

Heraldry Arms granted to members of the MacNeil, McNeill, Macneal, MacNeile families

The law of heraldry arms

In Scotland all things armorial are governed by the laws of arms administered by the Court of the Lord Lyon. The origin of the office of Lord Lyon is shrouded in the mists of history, but various Acts of Parliament, especially those of 1592 and 1672 supplement the established authority of Lord Lyon and his brother heralds. The Lord Lyon is a great officer of state and has a dual capacity, both ministerial and judicial. In his ministerial capacity, he acts as heraldic advisor to the Sovereign, appoints messengers-at-arms, conducts national ceremony and grants arms. In his judicial role, he decides on questions of succession, authorizes the matriculation of arms, registers pedigrees, which are often used as evidence in the matter of succession to peerages, and of course judges in cases when the Procurator Fiscal prosecutes someone for the wrongful use of arms.

A System of Heraldry

Alexander Nisbet

Published 1722

A classic standard heraldic treatise on heraldry, organized by armorial features used, and apparently attempting to list arms for every Scottish family, alive at the time or extinct. Nesbit quotes the source for most of the arms included in the treatise alongside the blazon

A System of Heraldry is one of the most useful research sources for finding the armory of a Scots family. It is also the best readily available source discussing charges used in Scots heraldry.

The Court of the Lord Lyon is the heraldic authority for Scotland and deals with all matters relating to Scottish Heraldry and Coats of Arms and maintains the Scottish Public Registers of Arms and Genealogies.

The Lord Lyon King of Arms is also responsible for State Ceremonial in Scotland.

In Scotland, a coat of arms belongs to a single individual at a time and there is no such thing as a "Family" coat of arms or crest. If a person uses the arms of someone else in Scotland, he or she is usurping those arms and the Procurator Fiscal of Lyon Court can prosecute the offender in court. And it is the Procurator Fiscal who goes after the culprit – not the owner of the arms.

Outside the jurisdiction of the Lord Lyon, it is in the worst possible taste to pretend that someone else's Scottish arms are your own, although many people do not realize that this is the case. The best modern analogy is identity theft. Arms were the symbol of a person's identity back in the days when most people were illiterate; likewise, they had an important use on the battlefield (Who's my ally in this fight? Oh, I see his banner!) and at great gatherings.

To use someone else's Arms was a great insult and downright dangerous, and the reaction was at least as strong as anyone would feel now if his identity was stolen by hackers.

McNeill of Colonsay and Gigha Arms

Current publications and information documents often show the Arms of the McNeill of Colonsay and Gigha. The image of the arms is very similar to those granted to Alexander Malcolm McNeill in July 1972. Arms granted to a person belong to them as individuals and not to the family of the McNeills of Colonsay or to Colonsay.

The most recently matriculated arms were designed by the Lord Lyon's office of heraldry in Scotland and granted to Alexander Malcolm McNeill in 1972 and his heir John Duncan McNeill who now holds these arms. Alexander Malcolm McNeill was the eldest son of Alexander McNeill and grandson of Alexander Carstairs McNeill. Alexander Carstairs McNeill was the second son in the family after Major General Sir John Carstairs McNeill, and became heir after the death of his father in 1904.

The adoption of Arms by our clan kinsmen first appeared on grave slabs. In the ruins of St. Columba church at the foot of the Kintyre Peninsula there is a grave slab recording the death of Neil McNeill of Carskiefy who died in 1685. The design of the Arms carved on the slab is very similar to the Arms of Gigha and Colonsay.

There is an image of a rampant lion in the first and fourth quartile, a birlinn (or galley) with furled sail in the third quartile and in the second a hand lying sideways from right to left with three stars (mulletts) below and below again an image of a salmon.

In the Rothesay churchyard on the island of Bute there is a grave slab (the burial place of the McNilles of Kilmorie). The design shows three stars (mulletts) in the first quartile, a rampant lion in the second, a galley or birlinn in the third and a hand holding a cross in the fourth.

The treatise written by Alexander Nesbit in 1722 attempts to list arms for all Scottish families alive at the time or extinct

The list included an entry for the Macneil of Barra –
First and fourth quartile a rampant lion, second a hand holding a cross, third quartile a galley or birlinn and three stars (or mulletts).

There was also an entry for Lauchlan McNeill of Tirfergus in Kintyre –
First and fourth quartiles containing a rampant lion, in the second a hand lying sideways above a salmon and in the third quartile a galley with crossed oars below three stars (or mulletts).
The design matriculated by Lauchlan was later recorded for Hector Macneal of Ugdale.

