

Clan Leslie Society INTERNATIONAL



Clan Leslie Septs: *Cairney*

Although Cairney is now a clan in its own right, with various spellings as is often the case, it first comes into Leslie history when Mary Abernethy married Sir Andrew Leslie (1316), bringing with her the Abernethy inheritance, which included 'the lands and baronies of Cairney in Forfar.' There are many places of that name or similar in Scotland, this one was situated between Perth and Dundee on the north bank of the river Tay estuary. A direct personal relationship between a Cairney and a Leslie is more difficult to establish but with surnames not yet widely used it was common for people to take the name of their district of origin to identify themselves. In all probability, therefore, there would have been people in Mary's entourage calling themselves 'of Cairney.' A more definite connection, however, comes with the Earls of Ross. Mary and Andrew's fourth son, Walter, married Euphemia, only daughter and heiress of William, 6th Earl of Ross, so when he died his inheritance passed to Euphemia and Walter, and Walter became the 7th Earl of Ross. The first recorded connection between a Leslie and a Cairney is when Sir John de Ross, son of the Earl of Ross (Walter's father-in-law), assumed the name of Cardney from lands he acquired from Robert II in 1375. Sir John's son, Robert de Cairney, and Alexander Leslie, Walter and Euphemia's son, were cousins (through Euphemia's Ross connection).

Robert became the famous Bishop of Dunkeld 1389-1436 and would have been serving as bishop there when Alexander died about 1405. Alexander, in the meantime had inherited as 8th Earl of Ross on the death of his mother in 1394. There is a striking effigy of Robert in Dunkeld Cathedral.

The lands of Cairney were passed down through the Rothes line until there is mention of them again on the death of the 4th Earl of Rothes in 1558. The succession of the earldom was challenged by his eldest surviving son, William, who had previously forfeit all claim to the title, so the title had passed to his younger half-brother, Andrew. Queen Mary eventually decreed that Andrew was the rightful Earl but that by way of compensation he must give the lands of Cairney to William and build a house there for him. The Cairneys later became involved with the much larger families of Stewart and Ross but the records usually quote Cairneys as a sept of the Leslies and we are happy for that to remain so.

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