

**THE HISTORY OF THE PROVINCE
OF CAT (CAITHNESS AND
SUTHERLAND), FROM THE
EARLIST TIMES TO THE YEAR 1615**

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The History of the Province of Cat (Caithness and Sutherland), from the Earliest Times to the Year 1615 by Angus MacKay & D. Beaton

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ANGUS MACKAY & D. BEATON

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THE HISTORY
OF THE
PROVINCE OF CAT
(CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND)
FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE YEAR 1615.

BY THE LATE
REV. ANGUS MACKAY, M.A.,
Author of the "Book of Mackay," etc., etc.

EDITED BY REV. D. BEATON, WICK.
WITH FOREWORD BY LORD REAY.

WICK:
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1914.



FOREWORD.

The HISTORY OF THE PROVINCE OF CAT (otherwise the Counties of Caithness and Sutherland) is a most elaborate and careful work. The ground covered is from "Before the Dawn" to the beginning of the Seventeenth Century. The Author has made most excellent use of his materials, and has brought to light many sources of knowledge that have hitherto been overlooked.

It is impossible in a short Introductory Note to deal with the merits of the work, but I would desire particularly to call attention to Chapter IV., which deals with the Advent and Settlement of the Norsemen in a way in which, so far as I am aware, this matter has never been touched upon before.

Chapter VI., dealing with the Conflicts of the Clans, is a not less valuable contribution to History.

I am particularly struck with the way in which the story of the Church in Caithness is rendered.

The book abounds with interesting points for those who care for local history, and the Author has handled his subject so as to make it a contribution to national history.

REAY.

May 15, 1914.

ERRATA.

- Page 26: footnote, line 1, for "Galish" read "Gantish."
Page 27: footnote, line 9, for "Grupius" read "Grampus."
Page 52: footnote, line 5, for "Saga Library, 116" read "Saga Library, I, 116."
Page 140: line 6, from foot of page, for "outed" read "ousted."
Page 142: line 7, for "1550" read "1560."
Page 149: line 11, for "Cathness" read "Caitness."
Page 154: line 12 from foot of page, for "Reugent," read "Regent."
Page 191: line 5 from foot of page, for "June" read "July."

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

IN seeing this work through the press my attention has mainly been confined to the verification of references and the collation of quotations with the original sources. In this I had the valuable help of James MacDonald, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh, who kindly verified those references from books which I had not in my possession. In Mr. MacKay's lifetime he had submitted the chapter dealing with antiquities (Chapter I.) to Dr. Joseph Anderson, and the chapter dealing with the Celtic Church (Chapter III.) to Rev. A. B. Scott, B.D., Helmsdale. Both Dr. Anderson and Mr. Scott made some corrections and suggestions which were noted in the margin of the MS. I have taken the liberty of incorporating these into the text. Dr. Anderson's pre-eminent position as an antiquary and the intimate knowledge he possesses of northern antiquities make any criticism of his particularly valuable. Mr. Scott has also given evidence in his studies on the hagiology of the Pictish Church that his opinion in his own department is worthy of all respect, and it is to be hoped that his forthcoming work—*S. Ninian and the Founding of the Celtic Church among the Britons and Picts*—will soon be published, as it is sure to throw new light on the early Celtic Church. I may be permitted to say that Mr. Scott informs me that the Sutherland place-name—Kilchalumkil (Strathbrora), see p. 33, which is supposed to be a dedication to the great Dalriadic missionary, Columba of Iona, in its oldest form appears as "Gillycealongill" (1450), that is the *gill* of Gillecalom. This, of course, tells against Kilchalumkil being a commemoration of Columcille. The first Roman Abbot of Fearn was a Maot-Choluim, and it may be that this place-name commemorates this Colum; at least his name seems to enter into some Ross-shire place-names.

Any alterations made in Mr. MacKay's MS. were of an unimportant nature and consisted in the correction of a few

grammatical slips and of two or three dates that were manifestly wrong. With these exceptions, and the footnotes in square brackets for which I hold myself responsible, the work is wholly Mr. MacKay's. In regard to these footnotes they are mainly illustrative but here and there they are the expression of the opinions of authorities which differ from that stated in the text. I did not feel at liberty to make reference to some statements and points which if the work were mine I would either have omitted or put in a different way as it was my desire that the book would go forth to the public as Mr. MacKay had left it. One could have wished that he had lived to finish it and see it through the press. For even since the first part of the MS. was finished a number of books bearing on northern history have been published containing material that might have been used with advantage, such as Dowden's *Bishops of Scotland*; Dinan's *Monumenta Historica Celtica*; *Records of Caithness and Sutherland* (Viking Club); *Second Report and Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the County of Sutherland*; and *Third Report and Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the County of Caithness*.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to R. J. G. Millar, Esq., Editor of the *John O'Groat Journal*, Wick, and George Bain, Esq., Librarian, Wick, for the valuable help given in reading the proofs.

D. BEATON.

Wick.