Argyll

McNeills who matriculated their arms were –
Sir John McNeill 1840
Major General Sir John Carstairs McNeill,
John McNeill (5th of Colonsay)
Duncan McNeill, Lord Colonsay 1867
Alexander McNeill, son of the above,
Torquil Duncan Ferachar Macneal of Ugdale 1897
Hector Macneal of Lossit,
Lachlan McNeill 1672

Ireland & England

John Gordon Swift MacNeill, Cushendun,

Sir John McNeill of Mount Pleasant,
Sir John MacNeill Professor of practical engineering, Trinity College, Dublin
Major General James Graham Robert Douglas McNeill, 1896
John Donald McNeile of Faughart,
Ronald John McNeill Baron Cushendun 1930

Barra

Roderick Macneil 1806
General Roderick MacNeil of Barra 1824
Robert Lister Macneil 1915 /1962
Ian Roderick Macneil 1987
Roderick Wilson Macneil

Here are some terms used to describe a shield design

Chief - A broad strip running across the uppermost part of a shield
Dexter - Right-hand side of the shield (but the user's right, not the viewer's)
Fess - A broad strip running horizontally across the centre of the shield
Bend - A broad diagonal strip running from the top left to bottom right of a shield
Chevron - An inverted V
Sinister - Left-hand side of the shield (but the viewer's right-hand side)
Mantling - A small cloak hanging from the back of the helm, usually shown as shredded and in an updraught
Ermine - A fur made from the white pelt of the ermine on which the black tips of the creature's tail appear
Rampant - Position of an animal which is standing up on one hind leg and pawing the air with the other three
Griffin - A monster, part eagle and part lion

Colours

Azure - Blue
Argent - Silver (most often shown as white)
Gules - Red
Or - Gold (often shown as yellow)
Pale - A broad vertical strip running down the centre of a shield
Vert - Green
Passant - Position of an animal which is walking with one fore leg raised
Purpure - Purple
Sable - Black

The present arms of Colonsay show a rampant lion in the first and fourth quartile, in the second a hand lying sideways above a salmon in water, a galley in the third quartile with three stars (or mullets) above.

In heraldry language the design is described as-

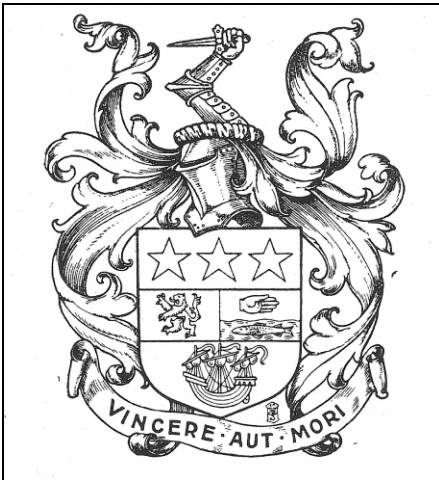
Quarters 1 & 4 azure, a lion rampant argent, armed and langued gules: quarter 2 argent a sinister hand couped fessways in chief gules, in the base wavy azure, a salmon naiant of the first; quarter 3 or, a galley, her oars in saltire gules, on a chief of the second three mullets of the first. Above the shield there is a helmet drawn and an arm holding a dirk. The drawing varies in shape for different variations of the arms produced for different individuals.

Some examples of the design of arms for different people tracing their ancestry to the McNeill of Gigha or Colonsay are produced below.

Elizabeth Roads, Lyon Clerk and Keeper of the Records at the Court of the Lord Lyon wrote to me in February 2010 and advised that there were six arms registered for Barra, including one cadet, three for Colonsay including two cadets, two for Ugadale which is a cadet of Tirfergus and one for Tirfergus, and seven other recordings.



The arms of Alexander Malcolm McNeill of Colonsay matriculated 31st July 1972 and inherited by his son John Duncan McNeill



Arms of Sir John McNeill of Mount Pleasant, County Louth, Ireland.

Son of Torqil Parkes McNeill and grandson of John McNeill of Lower Fanchard, County Louth



MacNeale of Portrane

Miss Margaret Evans, who inherited the Portrane property from her brother George, without issue on 26 May 1873. She married John Donald McNeale the eldest son of Major Donald MacNeale (or McNeill), 17th Lancers, of Faughart and Aughaboys, county Louth.

