

Ancient History of the Hannahs

The Earliest Hannahs

Family tradition says that about 1150 AD one Patrick a'Hannay was the chieftain of a powerful Scottish Lowland Clan of his name. He built his "castle" at Sorbie in southwest Scotland for the protection of his clan. This is the first known Hanna and the progenitor of our family.

In 1296 King Edward I of England sent one of his heralds to Scotland to register the names of the land owners of that country. Two persons, Gilbert de Annethe and Gilbert A'Hannay, both of Galloway, appeared before the herald and signed what is now known as the Ragman Roll of Landed Gentry, attaching the seal containing the Hannay Coat of Arms after their names. These names, de Annethe and A'Hannay, are believed to be early forms of the name Hannay, Hanna, and Hannah and this is the earliest existing record of the Hannay name and of the Hannay Coat of Arms.

The origin of the family, and of the name Hannay, are not known, although several theories have been advanced. The theory we favor suggests that the family and name came from the Norsemen who raided and inhabited the shores and inlets of southwest Scotland in the ninth century. Some historians suspect the name came from a Pictish Gaelic origin; others think the name came from an Anglo-Norman family who settled in the area in the eleventh century. There is probably an argument to be made for each of these theories, and the real story may never be known. The various spellings -- Hanna, Hannah, etc. -- came about over the years as the members of the family moved into England, Ireland and on to America and other places. It is generally accepted that almost all Hannahs of whatever spelling had their origins from the Hannays of Sorbie in Galloway, Scotland.

Sorbie Tower, the ancient home of the Hannays, is located in Galloway, south of Wigton, between the village of Sorbie and the seaside village of Garlieston. It is in a pleasant part of southwest Scotland, a rural setting full of farms where one may occasionally see the special cattle of the district, the "Belties". These cattle are black with a broad white belt running around their girth. Like an Oreo cookie, some say!

In the 15th and 16th centuries the Hannay family was increasingly powerful and influential in the area around Sorbie, an area called "The Machers". By 1543 when one Patrick Hannay was murdered as a result of a feud, the family was at the pinnacle of its power. Quoting Stewart Francis:¹

"At the time of Patrick Hannay's death - the power of the Sorbie family was at its height - they held considerable sway over the Machers of Galloway, and the Burgh of Wigtoun marched to their tune."

The family's downfall came as a result of long-running feuds with the Murrays and others early in the 17th century, as related later in this chapter.

An annual gathering of Hannay descendants is held each year at the Sorbie Tower ruin. The Clan Hannay Society organizes this celebration and all descendants of

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Hannays, Hannas and Hannahs of any spelling are welcome and will enjoy attending at least once in their lifetime. You need not be a member of the society to attend. The Tower and the Society are described later in this chapter.

The Coat of Arms of Hannay of Sorbie.

The Hannay Coat of Arms is described in Fairbairn's Crests, Matthew's American Armoury, Burke's Encyclopaedia of Heraldry, and found in American Genealogy of First Families of America, Volume III, page 548 as follows:

'Ar. three roebucks couped az. collared or. a bell pendant from each collar gu. crest, a cross crosslet fitch issuing out of a crescent sa. supporters, two roebucks prr.

motto: Per ardua ad alta. "Through difficulties I seek higher things."

The description of the Hannay Coat of Arms in ordinary language may be given as follows: The shield or escutcheon is ar. or argent (that is, silver or pearl or plain) which means peace and sincerity; the three roebuck heads, couped (cut off), represent peace and harmony and are az. or azure (blue, meaning loyalty and truth); the collars are or. (yellow or gold, meaning generosity and elevation of mind); the bell pendant is gu. (that is, red or ruby, which means magnanimity, while the bell itself indicated one who fears not to "signalise his approach in peace or in war"; the crest is a cross and crosslet, the emblem of Christianity, meaning a four-fold loyalty to the cross, and are sa. (sable or black, which means prudence); the supporters are roebucks prr. (that is, purple, which means temperance); and the motto beneath the shield is "per ardua ad alta", which translated into English is: "Through difficulties to high places," or as given above: "Through difficulties I seek higher things."

The crescent, part of the crest, is said to mean that a Hannay participated in one of the Crusades.

