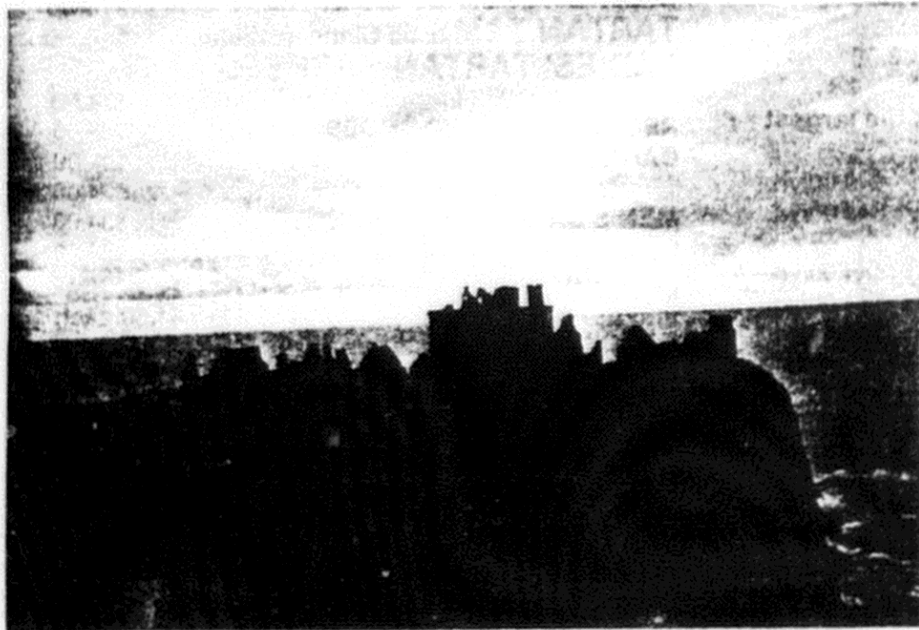


# THE



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Dunnottar Castle was the seat of the Keiths, Earls Marischal of Scotland from 1358 to 1715. It is perched on a rock 160 feet above the sea and was virtually im-

pregnable. George and James Keith left here in 1715 to fight for the exiled Stuart king and were themselves exiled for this.

## Marshall Keith

By Mairead Farquharson

The Keiths were hereditary Great Marischals of Scotland for almost seven hundred years, since Robert II granted the office to their ancestor in the 12th century. Their duties required their presence at every battle, and the guarding of the Royal Regalia. The Keiths accumulated great wealth and vast estates through the centuries, and in the late 14th century built their principal seat of Dunnottar castle on a wind swept crag high above the sea on the Kincardine coast. James II raised the Keiths to the title of Earl Marischal in 1458, and they were faithful servants of their king in the years that followed.

But it was their loyalty to the exiled House of Stuart that was their downfall. In 1715 the 10th Earl Marischal, 20 year old George Keith, was persuaded by his cousin the Earl of Mar to join the ill fated Jacobite Uprising of that year. He took with him his 17 year old brother, James, and the excited young pair set out from Dunottar. Both fought at the shambles of the battle of Sheriffmuir where James was severely wounded. His brother carried him off the battlefield and they were forced to seek sanctuary with Clanranald in the desolate wastes of Moidart. The indecision of the Earl of Mar had given the Hanovarian forces the upper hand and the uprising collapsed. News came that both brothers had been condemned to death for treason and all their lands forfeited. As soon as James was well they fled the country and arrived in France as penniless refugees at the Stuart court-in-exile at St. Germain.

Young James had heard great tales of Russia during his brief military career and decided he would seek his fortune there. The exiled Stuart queen was horrified that one so young would venture into such a savage land and paid for him to attend the top French military

## Brotherhood of Horse Whisperers

### The Horseman's Word

By Archie McKerracher

The Brotherhood of Horse Whisperers, The Horseman's Word, was the mystical phrase that gave Scottish horsemen total control over horse and woman. It was taught to initiates into the secret Society of the Horseman's Word which reached its peak between 1830 and 1930. The Society was strongest in North-east Scotland but was also taken by emigrant Scots to the Canadian prairies, and the United States. The original Ku Klux Klan in the southern states was based upon it. Its roots lay in a horse cult brought by the Celts as they moved west across Europe, and into Scotland. By medieval times the Society of the Horseman's Word ranked as a secret craft alongside that of millers and masons.

Freemasonry became open to non practising masons from 1717 onwards, and about the same period technological advances rendered the millers' secrets obsolete. However, three events helped advance the horsemen and make their Society the longest surviving trade craft in Britain. The first was the breeding of the mighty Clydesdale horse from six Flanders stallions imported into Scotland by the Duke of Hamilton in the mid-18th century. The second was the invention of the two-horse swing plough, and the third was the Napoleonic Wars which required vastly increased agricultural output.

Until about 1810 oxen still remained the principal work beast on a Scottish

*Continued on page 54*

*Continued on page 6*

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# Horsemen

Continued from page 1

farm but gradually the horse took over. The small Highland pony was used in the glens where the top soil was shallow and the ploughs still primitive. However, on the heavy soil of the Aberdeenshire and Kincardine plain only the massive Clydesdale horse could cope. Thus the Society of the Horseman's Word began to grow in power and prestige from 1820 onwards. It was helped by the farm-town system of North-east Scotland where each farm had a little, close knit, community grouped around it.

