

Dr. Bruce DURIE

BSc (Hons) PhD OMLI FIGRS
Consultant Genealogist and Heraldist,
Author, Broadcaster, Lecturer

e: gen@brucedurie.co.uk

w: www.brucedurie.co.uk

Shennachie to the Chief of Durie

www.duriefamily.co.uk

Academician, *Académie Internationale de Généalogie*
Right of Audience at the Court of the Lord Lyon



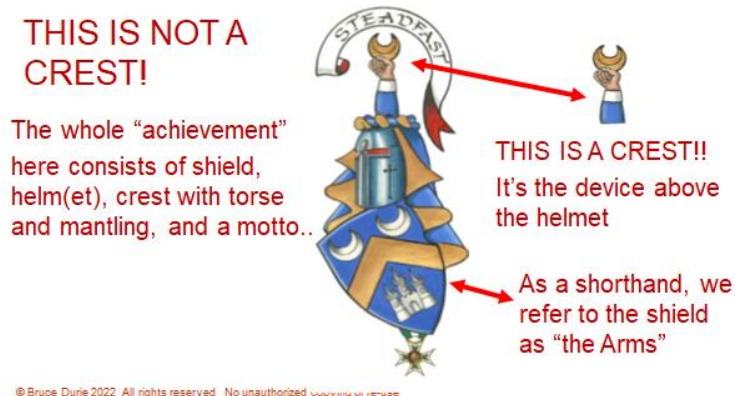
Crests and their uses

This article seeks to explain what the Crest is, where it comes from, and how it may be used. It should clarify a few misconceptions that abound.

“Crest” is not the same as “Arms”.

Look around the internet and there will be lots of references to “Family Crests”. This is wrong in two ways:

- what is usually meant is Arms – the Crest is only one part of that;
- there is no such thing as a “Family Coat of Arms” – Arms in Scottish heraldry are the personal, legal, heritable property of one person or legal body (company, university, association, etc.) at a time, and must be legally granted or recognised by the Lord Lyon King of Arms in Scotland.



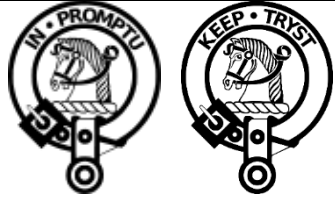
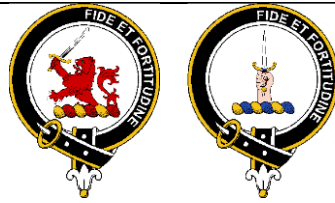

- it is not correct to download something labelled “Arms of the Clan McX” – Clans have no Arms, only individual Armigers do.

The Crest goes above the helm.

The Crest started life as an additional identifier of an Armiger in battle, or at a jousting tourney. Typically, they were made of wood and covered with boiled leather painted in various ways. They also served as a way to deflect blows from a sword, mace, flail, etc.

When someone is granted Arms, it is usual to have a Crest and Motto as well. The rules are:

- more than one person/surname may have similar crests
- more than one person/surname may have similar mottos
- However, the combination of crest and motto must be unique to a person
- members of the same family may have different crests

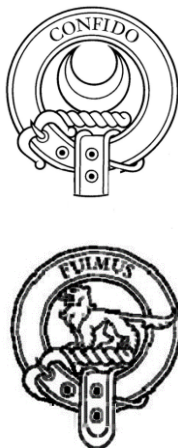
For example, this Dunbar and this Hepburn have the same Crest but different Mottos...	
...whereas this Farquharson and this Shaw of Tordarroch have the same Motto, but different Crests...	
...while Campbell of Breadalbane and Campbell of Cawdor, although both Campbells, have different Crests and Mottos	

Wearing the Crest in Scotland

The Crest-and-Motto combination is the property of the Armiger. But it was typical for kinsmen of the Chief to wear the Chief's symbol as a signifier of loyalty. This is helpful in a Clan battle, for example, where it could be difficult to tell the two sides apart. (Tartans associated with particular surnames was a later innovation, and it was typical in the Highlands and Islands to wear more than one tartan, or any tartan available.)

Originally, this was the Chief's plant fixed to the bonnet, or to the upper arms with a strap-and-buckle. This is where our modern rendition of the Crest in a strap-and-buckle badge comes from. An Armiger – including a Chief – wears his or her own Crest in an undifferentiated cirlet (and with a single feather behind to indicate the possession of Arms).

Scotland is unique in this – the only heraldic jurisdiction where this sign of Clan or Family name is used.



