

# Clan Irving

The Border Irvings & Irvines

## History of the Irvings

Much of what has been written about the history of the Irvings & Irvines in the Lowlands stems from two principal publications: “The Book of the Irvings &c” by Colonel J.B. Irving in 1907 which draws on many sources for its content, and “The Original of the Family of the Irvines or Erinivines”, by Dr Christopher Irvine M.D., so-called Historiographer Royal of Scotland, in his short family history written in 1678.

However, modern day research has uncovered some inaccuracies and rather obvious embellishment of the historical facts in both of the aforementioned publications yet nonetheless we should not let this detract from the colourful history of the Border Irving & Irvine Clan. This article attempts to keep to the known historical facts and touches on some of the misconceptions.

The tradition starts with the statement that the Irvings of Bonshaw are descended from Duncan of Eskdale, a younger brother of Crinan, father of Duncan I of Scotland.

The paternal grandfather of Duncan of Eskdale and Crinan was the Abthane of Dule and lay Abbott of Dunkeld, also called Duncan. This latter Duncan is believed to have been a direct descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages who was High King of Ireland early in 5<sup>th</sup> century. He appears to have been appointed as Governor of Strathclyde when the region was conquered by the Saxons and given to Malcolm I (943-964 AD). As Governor, his residence is supposed to have been the old fort of Eryvine or Orewyn, so he is known as the 1<sup>st</sup> of Eryvine. He was killed at the battle of Duncrub circa 964 AD. A standing stone on the battle site north of Dunning, Perthshire, marks Duncan’s tomb.

Duncan 1<sup>st</sup> of Eryvine was succeeded by his eldest son, Duncan 2<sup>nd</sup> of Eryvine who was succeeded by his eldest son, Crinan, who married Beatrix (or Bethoc) daughter of Malcolm II (995-1034 AD) and by her, was father of Duncan I (1034-1040 AD) who reigned as King of Scotland for six years. It has been said that Crinan was the progenitor of all the kings of Scotland down to Alexander III (1249-1286 AD) and in the female line of all the sovereigns of Scotland to present day with, apparently, the exception of Macbeth (1040-1057 AD) who murdered his son, Duncan I, in 1040 and reigned for seventeen years.

In 1018, Duncan of Eskdale was appointed as Governor of Cumbria with his nephew, Duncan, as ‘Rex Cumbrorum’ based at Carlisle and Castle Owryn (now known as Castle O’er).

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When Malcolm Caennmor introduced the parish system towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Irving lands in Kirtledale became the parish of Irving, retaining its identity until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it was split into the parishes of Annan and Kirkpatrick-Fleming. The Irving lands during the 11<sup>th</sup> century were extensive, stretching from Annandale to Liddesdale.

David I (1124-1153 AD) granted feudal superiority of Annandale in 1124 to the Norman family De Brus who retained it until accession of Robert De Brus, Earl of Carrick, to the throne of Scotland in 1306. The Irvings became vassals perhaps for the first time in their history, initially under De Brus and then for more than four centuries, finally achieving independence under the Johnstons.

Robert De Brus was a guest at Bonshaw Tower in 1298 when he fled the English court of Edward I and there is a cave in the Kirtle cliffs at Cove, within which Robert De Brus was hidden on more than one occasion.

The tradition extends to the story of a 'William De Irwyn', second son of the chief of the Irvings at Bonshaw, being taken into the service of Robert De Brus, holding various offices in the Royal Household, and ultimately being rewarded with part of the Forest of Drum in 1323 and free barony for his devotion to duty.

The story suggests that the Irvines of Drum are descended from the Irvings at Bonshaw as a consequence. In fact, quite the reverse is true. Due to the geographical, economic and historical isolation between the Irvines in the Highlands and Irvings & Irvines in the Lowlands, they are two separate Clans sharing a common Name. (See The Irvines of Drum).

The next mention historically of the Irvings is not for another two hundred years.

In July 1484, at the battle of the Kirtle, where the Duke of Albany and the Douglasses were routed, the Master of Maxwell was killed and just across the Kirtle water from Bonshaw Tower, the Merkland Cross marks the spot.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Irvings of Bonshaw played a leading part in Border warfare and in national politics under the chiefship of Edward Irving of Bonshaw (1555-1605). It was during this century that a feud existed between the Johnstons and Irvings on one side and the Maxwells with their supporters on the other.

