



The homeland of the MacKay Clan lies in the far north of Scotland, from Cape Wrath to the Caithness border, amidst wild, rugged and beautiful countryside. The earlier Clan lands were just north of Inverness in Moray and in the early 12th century The MacKay Chief, Malcolm, was known to the Norsemen as Jarl (Earl) of Moray. Both Malcolm and his immediate descendants came into conflict with the Kings of Scotland and the Clan moved north to the remote glen of Strathnaver in Sutherland. There the Clan prospered and by 1427 the MacKays, always warriors, were able to muster 4000 men for battle. The fighting abilities of the MacKays were well tested over the next three centuries when the Clan was involved in many battles, mainly with the Sutherlands and the Gordons, to prevent encroachment by these clans onto their lands.

The Clan also became well known on the battlefields of Europe when, in 1626, Donald, the MacKay Chief raised a regiment of 3000 Clansmen to fight in Germany during the Thirty Years War. Such was the reputation gained during this war, that they were much sought after and the regiment joined up with the army of the Swedish King, Gustav Adolph who was waging war against a large part of Europe in the Protestant cause. Much of the King's successes were due to the MacKay's fighting prowess and Donald was described by the Swedish King as 'my right hand in battle'. Charles 1 created Donald 1st Lord Reay in 1428, but the costs involved in raising the regiment had been great and parts of the Strathnaver lands had to be sold to pay the debts. From this time the Chiefs also became Barons of Nova Scotia.

The Clan also had a strong connection with Holland. General Aeneas MacKay who died in 1697 had made his home there and his great grandson was made Baron MacKay of Ophemert. Hugh MacKay of Scourie was in command of the Scots regiment in Holland which accompanied Prince William of Orange when, with Mary, he crossed to Britain and took the throne from James 11. He was appointed Commander in Chief by William and later died in battle in Holland. Hugh, 14th Lord Reay, Baron MacKay Van Ophemert, is the present Chief. Hugh's grandfather, 12th Lord Reay succeeded to the title in 1875 when the direct male line died out in Scotland. His father became a British subject in 1938.

The Clan's Crest is a hand holding a dagger and the motto is "Manu Forti", which means, "With A Strong Hand", - fitting indeed for one of the most military of all of the clans, - the MacKays.

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