The Clan Hannay Society

Credit for the founding of the Clan Hannay Society goes to Pat Hanna, cartoonist, film star, and producer, from Melbourne, Australia. It was his enthusiasm and untiring efforts which made the Hannas, Hannahs and Hannays conscious of the great tradition of their family. In London, England in October 1959 he met another enthusiast, the late John Hannay, Deputy Mayor of Chelsea, and out of this meeting the Society was born.

Pat Hanna contacted Donald C. Hannah of Edinburgh, Scotland and Alex Hannah of Inverness, Scotland. Exploratory meetings were held at the former's home in Edinburgh on March 8, 1960 and again at Sorbie Tower on June 28th. It was decided to form the Hannay, Hanna, Hannah Clan Society, later shortened to Clan Hannay Society, with the prime object of acquiring the Hannay ancestral home, Sorbie Tower.

As a result of these meetings, a World-Wide Council of Hannays was formed with John Hannay as Convenor, Alex Hannah as Secretary and Donald C. Hanna as Treasurer.

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The first Council included Major R.W. Rainsford-Hannay of Kirkdale who, as of this writing, is still Clan Chief. The first General Meeting was held on May 18, 1962 at the Commonwealth Club, London, and thus the Clan Hannay Society was born.

One of the main objectives of our Society, and one indeed which is at the root of all Scottish Clan Societies, is to develop, maintain, and strengthen the links to our family line and their descendants who have spread throughout the world during past centuries. The preservation of Sorbie Tower, now in the possession of the Society, is an on-going project. The Society holds an annual gathering at the Tower in the latter part of May.

Membership in the International Society can be obtained for a very modest fee and a newsletter is published annually. A current address of the International Society as well as branches of the Society can be found in the *Highlander* magazine.

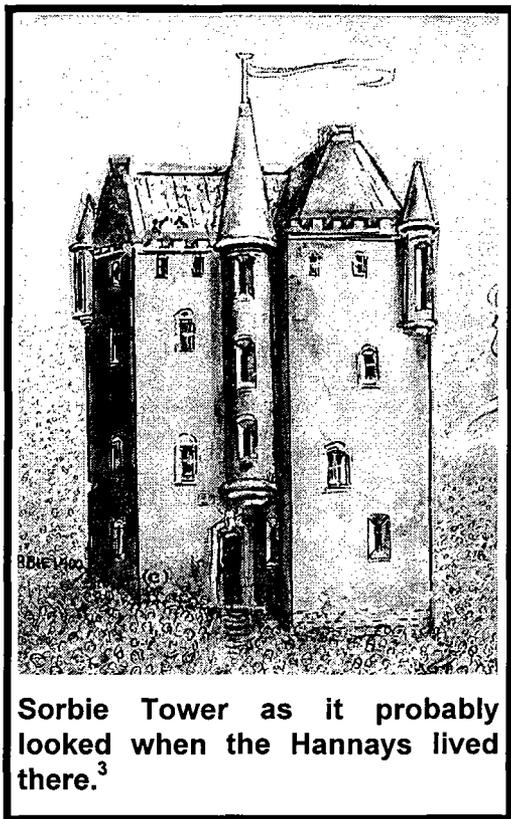
Sorbie Tower



Sorbie Tower about 1969

The Old Place of Sorbie, as it is called, is the ancestral home of the Hannay family. It was occupied by the Hannays from the time it was built, about 1580, until it was lost to the family in about 1640. There were, no doubt, one or more wooden structures that predated the stone tower by at least two hundred years, but whether the Hannays or perhaps some other people occupied this site then is not known with any certainty.

The picture shown here and the description is from a book² which describes the building in detail. It was built in an "L" shape with the larger side measuring 40' by 24' and the smaller 26' by 20'. The ground floor had three storage rooms and a kitchen. The next floor had a great hall and according to the referenced book, "The hall would have been a grand and comfortable room, with a wooden roof, tapestries on the walls, iron grated windows with glass and wooden shutters, perhaps portraits of members of the Hannay family, collections of books, seats in the in-goes of the windows, and fine tables and chairs." The remainder of the house, the third and fourth floors, would have been rooms and sleeping accommodations for the family and guests. There was a spiral stone staircase in the inside corner of the "L" near the main entrance. Quoting from the book again: "A covered wall walk around the main block on the third floor level, with corner turrets, provided a decorative castellated element. This walk would have been reached from the turret stairway,..."