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At the battle of Solway Moss in 1542, Christopher Irving of Bonshaw commanded the light horse, surviving the battle and continuing the resistance against Henry VIII. From 1543 through to 1548, there were continued border clashes between the English Wardens, the Earl of Lennox, Lords Dacre and Wharton in particular, and the Scottish forces. In one conflict, Christopher Irving of Bonshaw led a running battle with English forces from Durisdeer down Nithsdale but eventually getting caught in a flanking attack by the English and incurred heavy losses. Having been taken prisoner, he renewed his former oath and was later released.

A truce between England and Scotland in 1550 gave many a Border Clan the opportunity of renewing old feuds. In 1554, the Kirkpatricks slew a younger son of Christopher Irving of Bonshaw. The Irvings bided their time until 1563 when Edward Irving of Bonshaw, the new laird, slew the Laird of Closeburn, Chief of the Kirkpatricks.

In 1564, at a meeting of the Scottish Privy Council on 21<sup>st</sup> December, the marriage of Christopher, the son of Edward Irving of Bonshaw, and Margaret, daughter of Johnston, was forbidden by resolution. The objection at the time was due to the increasing influence and power held by the Irving-Johnston alliance in the West Marches. Two years later the marriage took place with little consequence to either Clan.

During 1566, the Irvings fell out of favour with Queen Mary, having given her support in her early struggles, so, in true Borderer style, they changed sides and joined the then Regent Moray. Three years later, Moray appointed one of Bonshaw's younger sons, Edward, as Governor of Annan.

In 1570, the Earl of Sussex raided Dumfriesshire with 4,000 men, damaging many towers and castles, Bonshaw being one of them. Over the next few years during the Regencies of the earls of Mar and Lennox, the Irvings fell into and out of favour. One chief, Edward Irving of Bonshaw, spent a short time in prison (1572) but was released.

During 1585-1586, the Irvings and Johnstons were at war with the Maxwells. This seemed to have been started by the Maxwells raiding Johnston territory but culminated with a peace treaty with Johnston handing over the lands of Irving to Maxwell. The Irvings had no intention of complying with these terms and when Maxwell claimed Kirkconnel for example, he met with defiance from William Irving, a son of the laird of Bonshaw, and retreated. On 16<sup>th</sup> June 1585, Maxwell laid siege to Bonshaw but retreated with no result. Maxwell made two further attempts during 1585 at taking Bonshaw without success.

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Early in 1586, the Irvings and Johnstons, backed by the Grahams of Netherby, took Maxwell and his 'police force' by surprise, captured and held him prisoner even though he was seriously wounded. In May, a force of Maxwells, Douglasses and others raided Kirtledale. Later in the same year, feuds were set aside whilst the Borderers joined together to oust the Regent Arran.

During the last decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was an ongoing feud between the Bells of upper Kirtledale and the Irvings of lower Kirtledale. This may well have been started by the shooting of "Fair Helen of Kirkconnel", the date of which is uncertain.

In December 1593, the Irving-Johnston alliance, under Sir James Johnston of Lochwood met the Maxwells at Dryfe Sands. The battle that followed was notable in that it was the last Clan battle to be fought in Scotland. The result is that the Irving-Johnston forces inflicted a crushing defeat on the Maxwells with Lord Maxwell being slain on the field. The Maxwells never fully recovered even to this day.

After the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, life on the Borders quietened down considerably but the Clan history continues.

During the Civil War in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Irvings supported the Royalists and anti-Presbyterians.

Between 1672-1677, the general registration of armorial bearings of the nobility of Scotland, William Irving of Bonshaw registered the ancient armorial achievement of Irving of Bonshaw, these being: ".....bears argent three hollin leaves proper above the shield ane helmet befitting his degree mantled vert doubled argent next is placed ane torse for his crest ane arm gauntleted holding ane branch of hollin consisting of seven leaves all proper. The motto is ane scroll Haud Ullis Labentia Ventis".

The next notable historical mention is of the birth of Colonel Paulus Aemilius Irving in 1714 at Bonshaw, he entered the Army and in 1759 was i/c of 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot under General Wolfe during the capture of the Heights of Abraham at Quebec. He later became Governor of the Province of Quebec. His son, General Sir Paulus Aemilius Irving was created "Baronet of Woodhouse and Robgill"; the title became extinct in 1852 with the death of the third baronet.

