his life, and after his death, by his lawful heirs. But the charter contained an illegal provision that if, however, Alexander died without an heir, the Earldom and Lordship would revert to the Crown in spite of the previous charter. On January 9, 1427, James I granted a charter awarding Alexander the additional lands of the Lordship of Badenoch, in the Sheriffdom of Inverness. But, in 1431, Donald Balloch, a cousin of the Lord of the

Isles, completely defeated the Earl of Mar in a pitched battle at Inverlochy, which deprived Mar of that Lordship.

The Earl of Mar had no legitimate children. He tried to secure the succession of his natural son, Thomas, to the Earldom. Mar arranged for Thomas to marry Margaret, Countess of Buchan, a daughter of Archibald, fourth Earl of Douglas, the widow of John, Earl of Buchan, the Regent Albany's son. Only a grandson by Margaret of Buchan seemed necessary to make Thomas' succession to the Earldom of Mar



secure. But fate was against the Alexander and his son. Thomas Stewart died childless in the lifetime of his father and on the death of Alexander himself, in 1435, the King annexed the Earldom of Mar and the Lordship of Garioch to the Crown.

James I ignored the rightful claim of Robert Erskine, a son of Thomas Erskine and Janet Keith, who was the nearest heir of Isabel, the late Countess of Mar. The chief aim of the King's policy was to reduce the power of the barons. In his short reign James I annexed the Earldoms of Fife, Monteith, March, and Mar to the Crown.

After the murder of James I. at Perth, in 1437, Robert Erskine took legal steps to secure his right of succession to the Earldom of Mar and Lordship of Garioch. The inquest ruled in his favor and subsequently he assumed the title of Earl of Mar and Lord Erskine..

However, the government continued to distribute the lands and castles of Mar, even awarding the Lordship of Garioch itself to favorites of the Crown. On May 15, 1457, the King finally heard the matter. In spite of all the evidence to Erskine's legitimate claim, James II decided Lord Erskine's claim to the Earldom was rejected.

Though the Erskine claim was rejected by James II, the family continued to prosper receiving many honors including being elevated to the peerage in 1467. The second Lord Erskine fought on the side of King James III against the rebel lords at Sauchieburn. Robert, third Lord Erskine, fell at the battle of Flodden and his grandson, the Master of Erskine, was killed at Pinkie

James II in 1457 granted the Earldom of Mar to his own youngest son, John, then an infant. He became a manly and promising prince. Unfortunately, Earl John died unmarried in 1479 and the Earldom lapsed to the Crown.

In 1482 James III granted the Earldom to his brother, the Duke of Albany. But in 1483 he was involved in a conspiracy against the Crown and was forced to retire across the English Channel forfeiting the Earldom. In 1485, he was accidentally killed by the splinter of a lance while watching at a tournament in Paris.

In 1486 James III then granted the Earldom of Mar to his third son, John Stuart, a mere boy, who soon after (1503) died at the age of 17. The Earldom again reverted to the Crown, and continued in its possession for a period of 60 years, during which there were no publicly recognized Earls of Mar.

Large portions of the lands of the Earldom were from time to time granted to favorites of the Crown. These included members of the great families of Gordon, Forbes, and Elphinstone.

Queen Mary Restores the Earldom of Mar

For several generations the Erskines were entrusted with the duty of keeping the heirs to the Crown during their childhood. James IV, James V, Queen Mary, James VI, and his eldest son, Prince Henry, were in turn committed to the charge of the head of the Erskine family. After the James V death at Falkirk, John, the fourth Lord Erskine, gave refuge for quite some time to his unfortunate daughter Mary in Stirling Castle, of which he was governor. On the invasion of Scotland by the English, he removed Mary for greater security to the Priory of Inchmahome, an island in the Lake of Menteith, which also was his own property.

When she ascended to the throne, Queen Mary granted to her natural brother, James Stewart, Prior of St. Andrews and Earl of Moray, what remained of the lands of the Earldom of Mar, on February 7, 1562, and created him Earl of Mar. For a short time he was called Earl of Mar. However, by 1565, the Queen decided to hear the claim of the Erskine family to the Earldom and to the Lordship of the Garioch. She resolved to restore them to John, sixth Lord Erskine, as the legitimate heir of Mar.

The Queen called for an inquest to be held on May 5, 1565, in Edinburgh. The verdict of the jurors was that John, now Lord Erskine, was the legitimate and nearest heir of the late Robert, Earl of Mar and Lord of Garioch. Lord Erskine's status having been established as heir to Earl Robert, on June 23, 1565, Queen Mary granted him the Earldom of Mar and the lands of the Lordship and Regality of the Garioch. Thus John, Lord Erskine, became seventeenth Earl of Mar.