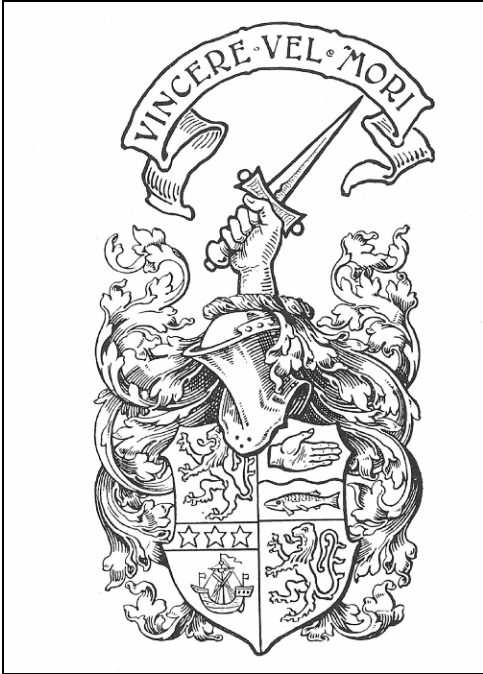
She died 19 May 1874 leaving three daughters who became joint heiresses to the property.

Margaret married 19 April 1889 Capt. S.G.Rathborne, 66th Regiment.

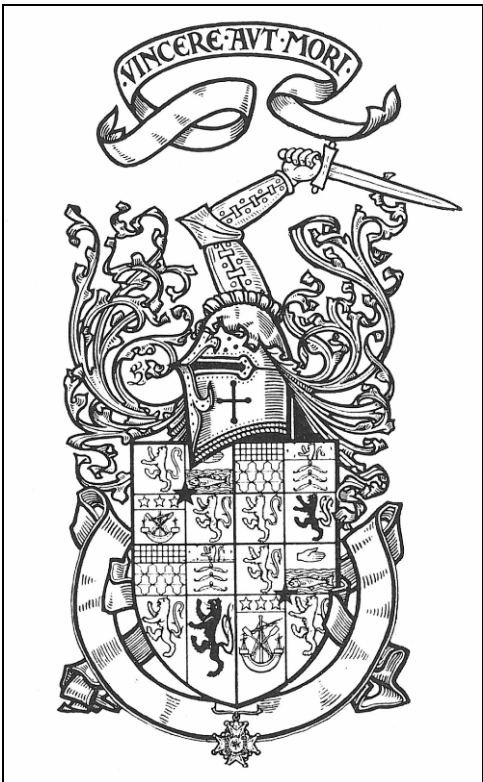
Children – St George Ronald McNeill b 19 June 1893, Eyre Ivan b 22 Jan. 1895.

Bella Grace married 3 July 1879 Capt. William Hans Rathborne, RE and their children were – William Donald McNeill b 8 June 1884, Margaret Grace, Freda Penelope, Ella Mary, Gladys Emmeline, Kathleen Evelyn, Jean Adrienne

Emmeline Evans married 30 Sept. 1893 Capt Frederick Lewis Alford, RA – children Lewis Henry McNeill Alford b 21 June 1898, Margaret Evans.



Arms of Hector Mcneal of Ugadale,
birth 1822, son of George Macneal



**Arms of Major General James
Graham Robert Douglas McNeill**
son of James Neill MacNeill, born 11 Feb.
1842 and retired from the army 1898.

Robert Lister Macneil matriculated new arms which are known today as the arms of the Macneil of Barra. These arms have been inherited through his son Ian Roderick Macneil to Roderick Wilson Macneil.

The design has in the first quartile a rampant lion, second quartile a castle in the sea, third quartile a galley and in the fourth a red hand surrounded by nine fetlocks.

While the images within all the shields are often common there are special elements which determine the individual design for the person to whom it is granted.

The arms of Barra provided to individuals do not have as many design variations. Colonel Roderick MacNeil's arms are the same as those of the arms granted to our present chief with the exception that the castle in the 2nd quartile is described as a castle in the sea. In the arms of our current chief this is described as a triple towered castle.

The Barra arms are described as –

1st quarter vert. a lion rampant or (green lion on gold background), 2nd quarter argent issuing from the sea in base a triple tower castle proper, 3rd quarter a lymphad sail furling oars in action sable, fluffed gules; 4th quarter a dexter hand erect couped within an orle of nine fetterlocks gules.



**Arms of Roderick Wilson
Macneil of Barra inherited
from his father, Ian Roderick
Macneil and grandfather
Robert Lister Macneil**