

Early Davidsons known to have used Arms

As a Davidson of north-east Scottish ancestry, my researches started in that region and expanded from there. There were many Davidsons who were landholders in the north-east prior to the late 17th century, but there is little information on whether or not they used arms, other than the limited surviving examples referred to in the publications on Scottish Seals **and** elsewhere.

The Lyon Office suffered the loss of all its official records in the 17th century during the Civil War, Cromwell's Commonwealth and the Restoration.

Thus our knowledge of early Davidsons who used arms is based on a few printed sources and some surviving artefacts. Since 1672, the Public Record has been maintained and provides detailed records of all matriculations and grants.

In 1439 a Thomas Davidson, was "one of the four counsellors to Lord of Mar" and in 1439 known as "de Forbes". Thomas was probably the son of Alderman Robert Davidson who died at Harlaw in 1411. He was described as a Burgess of Aberdeen and in 1460, "*an armiger and witness at Huntly*" [ref-AB111 1V 190]. An armiger at this time was a man with a coat of arms; he would have been at the least a squire to a knight. To have become a Burgess in a town in Scotland from the 14th century onwards involved payment of a sum of money to the local merchant Guild, a body which regulated the trading privileges of that town as a closed shop. Burgesses were chosen from the well-to-do landholders and members of the local trade Guilds.

Alderman [Provost] Robert Davidson who died at Harlaw is sometimes wrongly described as an inn keeper whereas he was, amongst his many other interests, an importer of wines from France and the Continent. He also controlled certain salmon fishing, and held the Office of the Crown Tax Commissioner for the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen. There is no evidence of any arms he may have used from that time, but there is a set of arms on the ceiling of the St Nicholas Room in Aberdeen Town House dating from the 1870s which purport to be those used by him.

Purported Arms, Sir Robert Davidson



In 1499, William Davidson, Elder and a Burgess of Aberdeen, used a seal with an indistinct merchant's mark. "Elder" signified that he had a son or relative of the same name, who would have been called "younger". William may have been a son of Thomas "de Forbes" mentioned above, who is understood to have founded the family of the Davidsons of Auchinhamperis near Forgue on the old Aberdeenshire-Banff-shire border.

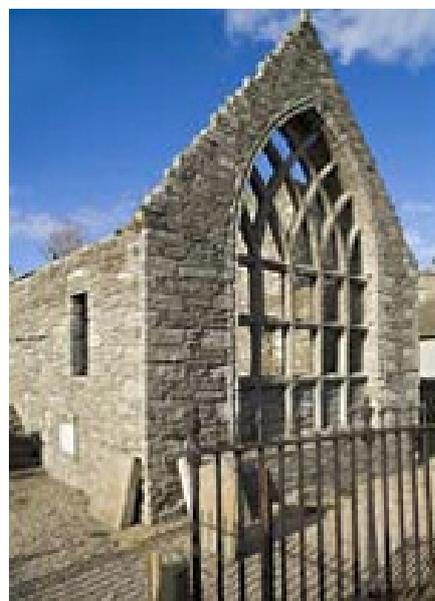
Adam Davidson Burgess of Inverness & Indweller of Thurso c.1521-1587

In the 1884 publication "Caithness Family History" by John Henderson, the writer refers to:-

In the Old Kirk of Thurso, and in the place where once stood the Buckies pew, there is an ancient and handsome gravestone now embedded in the soil. At the top, there are armorial bearings with the motto "Vivat Post Funera Virtus", and underneath the following inscription:

"Heir lyes ane famous man Adam Davidsoun Burgess of Inverness Indweller in Thurso who departed in June 1587 being 66 years of age. And Katherine Sinclair his spouse departed May 1592 being 70 years of age".

This monumental inscription and the armorial bearings of this Adam Davidson have still to be rediscovered, but it does indicate that an Inverness Davidson claimed armorial bearings in the middle of the 16th century.



St Peter's Kirk, Thurso, Caithness



William Davidson, Minister of St Mary's Church, Auchindoir, Aberdeenshire, 1638

William Davidson was the long-serving minister of St Mary's Church from the 1620s to the 1660s. He left his arms and initials on the gable end of this church in 1638, probably as a result of completing some repairs to the church.