Among the lands specified in the charter as being in the Earldom of Mar are Strathdon, Strathdee, Braemar, Midmar, and Cromar, being portions of the Earldom then in the hands of the Crown. The Earl immediately recovered possession of these lands, but many years elapsed before the other lands of Mar could be recovered. Even so, large portions of the original holdings were never recovered.



John, Earl of Mar, married Annabella, a daughter of William Murray of Tullibardine, by whom he had a son, John. About this time the Earl was appointed guardian of the infant King, James VI. The young heir spent his youth very happily and securely in the household of the Earl, pursuing his studies and enjoying sports in the company of Mar's eldest son. King James later even nicknamed his class-fellow "Jock o' the Sclaits" (slates) remembering young John Erskine's writing down the young sovereign's misdeeds on a *slate* as their tutor had required of him.

There is a story which may explain the Earl's affection and care for the young James. The story is that Mary Queen of Scots' infant died soon after birth and that John Erskine, Earl of Mar substituted his own infant son for the dead Prince. The tradition is supported by the recent discovery of an infant's body walled up in the Royal Apartments in Edinburgh Castle where Mary is said to have given birth to her child. Also portraits of the 19th Earl, eldest son of Earl John, and James VI have an uncanny, almost family resemblance.

On the death of the Regent Lennox in 1571, the Earl of Mar was elected Regent of Scotland. The Regency of Mar was of short duration for he died on October 28, 1572.

He was succeeded by his son, John, eighteenth Earl of Mar, and seventh Lord Erskine. This Earl was a man of great energy and ability and he made many determined and prolonged efforts to recover the lands of the Earldom. He was a supporter of the Regent Morton and he even entered into an agreement with the party of the Barons who were conspirators in "the Raid of Ruthven" to end the Earl of Arran's influence over the King. In the raid of 1582, Arran was captured and banished from Scotland.

By August of 1583, the hated Earl of Arran had returned and was again in control of the government. A new plot was formed against him, in which the Earls of Mar, Angus, and Gowrie, the Lord Lindsay, the Master of Glamis, Claude Hamilton, John Hamilton, and others were associated. On April 10th, the Earl of Mar and the Master of Glamis, with a large number of their followers, captured Stirling Castle. But on April 15th the Earl of Gowrie was arrested and taken to Edinburgh. At about the same time the Earl of Arran, with a strong force, advanced against them at Stirling. Mar and Glamis were forced to abandon the stronghold of Sterling. With capture of Stirling, a royal proclamation was issued for the capture, dead or alive, of the Earls of Mar and Angus, the Master of Glamis, and the other rebels. However, they escaped by Lanark to Kelso, and crossed the border into England.

When the Lord Maxwell raised a border revolt against the King and Arran, the banished Earls of Mar and Angus, and the other lords, saw their opportunity and joined Maxwell. In the beginning of November, 1585, they returned and met Maxwell at Selkirk. From there they marched on Stirling with a force of 8,000 men. The King

and Arran were in Stirling when the earls and lords arrived. Arran immediately fled into the Highlands, while the King had no alternative but to receive the homage of his rebellious barons and pardon them. Thus the forfeitures of the Earls of Mar and Angus and the other lords were revoked, and their lands and titles restored to them.

The Recovery of the Lands of Mar

Earl John took the first important step to recovery of the alienated lands of the Earldom of Mar and Lordship of Garioch in the year 1587, when he presented a supplication to the King and Parliament. The King and the Parliament found his rights to be lawful and valid. In the hearing the Lord Elphinstone appeared before the King and Parliament and protested that this Act should not hurt or prejudice his possession of the lands and Lordship of Kildrummy. Also George, Earl of Huntly, Lord of Gordon and of Badenoch, and Lieutenant of the North, appeared in Parliament and protested that this action should not hurt or prejudice his rights and titles to lands within the Earldom of Mar and Lordship of Garioch. Even so, an Act was passed on July 29, 1587, granting Earl John the right to pursue the recovery of the lands of Mar.