(top) Crest badge of a Durie, bearing the Chief's Crest and Motto in a strap-and-buckle
(below) a Bruce, showing the Chief's Crest and Motto in a strap-and-buckle



Bruce Durie's Crest badge – undifferentiated cirlet, his own Crest and Motto, and one feather as an Armiger



A Chief – in this case Andrew Bruce – with his Crest, Motto and three feathers, plus his coronet as Earl of Elgin

Cap badges

These are not really of Scottish origin, where Clansmen would usually wear a plant badge. The tradition of Crest badges started in the British Army with regimental badges worn on forage caps or Glengarry caps. These are also not of Scottish derivation. The forage cap was originally worn in the 18th century by Cavalrymen when out “foraging” for “forage” to feed their horses, and became standard throughout the British Army and Royal Marines in 1811. It is said that the familiar Glengarry bonnet, capable of being folded flat, first appeared with the Glengarry Fencibles (a Militia unit) formed in 1794 by Alexander Ranaldson MacDonell of Glengarry, and this superseded other headgear in kilted Highland regiments in 1851, and in the rest of British infantry in 1868. The Glengarry has been worn “straight on” as opposed to “cocked” to one side, since 1945.

In Scottish regiments, which often started life attached to a particular Clan or Family (the Sutherland Highlanders, the Gordons, etc.) the cap badge may well have been derived from the Chief’s Crest. Now, cap badges are standard in the Military everywhere. Scottish regiments often have a tradition for soldiers to wear their cap badges on a small square of the regimental tartan, and the Glengarry may have a checked border.

Plaid brooches, kilt pins, belt buckles and other “tartanalia” usually bear the Chief’s Crest in a strap-and-buckle, or the Armiger’s Crest in a circlet.

Do the MacFies/MacDuffies have a Crest?

The simple answer is “NO”!

As there has never been a Chief, who had Arms and a Crest, there is no chiefly Crest and therefore no badge. It is in the nature of companies who sell such things to want to sell things, so it is likely that one of them has found the Arms of Langhouse and MacFie of Dreghorn and since they are identical when rendered in greyscale or made in white metal, they thought “that’ll do”. Or, they have looked up one of the many Books of Crests that went about in the 18th and 19th Centuries and are still consulted today. These have no authority, but were often used by engravers, stationers and printers – “Buy a Guinea Box of notepaper and we’ll throw in a stamp seal with your Crest on it”. The example below is from the best known of these – Fairbairn’s *Crests*¹ and Fairbairn doesn’t even get the colour of the demi-lion correct.

This has since gone around the internet as “The MacFie Crest” when it is, in fact, no such thing – these are the Crests of two individual MacFies and their heirs.



Crest of Macfie of Langhouse, granted 1864



Crest of Macfie of Dreghorn, granted 1867



A typical internet rendition of “Clan MacFie Crest badge”, which it is not.



Macfie, Scotland, a demi-lion rampant, Gules. *Pro rege*. Plate 67, crest 10.

¹ James Fairbairn. *Crests Of The Leading Families In Great Britain and Ireland and their kindred in other lands*. First published in 1859. This edition New York, Heraldic Publishing Company, 1911.

And please be aware - it is inappropriate (actually illegal in Scotland) for anyone to “pretend to” these Crests and Mottos unless they are the heirs of the Arms.

The MacFies and MacDuffies are not alone in this. The MacAlpines have been trying for years to stop the various companies produce a crest badge that is completely wrong. But without a Chief, they don't have a suitable crest to use. And the companies say, in effect: “We've made the moulds and we have loads in stock, so we're selling them”.

What should MacFies/MacDuffies do?

There really isn't an answer to that, short of “get yourselves a Chief and adopt whatever that Chief decides is his or her Crest and Motto”. Just because Langhouse and Dreghorn were the first to ask for and be granted Arms does not necessarily make these lines senior in any way. Another MacFie, MacDuffie, etc. may come along with a prior claim derived from an earlier ancestor, but that person may not represent any senior line either.

What about the Clan Societies?

Equally, the Societies have no business using the Crest of any one family or line.²

There is a suggestion – and it's an inspired one – that the various Societies might use (on letterheads, newsletters, web pages and so forth) a rendition of the “Murchardus MacDuffie tomb slab” as a signifier.

Another option is a for a Clan Society to Petition the Lord Lyon for a Badge. This is rather like a crest, but is a simple circlet with a Crest-like device in the centre. This makes it highly suitable for use on printed materials and as a badge to be worn by Society members.



The Badge of the Clan Duncan Society.³



Are the MacFies/MacDuffies an “Armigerous Clan”?

This is as good a place as any to lay the ghost of the so-called Armigerous Clan. There is no such thing. As a Clan or Family cannot have Arms (only an individual or body with that surname) the Clan itself cannot be Armigerous.

This is a loose terminology that has found its way into popular use as a way of describing a surname that has no Chief, but once did, and therefore there are recorded Arms for someone of that name in the past.

But for all the reasons given above, the Arms do not pertain to the Clan. The expression should be avoided and confined to the bin of Specious Scottish Nonsense that plagues so much of what we all try to do in an authentic way.

² See <http://www.scotarmigers.net/pdfs/info-leaflet-2.pdf> - “

³ See <http://clan-duncan.co.uk/duncan-clan-shop.html>