Davidson arms at St Mary's Church, Auchindoir

Thomas Davidson, the King's Printer

[active as printer in 1530s & 1540s, granted Royal monopoly to print Acts of Parliament 1541-47]

Thomas Davidson was originally from Birse on Deeside before becoming a printer and then a Burgess in Edinburgh in 1528. His printer's mark includes three arrows, a variation of the pheon motif.

Printer's marks were an early form of security device to show the authenticity of a printer's publication.



Thomas Davidson's
Printer Mark c.1530/40s



Master William Davidson, Burgess of Aberdeen, who was a son of David Davidson also of the Auchenhamperis family, used a pheon or arrowhead and a deer in a Seal in 1576 and in 1583, a generation or two after his namesake. We only have a description of this item.

Davesovn, c.1563–1565

Forman's Armorial includes a description "*Azure, on a fess Argent between three pheons those in chief point downwards, that in base point upwards, Agent, a stag at rest Gules*".

We believe that this item could be the arms of Patrick Davidson, Ross Herald of the Lyon Court at that time.

Davidsons of Grinnant [Grennan] and Pennyglen in Ayrshire

There is an undated reference to the arms for this family:-

"Azure, on a fess between three pheons Argent, a stag couchant Gules"

From other records we know that this family were active from the late 15th century onwards.

Davidson Graves in the Howff Cemetery, Dundee



The Howff Cemetery located in the centre of Dundee holds at least two 17th century Davidson gravestones with armorial detail. Although both items are suffering from atmospheric erosion, the *Old Davidson* design of the stag or deer with the arrow through the neck can still be seen.

Arms of Isobel Davidson, wife of George Gaire d.1641



Arms of William Davidson d.1649



Image of the Original Memorial

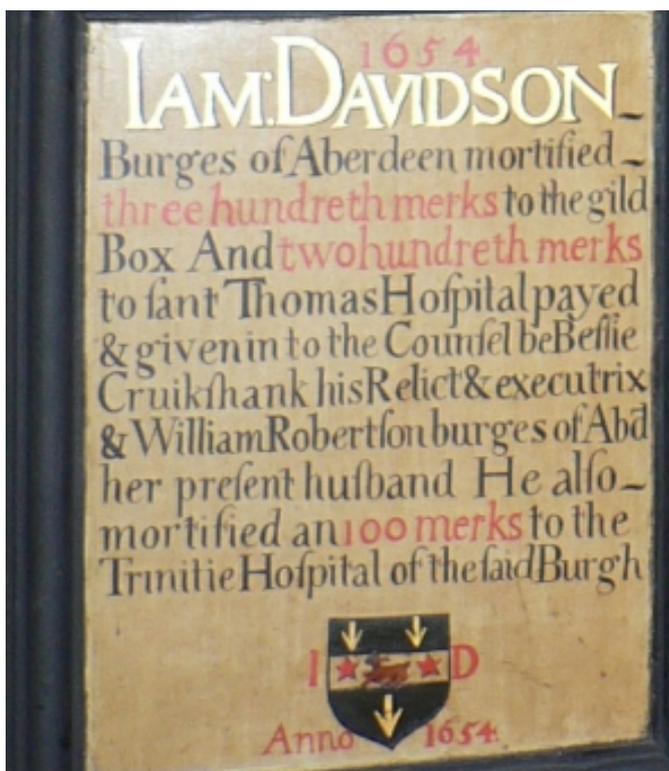
George Davidson of Pettens Burgess of Aberdeen, 1650

There are several surviving memorials to this Aberdeen benefactor. The most famous one is the memorial in the kirkyard wall at St Clement's, Footdee, Aberdeen.

George Davidson also provided for the Church at Newhills just outside Aberdeen which survived until 1828. This used to contain his own pew which included a decorated armorial panel. There is no formal record of this Davidson having ever being granted arms.



Sketch of George Davidson's Arms on his church pew at Newhills Church. The Pew has been lost.



Davidson Armorial on display in the Aberdeen Town House

Iam [James] Davidson, Burgess & Benefactor of Aberdeen, 1654

Aberdeen Town House Mortification Board

This item shows yet another variation of the Davidson arms.



Detail of the Arms