Earl John having risen to great and exceptional power, in 1593 commenced proceedings in the Court of Session against William Forbes of Corse, the great-grandson of Patrick Forbes, a younger son of the second Lord Forbes to whom in 1482 the lands of Corse and Kincaigie were granted by James III. The court having disallowed Forbes's defense, admitted the Earl's right to the lands. Mar, however, refrained from further prosecution of the case at that time. But he revived the process in 1620. William Forbes of Corse was then dead and the suit was renewed against Patrick Forbes, his son and heir, the highly esteemed and amiable Bishop of Aberdeen. The case was well presented and debated on both sides. The final judgment was in Mar's favor and was given on June 23, 1621. This decision was based on the charter of Robert III, dated January 21, 1405, which confirmed Isabel's charter of December 9, 1404.

The Earl of Mar next directed his attention to the recovery of Kildrummy, originally the chief seat of the Earldom. Proceedings against Lord Elphinstone and his son, the Master of Elphinstone, whose ancestors had been in possession of Kildrummy for 110 years, were summoned to court in 1621. It was a great and complicated case, and it caused much alarm in the northeast of Scotland and in other quarters of the kingdom. The process continued for four years. The final decision was delivered on July 1, 1626, by which the lands and estates of Kildrummy were declared to belong to John, Earl of Mar by heritable right from Robert Erskine, the legitimate heir of Isabel, Countess of Mar and Garioch. After this decision, Lord Elphinstone and the Master of Elphinstone agreed to accept a payment of 48,000 marks to renounce all rights to the castle and lands of Kildrummy.

There were many other estates and land rights which had been alienated from the Earldom of Mar and Lordship of Garioch by preceding Kings of Scotland and crown vassals. The Earl continued to press proceedings for the recovery of these possessions and rights. As he had succeeded so far, he resolved to widen the scope of his claims. Accordingly, the Earl undertook prosecutions against upwards of 150 including the Earls of Crawford, Kinghorn, and Earl Marischal, Lord Forbes, Lord Deskford, and Lord Wemyss, Irvine of Drum, Burnett of Leys, Leslie of Balquhain, Scrymgeour of Dudhope, the hereditary constable of Dundee, many Gordons, Forbeses, Leslies, and Leiths.

These proceedings stirred up many anxious searches in many massive iron chests and hidden vaults with their complicated locks and secret drawers which were the repositories of the charters in the old Scottish castles and towers. Some of those involved had possessed their lands for centuries and many for several generations. A considerable number succeeded in proving their right to the property in question, but in the majority of cases the superiority was found to belong to the Earl of Mar.

Earl John held the office of Lord Treasurer of Scotland from 1615 to 1630. He died on December 17, 1635, at the age of seventy-seven. He was succeeded by his son John, nineteenth Earl of Mar, and eighth Lord Erskine. The new Earl married Christian Hay, a daughter of Francis, Earl of Erroll, and they were blessed with children. The fortune and influence of the family reached the zenith in his time.

It was also Earl John who commenced a series of protests for higher precedence for the Earl of Mar in the roll of Peers. This was a point very highly valued by the nobles of Scotland, as is manifest in the records of Parliament. At the opening of almost every session for upward of a century a number of Earls and Lords protested regarding the precedence of their names and titles on the rolls of Parliament. Bitter contentions arose between many of the Scottish Peers touching their precedence and in 1587, Parliament issued an Order, intended to allay these feelings, which had no effect. James VI issued a Royal Commission under the Privy Seal in 1605 for examining and settling the disputed questions of precedence among the peers. The commissioners issued their decree on March 5, 1606. But the ranking of the decree was in no case final, being open to corrections before the Court of Session by aggrieved parties. Naturally the decree was not satisfactory to all the nobility of Scotland. Nevertheless the Decree of Ranking and the Schedule of Evidence upon which the precedence were based are important historical documents along with the corrections made upon it by the decisions of the Court of Session. With the additions made to it by the creation of new peers between 1606 and 1707, it forms what has been called the Union Roll of the Scottish Peerage.



According to the ranking of 1606, the Earl of Angus was placed first. Argyle ranked second, not on the ground of the date of the Earldom, which was 1457, but because he held the hereditary office of Master of the Household and Justiciary General. The Earl of Crawford was ranked third on the roll. The Earl of Erroll, the hereditary Lord High Constable of Scotland, was placed fourth. His office in Parliament as constable was to keep order and guard outside the walls of the House. Earl Marischal was ranked fifth, his office as Marischal was next in grade to the High Constable. The Earl of Sutherland stood sixth on the roll, his ancestor having been created Earl in 1347. The Earl appeared before the commissioners, and produced a charter of David II to William, Earl of Sutherland, and Margaret his wife, the "King's sister." John, Earl of Mar, produced evidence before the commissioners starting with the charter of Isabel, Countess of Mar and Garioch, of December 9, 1404, and concluded with an extract of the retours of 1589. He was placed seventh on the roll.