Membership of the Society was essential for any youth wishing to rise in the strict, social hierarchy of the farm. Unless he was an initiate he could not become a ploughman nor could he court the female servants. He would begin work at the age of 14 in charge of the cows, by 16 he would be given the spare plough team and on his 17th birthday would find on his pillow an envelope containing a single horse hair.

This was his summons to join the Society and one he dared not refuse. An old ballad tells of his progression;

*Syne I got on for baillie Loon,  
(head boy)*

*Syne I got on for third,  
(third plough team)*

*And syne I had to get of course,  
The Horseman's grippin Word!"*

The initiation ceremony was usually carried out at Martinnas, and had to be attended by 13 novices. Each was required to bring a jug of whisky, a loaf of bread and a candle, all purchased

with difficulty from his meagre six monthly pay. His sponsors, usually the older ploughmen on each farm, would lead the youth blindfolded to a barn at midnight. They would stop before the closed door and the senior Horseman would give a measured knock and a whinny like a horse. From inside came the question:

*"Wha telt ye to come?"*

*"The Deevil!", was the reply.*

*"Which wey did ye come?"*

*"By the hooks and crooks of the road."*

*"By which licht did ye come" (light)*

*"By the stars and licht of the moon"*

*"How high is your stable door"*

*"As high as taks the collar and the hames." (rein bars)*

*"Where were ye made a Horseman?"*

*"In a Horseman's Hall where the sun never shone, the wind never blew, the cock never crew, and the feet of maiden never trod."*

When the interrogation finished the door swung open to admit the initiates. The youths were stripped naked and forced to kneel before a makeshift altar formed by an upturned sack of corn. The presiding Horseman questioned them: "What is the tender of the Oath?" "Hele, conceal, never reveal, nor write nor dite, nor carve nor write in sand", the youths chanted. Then they repeated the Horseman's Oath and swore never to reveal the secrets they would learn - . . . and in failing may my body be quartered in four parts with a Horseman's knife and buried in the



Plough teams setting out for the fields. The youth on the right has been newly in-

itiated and is accompanied by a Master Horseman.

sea 40 fathoms from the shore where the tide ebbs and flows every 24 hours, or may I be torn to pieces by wild horses".

Each youth was then plied with whisky and taken to a corner of the barn where the Horseman's Word was whispered in his ear. Then he was led to the innermost recess of the barn where a horned, shaggy figure sat on a corn stook with cloven foot outstretched. The youths would tremblingly shake the foot of the Auld Chiel before being led out. More and more whisky was passed round until the youngsters were stupefied. The older men raised their jugs in a final toast:

*"Here's to the horse with four white feet,  
The chestnut tail and mane.  
A star on his head and a spot on his head,  
And his master's name was Cain!"*

The youth would be carried back to bed and roused a few hours later for the normal 5 a.m. start. He would be allowed to lead out the first plough team to prove he now had total control over the most powerful horses. The farmer usually watched in disgruntled silence, knowing he would now have to pay the youth a man's wage. He knew, too, that neither he nor any member of his family would ever be allowed into the Society.

Such was the superstitious awe of the secrets of the Society that disputes between master and workers were rare. The farmer and his family could be persuaded to mend their ways by fear of the supernatural. This was aided by sheet covered figures swaying outside at midnight, or by mysterious taps on the farm windows. The farmer also knew that only an initiated Horseman could work his fields. Those who weren't would find the farm horses refusing to leave the stable. Much of the initiation ceremony, which continued in this form until the 1930's, reeks of witchcraft. The 13 initiates, the shaking of the Auld Chief's foot (the Devil), the parody of a religious ceremony, and lastly, the spells cast over horse and woman. The persecution of Scottish witches in the 16th and 17th centuries did not destroy witchcraft, the surviving element of the old pre-Christian religions. It simply went

*Continued on next page*



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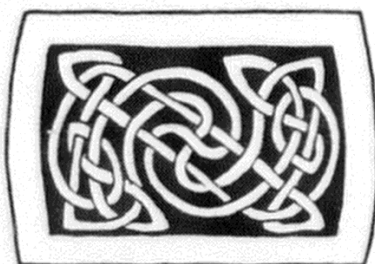
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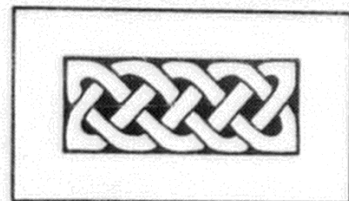
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## Horsemen

Continued from preceding page

underground and found a last refuge amongst the isolated farming communities of North-east Scotland.

Once a youth was initiated his studies continued for five years. He was taught first the Four Rules of Horsemanship - \*To make him stand, \*To make him lie, \*To make him hip, \*To make him hie. He was then gradually admitted to more and more secrets by older Horsemen. He was taught how to prepare certain drugs and how toad's blood and pig's dung are totally repellent to a horse. Smear either on a stable door and the horses within will refuse to leave. Similarly, a small nail placed beneath a collar would turn the mildest horse wild. By such means the Society ensured that only their members could work a farm's horses.