John Irving, younger of Bonshaw, was appointed Collector of Land Tax for Dumfriesshire in 1732 and a Commissioner for Supply in 1741. He took no part in the Rebellion of 1745,

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but William Irving of Gribton and his eldest son James, Edward Irving of Wysebie and John Irving of Whitehill were all reported for aiding Prince Charles.

In 1765, William Irving of Bonshaw entailed the estate. In 1770, he built the new mansion which now forms the main living quarters. He died two years later leaving an only son, a minor at six years of age.

John Robert studied law and in 1793 was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates where he was taught by Alexander Irving, Lord Newton, of the Irvings of Newton (a cadet branch of the Irvines of Drum) who was Professor of Civil Law at Edinburgh University from 1800-1826. By the time he died in 1839, the Bonshaw estate was in decline. He left two daughters, from one the Winter-Irvings (Australia) are descended. His successor, the Reverend John Irving, disentailed the estate in 1853 (please see separate article on this subject) and on his death Robert Nasmyth Irving (1827-1894) succeeded to the estate but wasted most of his life away from Bonshaw, leaving it heavily mortgaged; he died in 1894, unmarried. It is he who is regarded by Colonel J.B. Irving in his book as “the traitor” and referred to in his book by his initials “RNI”.

Colonel J.B. Irving (1844-1925) was the exact opposite of his predecessor. On Robert Nasmyth Irving’s death in 1894, he went to law as “heir-at-law” to recover what he could of the estate, with no entail to aid him, and after a protracted lawsuit, he settled at Bonshaw.

Col. J.B. Irving was succeeded by his youngest and surviving son, Captain Sir R.B. Irving (1877-1954), KB, OBE, RD, DL, who had a long and distinguished career at sea, fought at the Battle of Jutland and commanded the ‘Queen Mary’ in 1936. He was granted a knighthood in 1943 and retired in 1944.

Having succeeded to the Bonshaw estate on the death of his father in 1925, and his mother died the following year, Capt. Sir R.B. Irving devoted much of his time at Bonshaw in preserving the estate. He died in 1954 without issue and his successor and next “heir at law” was Commander G. R. I. Irving RN (1895-1970).

Commander G.R.I. Irving RN inherited the remainder of the estate as “heir-at-law” in 1954. He was born George Robert Irving Snow being one of the offspring of Major Alexander Duffett Snow of the Royal West of Scotland Artillery, and Rose Lilian Irving who was the only offspring of Colonel J.B. Irving to have issue. They had three children – Doris Lilian; John, who died in childhood; and George Robert. Doris Lilian went on to

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marry the historian, writer and broadcaster S.P.B. Mais; however their two children died without issue. Colonel J.B. Irving decreed in his Will of 1916 that his grandson, George Robert Irving Snow, should change his name by Royal Licence to ensure the succession.

This was common practice, more so post-WWI and post-WWII due to the lack of heritable males. The Royal Licence was granted by the sovereign George V in May 1927. The Royal Licence also granted Arms which were duly exemplified with the College of Arms.

When Commander Irving inherited as “heir-at-law”, he was in his sixtieth year, previously a WWII Royal Navy serving officer, and had never lived at Bonshaw. His son, Captain R.A.S. Irving RN (Retired), was only 24 years of age at that time, unmarried and just had started on his considerable sea service in the Royal Navy; neither had the means to live at or maintain the property.

Within a few years of inheriting and after a few years of trying to rent out the house and estate, he took the decision to sell, but only to an Irving. Eventually Mr. & Mrs. E. Keys-Irving Straton-Ferrier, who were living in Australia at the time, purchased the property. They were descended from the Irvings of Wysebie, a branch of the Clan which went to Australia in the early 1900's. Within a few years of taking possession of the Bonshaw property her husband died. Mrs. Keys-Irving Straton-Ferrier undertook some modernisation and improvements to the house and grounds.

As time went on, Mrs. Keys-Irving Straton-Ferrier herself died, and her son and his wife, who were living there with her, decided they needed to move on.

Drs J. B. & M.A. Irving purchased the Bonshaw property in 1986 and in 2005 their eldest son is now the owner. The Bonshaw estate and house is now still owned by an Irving, although distantly related within a cadet branch of the Clan – the Irvings of Dumfries.