But his son John, Earl of Mar, was not satisfied with his place on the roll. In 1639 he protested in Parliament for higher precedence than that assigned to him by the Decree of Ranking in 1606. The succeeding Earls repeated the protests for higher precedence until 1705 without success.

The Earl of Mar remained a supporter of the Royal cause in the Civil Wars of the seventeenth century. In consequence of this, the family suffered serious loss, and the debts created in the pursuit of the cause of Charles I and Charles II required the sale of many of their estates.

Earl John died in 1654 and was succeeded by his son John, twentieth Earl of Mar and ninth Lord Erskine. The Earl first married Mary Scott, a daughter of Walter, first Earl of Buccleuch. He later married Mary Mackenzie, a daughter of the Earl of Seaforth.

Earl John died in 1688 and was succeeded by his son Charles, twenty-first Earl of Mar and tenth Lord Erskine. The Earl married Mary, a daughter of George, Earl of Panmure, and by her had children. This Earl was a Jacobite, and was almost ruined by his attachment to the Stuart dynasty.

The First Jacobite Rebellion

Charles died in 1689 and was succeeded by his son John, twenty-second Earl of Mar and eleventh Lord Erskine. Earl John was an able politician. Even though, like his predecessors, he was at heart a Jacobite and distrusted by William of Orange, in 1706 during the reign of Queen Ann, Mar was appointed Secretary of State for Scotland. He even assisted the Government to carry the Treaty of Union through the Scottish Parliament. Meanwhile, the Jacobites made every effort in Parliament and in the country in general to obstruct and defeat the passing of the Treaty of Union and they were extremely enraged at the Earl of Mar for assisting the Government to pass it. His political fencing straddling earned him the nickname of "Bobbing John" Erskine.



"Bobbing" John Erskine 22nd
Earl of Mar, 11th Lord Erskine

Mar continued as Secretary of State for Scotland. However, in the latter years of the reign of Queen Ann the Jacobites were very active and were gaining ground. On the death of the Queen August 1, 1714, the Elector of Hanover was proclaimed King, under the title of George I. The Earl embraced the earliest opportunity of offering his service to the new King, but on September 24, 1714, he was dismissed from the office of Secretary of State for Scotland and the Duke of Montrose was appointed to the post instead. Mar remained for some time about the Court in London, but no special favors were granted to him by the new King. At last the Earl resolved to be revenged.

He left London in the beginning of August, 1715 and landed in Fifeshire. Then he proceeded to Braemar, issuing intimations, as he advanced northward, to the Highland Chiefs and his friends to join him at a great hunting party in the forest of Mar. He reached Invercauld Castle on the 19th of August and immediately commenced operations for the memorable gathering which met on the 26th of August at Braemar. The party then assembled round the Earl of Mar included the Marquis of Huntly, eldest son of the Duke of Gordon, the Marquis of Tullibardine, eldest son of the Duke of Athol, Earl Marischal, the Earls of Erroll, Seaforth, Southesk, Linlithgow, Carnwath, Traquair, and Nithsdale, the Lords Duffus, Rollo, Drummond, Stormont, Strathallan, Ogilvie, and Nairn, the Viscounts Kenmure, Kilsyth, and Kingston, Gordon of Glenbucket, the lairds of Auldbar and Auchterhouse, and about twenty men of note and influence in the Highlands. The number of men assembled at Braemar was nearly eight hundred.



Braemar Castle

There were many indications of the coming rising in other places. In Aberdeen, early on the morning of August 11, 1714, even before the accession of George I, a number of young men accompanied by fiddlers playing Jacobite tunes marched through the streets. On reaching the Castlegate, they gathered round a well and drank the health of James VIII. Similar incidents occurred in other places.

On September 3, 1715, a special meeting was held at Aboyne Castle to deliberate on the projected rising. At this meeting there were present the Marquis of Tullibardine, Earl Marischal, the Earl of Southesk, and Lord Huntly, Glengarry from the Clans, Glenderule from the Earl of Breadalbane and the gentlemen of Argyleshire, Lieutenant-General Hamilton, Major Gordon, and a few others. So on September 6, 1715 the one-time Unionist supporter "Bobbing" John Erskine, twenty-third Earl of Mar raised the Jacobite banner of rebellion in favor of the Old Pretender, James Stuart in Castletown of Braemar, on the spot where the Invercauld Arms Hotel now stands.

