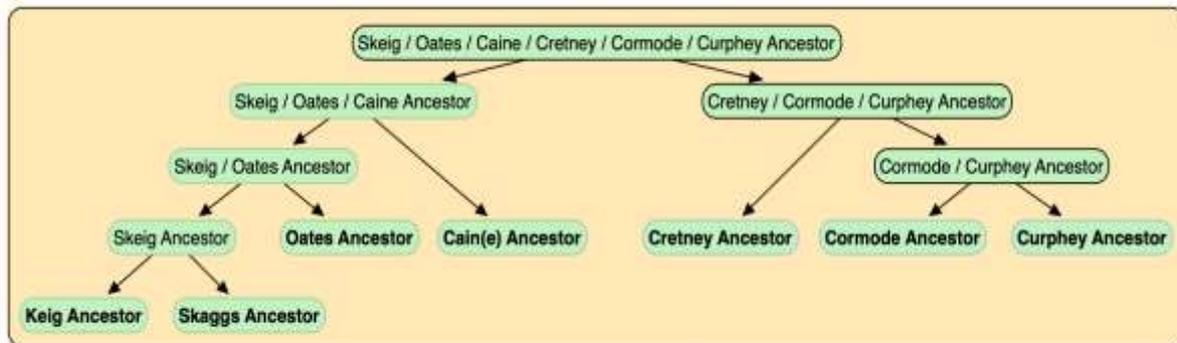


## Godred Crovan - have his descendants been found?

By Chris Keig

In August 2018, I discovered through the analysis of Y-DNA from members of six Manx families, that they were all descended from a common male ancestor who was of Norwegian Viking descent and was born circa early 1000. The six family names are: Keig (including the Skaggs), Oates, Cain(e), Cormode, Curphey and Cretney. These families are all indigenous Manx families with the surnames having originated in the Isle of Man.

The branching of these six families has been successfully reconstructed using SNP data from Big Y tests conducted by Family Tree DNA in Texas:



The significance of this discovery is that, from analysis of the 130 or so indigenous Manx families using surnames and Y-DNA ancestry, only 30 are of direct Viking descent with the rest being of primarily Celtic origin. For one man to be the common ancestor for six out of the 30 Manx Viking families, or 20% of the surviving Manx Viking population, it would indicate that the common ancestor was probably very significant.

Recent population genetic analysis worldwide has identified a number of examples where an unexpectedly large number of men are shown to have been descended from just one common male ancestor. This feature, known as polygyny, usually occurs when that ancestor was a wealthy and powerful king or ruler with the opportunity to mate with multiple wives. The best examples of this are Niall of the Nine Hostages in Ireland and Genghis Khan in Mongolia and China, both of which have a large number of living, direct male-line, descendants.

The historical records of the Isle of Man show that in 1079, a man, by the name of Godred Crovan, invaded the island with a large force from the Hebrides and successfully won control of the Kingdom of Mann at the Battle of Sky Hill. Godred's direct male descendants went on to rule the Kingdom of Mann and the Isles for nearly

200 years over the next six generations with the Kingship coming to an end in 1265 on the death of Godred's great-great grandson, King Magnus Olafsson. The majority of the Manx Kings had multiple wives and concubines and it is more than likely that Godred Crovan practised this as well.

Based on the historical record of the Manx Kings it would seem more than reasonable to expect that the Kings would still have living direct male descendants in the Isle of Man. I believe that my discovery of the six families is congruent with this expectation.

The Cretney surname is interesting as it means "Son of the Welshman" according to Manx scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the evidence that the surname was once "Mac Bretny" in the Manx manorial roll. This begs the question, how does a Manxman, of Manx Viking blood, end up with the surname "Son of the Welshman"? I think the simplest explanation is that a Manxman, must have left the Isle of Man for Wales at some later point, a son or perhaps grandson of his has returned to the Isle of Man. Naturally this person would speak with a Welsh accent and thus that man's children would be known as Mac Bretny, son of the Welshman.

If we return to the historical records, we see that in 1265 the last Manx King, Magnus Olafsson died in Castle Rushen. The following year the King of Norway, Magnus Haakonsson signed a treaty with Scotland that transferred the rights to the Kingdom of Mann and the Isles to King Alexander. In 1275, the son of King Magnus, Godred Magnusson, led a rebellion against the King of Scotland in which he tried to reform the Kingdom of Mann. The Scottish King responded by sending a massive fleet and army from the Hebrides and Galloway which overwhelmed Godred's army and resulted in over 500 Manxman losing their lives.

English sources recorded Godred as having escaped to Wales with his wife. I think it would be natural for any of Godred's sons or grandsons to want to return to their ancestral homeland, especially as the situation in Wales was becoming more destabilised with encroaching English forces looking to subjugate Wales. If Godred had a son or grandson who returned to the Isle of Man, it would have likely been in the early 1300s, which is around the time when surnames started to become more widely adopted.

While the DNA evidence for the connections between the six families is solid and beyond doubt, there is always a chance that my theory of them having descended from the Manx Kings, is completely wrong. It may be that the bloodline of the Manx Kings died out, or it could be that one of the other 24 Manx Viking families are their descendants.

At least three Manx Kings were buried in Rushen Abbey, they were Olaf Godredsson, the great-grandson of Godred Crovan and two of the former's sons, Rognvaldr and

Magnus who we have mentioned previously. It was believed that the remains of one or two of them were found in excavations in Rushen Abbey in the early 1900s on account of the ornate coffin lid of one burial that engraved with a sword and a cross. Burials in the Abbey grounds were typically restricted to members of the monastery, the Manx Kings and their family and in cases the sick who had died there that were being cared for by the Monks. The grave found, therefore seems most likely to be one of the Manx Kings.

Through my Y-DNA project I have manage to identify a large number of SNP markers that the Manx Kings would test positive for, should they be the ancestors of the six families. A Y-STR profile for the Manx Kings, numbering over 800 STRs, has also been reconstructed. It is hoped that testing of the remains, or suspected remains, of the Manx Kings could be done on a targeted basis against these unique markers, to increase the chances of success. If my theory is proved correct, it would be the first time that living descendants of a Viking King have ever been found and will help shape Manx history.

If you are a Keig, Skaggs, Oates, Cain(e), Cormode, Curphey or Cretney, you are more than welcome to join the DNA project. I am currently conducting one name studies on all six families with a view to connecting everyone within their respective families together and getting back as far as possible with Manx land records in the 1400s. If you would like to join my project, you can order a test through the following link: <https://www.familytreedna.com/group-join.aspx?group=Keig&code=W46710>