

Extract from letter from Henry Cecil Kennedy Wyld to A.T. Kennedy¹

Alvescot House,
Alvescot, Oxfordshire
24th June 1939

My dear Cousin²,

As you seem to know little or nothing about the early history of your family, I send you some information.

You need not bother about Lord Ailsa, who is a very remote kinsman. The Marquisate was conferred as late as 1831, on the 12th Earl of Cassilis. What concerns you and me is the descent of our first John Kennedy (1694-1730) from the Earl of Cassilis, hos³ and our own ancestors.

The family derive their greatness from the fact that Sir James Kennedy of Dunoon (d.1408) married Princess Mary of Scotland, daughter of King Robert III. She was the Great, Grand-daughter of King Robert Bruce. Her father was the 2nd King of the House of Stewart.

The eldest son of Sir James Kennedy and Princess Mary was Gilbert (1406-1480) who was made 1st Lord Kennedy in 1457, his grandson David, 3rd Lord Kennedy was created 1st Earl of Cassilis in 1509. He was killed at Flodden in 1513 together with King James IV and the greater part of the other nobles of Scotland. His descendants succeeded him as Earls of Cassilis till 1759, when John 8th Earl died leaving no direct heir. The House of Lords decided that the heir to the Earldoms was Thomas Kennedy the descent of the second son of Gilbert 3rd Earl (1515-1558).

The main line failed again in 1775⁴ with the death of David 10th Earl. The 11th Earl, Gilbert was descended from Thomas grandson of 3rd Earl⁵. This Thomas had 11 other sons and I believe our ancestor to have been descended from one of these⁶. The Marquis of Ailsa comes straight from the 11th Earl. I presume that our John I was the first of our lot to come south, especially as his wife Alice Rae⁷ has a Scotch name.

Although John I died when his son John II was only a year old, the latter evidently knew his family history since both Archie Kennedy and our cousin Mrs. Pain⁸ have representations of his coat of arms, which is the correct Kennedy coat. The distinguishing feature of this is a double border, called by the Heralds a double Tressure, flory and counter flory with fleur-de-Lys round the shield. The family owe this to their ancestor Princess Mary. It is part of the Royal Arms of Scotland. You can see it on forins and half crowns in the 2nd quarter surrounding the lion rampant of Scotland.

Quintin Kennedy (1520-64) a son of 2nd Earl was Abbot of Crossaquel and a stout opponent of the Reformation. He disputed with John Knox at Maybole and was canonised subsequently⁹. The 3rd Earl became a Protestant and later Earls were strong Presbyterians¹⁰.

The 4th Earl (1541-1578) tortured the then Abbot of Crossaquel to extort from him the charters of lands belonging to the monastery. For this outrage he was very properly fined £2,000. These lands are still in the possession of Lord Ailsa.

Notes re John Kennedy 1694-1730 (Portrait at Weybridge).

In the copy of his Will at Somerset House¹¹ he describes himself as a linen weaver of the Parish of St. Leonards Shoreditch.

He appointed one of his executors Peter Roe¹² a broker of St. Andrews Holborn.

His wife Alice and his son John and daughter Alice are mentioned. The Will is dated June 4th, 1730.

NOTES

¹These notes are mine (Graham Howlett), not part of the copy lent to me.
This must be a photocopy of a re-type of the original, since this heading line has been typed at the same time as the rest – not subsequently added. It is not stated what has been omitted.
I presume that A.T. is Algernon Thomas.

²Algernon is a first cousin, once removed.

³typo: his

⁴1792. 1775 is date of death of David's brother, the 9th Earl.

⁵Thomas was the 2nd son, not a grandson, of the 3rd Earl.

⁶The tree that I have been shown, giving the line down from Robert The Bruce to Yvonne Kennedy appears to be constructed from a mis-reading of what is written here. Henry Cecil is claiming only that the 11th Earl and John I are descended from this Thomas—not that Thomas is the father of either of these.

Henry Cecil's 'I believe...' makes it very difficult to see how to join John I to the Earls of Cassillis tree.

⁷NO. Alice was born Horsman, first married John, and then married Peter Rae after John's death.

⁸I presume that Archibald is a son of Benjamin Edward Kennedy. I have not identified Mrs. Pain.

⁹Not true. Found this: "His canonization, however, is a mere fable and probably arose through confusing Quintin with St. Kinedus Eremita, whom Dempster connects with the Cassillis family, although he lived in the seventh century and the surname of Kennedy was not assumed until the thirteenth century." It comes from "Maybole, Carricks Capital Facts, Fiction & Folks by James T. Gray, Alloway Publishing, Ayr. First published 1972".

¹⁰This has also been queried.

¹¹Now at The National Archives. A copy and transcript is on file.

¹²The Will has 'Ray'. When being proved, it refers to Peter Rae or Ray.

Why did Henry Wyld note just one of the two executors? I suggest that this Peter Rae became Alice's second husband.