A large number of the Braemar men with men from many other quarters of the country joined the rising. There is evidence, however, that some of those who joined the rising had no choice, but were forced to follow their feudal superiors. John Farquharson of Invercauld, for one, completely disapproved of Mar's movement and was unwilling to join it, but had no alternative, as the Earl was his feudal lord.

Mar himself assumed the rank of commander-in-chief of the insurgent force and his followers commenced to move southward by the Spital of Glenshee. They marched through Moulin and Logierait to Dunkeld, receiving reinforcements as they proceeded. At Dunkeld the army numbered 5,000 men. On September 16th, a detachment took possession of Perth and Mar made it his headquarters.

As the rising spread, some of the leading Jacobites in the North of England joined it. By the month of November, there were fourteen thousand men in arms for the Stuart cause. Mar himself, however, had little military skill or energy and remained too long inactive in Perth. The body of the insurgents, mainly consisting of Scots and some Englishmen, who were operating in England, under the command of Forster, were overtaken by the royal troops at Preston. On the 12th of November, a severe battle was fought, in which the insurgents were completely defeated, and many of the Scots and their leaders taken prisoners. Among others, John Farquharson of Invercauld was taken and imprisoned. He was confined till 1717, when he was finally liberated by the efforts of Rev. Ferguson.

Mar at last moved from Perth southward and on November 13, his force and the royal army, under the Duke of Argyle, met and fought the Battle of Sheriffmuir, near Dunblane. It was, however, indecisive though both claimed the victory. The actual result was that Mar retired with his army to Perth, where his force began to melt away.

James VIII finally landed at Peterhead on December 22, 1715. On the following day he passed through Aberdeen, progressing southward until he reached Perth on January 6, 1716. His presence inspired no new hope, as this representative of the Stuart line did not have the charisma needed to lead an army to victory and glory. Even so, preparations were made for his coronation at the historic burgh of Scone, on the 23rd of January. But before that day came, the Stuart King had to seriously consider retreating from the advance of his enemies.

The Duke of Argyle was lying at Stirling Castle with the royal army until on January 23, 1716 he commenced his march on Perth. His progress was very slow, owing to the depth of snow upon the ground. At midnight on the 30th of January, the insurgent army commenced to retreat, crossed the Tay on the ice and marched to Dundee and thence by Arbroath to Montrose. There, on the 3rd of February, the Pretender, the Earl of Mar, and a few other persons went aboard a small vessel and sailed for France. This incident caused a number of the men to leave for their homes. General Gordon was left in command and marched the fast diminishing army northward. On reaching Aberdeen, on February 7th, the remainder of the army dispersed. But a large number of those who joined the rising never returned to their homes, being either slain or taken prisoners.

Comparatively lenient feelings towards the insurgents prevailed in Scotland. But the English Government took the punishment of the prisoners and those implicated in the rising into their own hands. Many of the prisoners were executed at Carlisle and other places, and hundreds were sent to the plantations to live out a wretched life in slavery. Several persons of rank made their escape from prison and fled for their lives, amongst them were Forster, Lord Nithsdale, and Mackintosh of Borlum. The estates of over 40 families in Scotland were forfeited to the Crown.

Although the Earl of Mar saved his life by sailing from Montrose to France with James VIII, all his estates and titles were forfeited to the Hanovarian Crown. Eventually, clemency was extended to the members and friends of the family of Mar, not immediately descended from the exiled Earl. They were permitted to repurchase the forfeited estates at a price much below their market value and to settle them under trust for the benefit of the lineal heirs of the house. The purchasers and trustees were Lord Grange, the forfeited Earl's younger brother, and David Erskine of Dun, a Lord of the Court of Session. On July 26, 1725, this transaction was confirmed by a charter. The two trustees, Lord Grange and Lord Dun, in 1739 finally finished their work of straightening out the disposition of the residue of the Earldom of Mar. In the end, all the lands of the Earldom in Aberdeenshire were sold.

John, the forfeited Earl, lived for the most part in France and attended the Court of James VIII, “the Old Pretender”, at St Germain, near Paris. He was even proclaimed by James Duke of Mar, while in exile. But Earl John continued his habit of self-serving intrigues including selling the names of some of James’ supporters still in Britain in order to secure an annual stipend from the Crown. He finally incurred the displeasure of an increasingly suspicious James and had to leave the Court. He died at Aix-la-Chapelle in May, 1737.