One trick was to plant a fork in a dung heap and hitch a team to it. The Horseman then urged the horses forward. Their muscles bulged but the fork did not move. It seemed like magic to the watchers - unless, of course, the horseman was holding a totally repellent object right beneath the horses' nostrils! The reason a new initiate could suddenly master the powerful first plough team was due to the senior horseman on the farm placing an oatcake made from various herbs beneath the youth's armpit when asleep. This was broken beneath the horses' nostrils and the aromatic spices cleared the smell of their normal handler and replaced it with the odour of the youth.

This potion, known as Drawing Oils, was first mentioned in the 1st century by the Roman writer Pliny who described it as a love potion. Certainly, it was believed Horsemen were irresistible to women and this may explain the high illegitimacy rates in North-east Scotland both last century and this. To say you had been courted by a Horseman would bring nods of understanding rather than condemnation. Confidence in courting has always proved successful, as has confidence in handling animals, and belief in the Horseman's Word helped create confidence in a young initiate.

There is no doubt the Horsemen of yesteryear had an amazing control over horses to an extent never seen today. The expression "a Scottish Horseman" was known as far as London and a Victorian writer recorded "The Kincardine



Both as one. Total empathy between man and horse created by knowledge of the Horseman's word. The deliberate framing of the horse in the triangle of the barn has a secret significance.

horsemen are dexterous to a fault. They govern them wholly by the tongue and never use the hand reins. The horse turns to the right or left or goes forward or follows his guide like a dog".

Much of the horseman's control over horses seemed like magic to the uninitiated and it was these seeming spells that created superstitious awe, particularly amongst isolated farming people. There is the tale of the Horseman who drove a team of horses across the Loch of Skene near Aberdeen but more authentic are the stories of old horse dealers returning from market with a long line of untethered horses trotting behind him. These were men who had an amazing control over horses but also a deep knowledge of spices and chemicals attractive to them.

However, much of it was simply the ancient art of horsemanship handed down from pre-history. As to the Word itself - it is believed this is the phrase "Both as One" signifying total empathy between man and beast. This un-

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# Horsemen

Continued from preceding page

doubtedly derives from the legendary centaurs of our ancestors, half man, half horse. The centaurs were the Celtic tribesmen who pushed west across Europe in the first millenium B.C., riding small shaggy ponies and whose sheer horsemanship on their half wild beasts made them seem part of their mounts.

The Scottish horsemen also pushed west in the 19th century particularly to Canada and the United States where their skills with plough teams found ready employment. Many fought in the Civil War and shortly after its end, in May, 1866, six Confederate veterans of Scottish extraction met at Pulaski, Tennessee, to form a fraternal society. They called this Ku Klux from the Greek word for a circle and added Klan to mark their Scottish descent. As a joke they rode out one night covered in bedsheets and found the superstitious local Blacks thought they were the ghost of the Confederate dead. From this came the idea of forming a society based on that of the Horseman's Word to inspire as great a fear amongst lawless freed slaves as it had amongst Scottish farmers. In North Carolina a horned hood was worn while Blacks were forced to shake the skeleton hand fo the "Auld Chiel". New members were obliged to go through the same initiation rituals as Scottish ploughboys and their oath was identical. Alas, from these relatively harmless beginning the Ku Klux Klan was usurped by evil and criminal elements and the original Klan was officially disbanded five years later.

In Scotland, increased mechanisation from 1930 onwards saw the gradual demise of the Society of the Horseman's Word although it does still exist in outlying parts and the age old secrets are still passed on. Was it all just confidence and ancient "tricks of the trade", or does something much other lie behind it? Only those with the Horseman's Word today will really know, and they guard their secret carefully.

Photos courtesy The Clydesdale Horse Society.

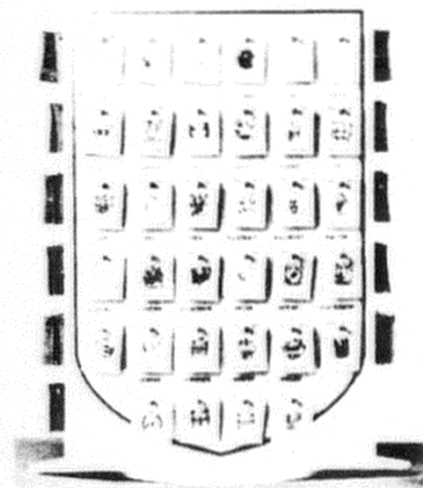
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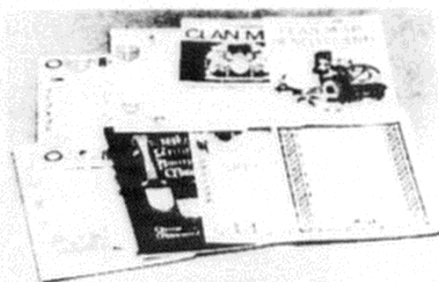
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