In the grounds surrounding the ruin there are some traces of outbuildings and an old well, but not much archaeological work has been done at the site as of 1997.

Douglas in his book of Galloway (1745) gives the following description: "Looking eastward across the lake, on the extreme verge like a lonely sentinel standing black against the sky on a treeless mound surrounded by a fosse fed by a burn which issued from the Loch Longcaster, they descried the gaunt castle of Sorbie. When they reached it they found a square baronial tower of the 15th Century, a stronghold of the Hannays, a family who dealt heavy blows in times of war from Flodden Field to the Gates of Rhodes and for some such service bore on their helmet the rare heraldic of a Crescent and a Fitched Cross".

The state of the tower today is poor. It has no roof, some walls have fallen and others are in danger of falling. The floors on the second and third levels are gone and only a part of the first floor remains. The ground floor storage rooms are more or less intact and the kitchen fireplace has been restored. Ivy grows on the outside of the building and must be removed from time to time because it damages the stonework. Each year the Clan Hannay Society, which has held the tower in trust since 1965, must spend time, effort and money to preserve this historic family home. Indeed, this is one of the main purposes of the Society.

The Feud with the Murrays

One of the more interesting stories of the Hannays of Sorbie is the manner in which they went into decline in the latter part of the 1500s and early 1600s. The history of the feud with the Murrays of Broughton, as well as with other families, is well described in the book *The Hannays of Sorbie* by Stewart Francis. Even Stewart Francis, who obviously researched the events thoroughly, can't say what the feud was about; but it went on for years and eventually cost the Hannays of Sorbie all of their extensive properties. By about 1640 Sorbie Tower was owned by others. One example of the feud is taken from the above book by Francis, and illustrates the sort of actions the feud provoked.

In 1602 George Murray brought charges in front of the Privy Council against a group of Hannays as follows: (paraphrased)

John Hannay apparent of Sorbie, Robert in Boghous, Andrew and Archibald Hannay (others were named) and it being Sunday appointed for devine service came armed with hagbuts and pistolets for the slaughter of said Murray of Broughton. When

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Murray was approaching the parish Church of Whithorn the Hannays chased Murray back to his house where they besieged his house and attacked him and his company with pistols and hagbutts for their slaughter.

Murray survived to bring charges! Incident after incident of the Murray/Hannay feud is described in Stewart Francis' book and in many cases it cost the Hannay family large sums of money and loss of property. By 1640, when John Hannay was reported to have been killed in a quarrel, Sorbie had passed into the hands of the Earls of Galloway. Thus the Sorbie Hannay's downfall.

A Poet

One of the ancient family members was the famous soldier-poet, Patrick Hannay, author of *Two Elegies on the Death of Queen Anne* (London, 1619), *A Happy Husband*, and *Songs and Sonnets* (London, 1622). As a soldier of fortune, he reportedly fought in the service of the Queen of Bohemia. Among the poet's friends was one John Marshall, himself a poet, who referred to Hannay's grandfather as being "well known to the English by his sword."

Here is an example of Hannay's work:

"The maple, with a scarry skin,
Did spread broad pallid leaves.
The quaking aspen, light and thin,
To the air free passage gives -
Resembling still
The trembling ill
Of tongues of womankind;
Which never rest,
But still are prest
To wave with every wind."

(Editors' note: We feel compelled to offer apologies to women everywhere on behalf of our forebears!)

Men of the Cloth

There have been many clergymen in the Hannay/Hannah/Hanna families over the years and Hannays have embraced almost every major Christian denomination. Some were among the early Quakers. The name of the Most Reverend Thomas Hannay is well known among Scottish Episcopalians and the late Edward J. Hanna was Roman Catholic Bishop of Los Angeles. One branch of the clan in America is said to have given the Presbyterian Church no less than thirty three clergymen. However, we know of no clergy among the descendants of our ancestor, Joseph Hannah.

Janet Geddes' Prayer Stool

During Charles I's period of "government without Parliament" (1629 - 1640) Archbishop William Laud ruled church affairs, causing all who would not support the Episcopal Church (the Church of England) to be fined. Another Hannah clergyman, Presbyterian James Hannay, was appointed Dean of St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh in 1634 and was instructed to introduce Laud's Church Service Book. The Presbyterians of St. Giles wanted no part of this, and his attempt to introduce the book sparked the famous Jenny Geddes Riot of 1637. Here is how the riot scene was described in the *Annals of Edinburgh*:

"The dean, arrayed in his surplice, had no sooner made his appearance and opened the service book, than a tumult arose. An old woman named Janet Geddes started up and exclaimed, 'Out, out ! Does the false loon mean to say his black mass at my lug?' and threw her stool at the dean's head. This was the signal for a general uproar."