John left an only son, Thomas, Lord Erskine, and a daughter, Lady Frances Erskine. Because of the forfeiture of the Earldom and Title by Earl John’s support of the Stewarts, Thomas was never given the title Earl of Mar, but is counted a *de jure* 23rd Earl. The public honor of the title passed to the son of his sister, but not until 1824.

Thomas, Lord Erskine, died in 1766, leaving no heir. Lady Frances then became heir to the lineage of the Earls of Mar. She married her cousin, James Erskine of Grange, a son of the forfeited Earl’s brother.

Lady Frances Erskine died in 1776 and left a son, John Francis Erskine, by her husband. In 1824, the title of Earl of Mar was restored to John Francis by an Act of Parliament. John being the grandson of the forfeited Earl and was made the twenty-fourth Earl of Mar.

He died in 1825 and was succeeded by his son, John Thomas Erskine, twenty-fifth Earl of Mar.

John Thomas died in 1828 and was succeeded by his son, John Francis Miller Erskine, twenty-sixth Earl of Mar. He also claimed the title of Earl of Kellie, which was awarded to him in 1835. Thenceforth he bore the title of the Earl of Mar and Kellie.

The Two Earls of Mar

The Earl died in 1866 and, leaving no children, was succeeded by his nephew by his sister, John Francis Erskine Goodeve, twenty-seventh Earl of Mar. He did not obtain any of the lands of the Earldom of Mar. The remaining lands of the Earldom are in the possession of Walter Coningsby Erskine, Earl of Kellie. John voted repeatedly as Earl of Mar at Holyrood and Walter, his cousin, always addressed him as Earl of Mar. But, in 1866, the Earl of Kellie commenced to lodge cases in the House of Lords, claiming he should be the Earl of Mar. John Goodeve at once presented a petition as Earl of Mar, asserting his right to the title, protesting the claim of the Earl of Kellie. In January, 1872, the Earl of Kellie died, but his son and successor, Walter Henry Erskine, continued to prosecute a claim to the title of Earl of Mar. At last, in 1874, the Earl of Kellie’s claim was referred to the Committee of Privileges. The opinion of the committee recorded on February 25, 1875, was that the Earl of Kellie had proved his claim to the dignity of the Earl of Mar created in 1565.

The committee's decision was deemed hasty and very unpopular. A short time later, John Goodeve attended an election of Representative Peers at Holyrood and offered his vote as the Earl of Mar, but the Lord Clerk Register refused it. This caused a stir among a number of Scottish Peers, which was not surprising considering the controversy created by the opinion of the Committee of Privileges on one of the oldest Earldoms in the land.



A series of debates on who should have the right to the title of Earl of Mar continued in the House of Lords. Also debated was whether the Earldom should be dated from 1404 or was it created in 1565 by Queen Mary. To remove these doubts an Act of Parliament was passed in 1885, in which the old title of Earl of Mar was confirmed to John Francis Erskine Goodeve, dating from 1404, while Walter Henry Erskine bears the title of Earl of Mar created in 1565 and is to be distinguished as the Earl of Mar and Kellie.

As a result, at present there are two Earls of Mar, one is the chief of only the Clan Erskine, the other is heir to the lineage & history of the ancient Earls of Mar.

The Modern Earls

John Francis Goodeve Erskine was born 1836 and became the twenty-seventh Earl of Mar in 1885. He died in 1930.

John Erskine, whose full name was John Francis Hamilton Sinclair Cunliffe Brooks Forbes Goodeve-Erskine, was born in 1868. He became the twenty-eighth Earl in 1930, but died in 1932.

Lionel Walter Young was born in 1891 and became the twenty-ninth Earl of Mar in 1932. In 1959 he resigned his title and died in 1965.

James Clifton Lane was born in 1914 and became the thirtieth Earl in 1959 as James Clifton of Mar. In 1967 he resigned his title in favor of his daughter Margaret and died in 1975.



Margaret Alison Lane was born in 1940 and became the thirty-first Countess of Mar in 1967 as Margaret of Mar. She lives and works on her farm in Coventry and is recognized and matriculated as the chief of the Tribe of Mar by the Lord Lyon of Scotland. As Countess, she is addressed as the Right Honorable, Countess of Mar, Margaret of Mar. She also has the right to sign simply as “Mar” since she is the Mar.

Mar also serves as an active member of the House of Lords, having received the greatest number of votes of any of the elected members.

She also holds the Jacobite title of 9th Duchess of Mar, not recognized by the British government, which was first conferred upon the 22nd Earl while he and James VIII were in exile in France.