A representative of the Kingsmuir Hannays in Fife has commemorated the Jenny Geddes incident by placing a plaque on the floor of St. Giles Cathedral. The plaque reads: "To James Hannay, D.D., Dean of this Cathedral, 1634 - 1639. He was the first and last who read the Service Book in this Church". Today a visitor in St. Giles can see the plaque and also buy a replica of Jenny's stool!

Another clergyman of the Hanna family sometime in the last century was the Rev. Hugh Hanna of Belfast. He was well enough known to have had a statue made of him. However, he must have represented all that the Catholics disliked about the Protestants in Northern Ireland, because in the recent "troubles" the statue, in Carlisle Circus, Belfast, was blown up and destroyed.

The Ship *Nancy* and Captain Hannah⁴

Many of our Scotch-Irish ancestors came to America in the early and mid 1700's as a result of religious and economic conditions in Ireland and the prospect of free land in the colonies. English landlords in Ireland found that they could make more profitable use of the land than for some tenant farmer to work it and pay him rent. So, rents were raised and sometimes when leases expired they were not renewed. In general, times became very hard for the Scotch-Irish Hannahs and their kind in Ireland.

Almost-free land in the colonies became a magnet to these struggling people and in about 1761 the colony of South Carolina made it more attractive by offering not only free land, but also free passage. Ship owners were paid by the government to transport immigrants, and when the immigrants arrived, they were given land after paying some small fees.

The villain in our story is one Samuel Hannah, master of the immigrant-carrying ship *Nancy*, which sailed from Belfast in 1767. Travel to the colonies aboard such a ship in those days had to be a terribly uncomfortable experience. We can't even envision the crowded, dirty, dark, evil-smelling scene belowdecks, where these people had to exist for the two to four month voyage. Add very poor food, dank water, and

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little or no medical care, and you have a grim picture. At best it must have been terrible; indeed, many immigrants died enroute. Add one mean, greedy, unsympathetic ship captain and it gets downright nasty!

The good ship *Nancy*, skippered by Captain Hannah, arrived in Charles Town, S.C. June 5th, 1767 from Belfast with her "cargo" of 240 Irish settlers. Those emigrating had to be Protestants and they had to have a certificate of good character from their minister or from the local court in Ireland before they could leave. Catholics weren't given the privilege of emigrating. To be a Catholic at that time in Ireland was a pretty risky business in itself.

After their arrival in Charles Town in the *Nancy* some of the passengers were housed at the "Old-Barracks". Their plight was discovered and reported by a couple of church wardens. The wardens' letter of June 24th to the South Carolina Gazette revealed the pitiful condition of some of the passengers as a result of the voyage. In part the letter said...

"We saw in several rooms two or three corps at a time-- many dying--some deprived of their senses--young children lying entirely naked, whose parents had expired but a few days ago, and they themselves reduc'd by sickness to a situation beyond any description."

The letter went on to appeal for charity, etc.

On July 10, 1767 several of the Irish immigrants petitioned the council, which was responsible for paying the passage money to the ship owners and for awarding the land to the immigrants, saying that if they had known the law they would have sued Captain Hannah for the...

"...Cruel and Barbarous usage they received in the passage from the said Hannah."

The petition goes on to say....

"... setting forth the unsufferable bad behaviour of the said Hannah who after getting these poor souls on Saltwater not only nipped them of provisions allowed them but heaped them one upon the other to such a degree in their births that it must be absolutely impossible to survive....".

There is much more said about this matter in the book from which we took this story. The council withheld payment to the shipowners for a time, but we didn't find the final outcome. However, we do know that the ship *Nancy* with Captain Hannah sailed again from Belfast for Philadelphia May 14, 1768 per the Belfast Newsletter.

One family included in those poor mistreated passengers to Charles Town was Robert and Mary Hannah and their children James, Sophia, Elias, and Richard. We wonder how Captain Hannah's namesakes were treated !!?

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