

# Origins Part 1: Early Davidson Arms & what forms they took

In this section we describe the early design forms used for Davidson arms and their development up to the point where the Lyon Court and College of Arms provide us with a full set of records.

Other writers in heraldic matters have considered the question of why arms have taken certain known forms when associated with surnames and families. The later [mainly English] practice of “canting” was to interpret the surname literally or nearly so, such as the family name of Turnbull could have a shield illustrating “a bull turning”. Miss Platts in her book titled “Hazard” suggests that many early continental arms, especially Flemish, originated in the Court of Charlemagne.

The lion had regal connections and may have been the biblical “lion of Judah”. The Fleur-de-lis, again the biblical “lily of the field”, were adopted by the kings of France. The “Buckles” were used by a family whose roots were in northern France where they were hereditary Court Officials wearing the “Belt and Buckle” as insignia of office. Miss Platts has developed many similar explanations regarding other motifs. Ethnic groups and tribal areas have long had associated insignia such as a wolf being suckled by twin boys, a reference to Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome; the white horse of the Saxons in south England; the dragon of Wales.

Tinctures or the colours of the charges are another indication, according to Miss Platts, which provide clues as to which part of Flanders or northern France, was the early home of the family using their particular coat of arms. The arms used by Davidsons are not known to have been used at a time when such colour usages were common. However, as will be seen later, the earliest known tinctures of Davidson arms appear to have been Blue and Silver of Boulogne and Vermonde.

First we can examine what form that the arms took, and then consider the reason why such arms were so adopted.

The arms which were associated with the name of Davidson in early times in Scotland took three distinct forms. What is believed to be the oldest example is “*A stag trippant pierced sinisterwise by an arrow*” and is termed *Old Davidson* in Stoddart.



Old Davidson design

### Marks of Cadency



Label: Eldest son



Crescent: 2<sup>nd</sup> son



Mullet: 3<sup>rd</sup> son



Martlet: 4<sup>th</sup> son



Annulet: 5<sup>th</sup> son



Fleur-de-lis: 6<sup>th</sup> son



Rose: 7<sup>th</sup> son



Cross Moline:  
8<sup>th</sup> son



Double Quatrefoil  
or rock: 9<sup>th</sup> son

Each armiger had to have a distinguishing variation from existing arms, called a differentiation.

An example of such a differentiation of the *Old Davidson* is that on the Seal of 1536 of the Rev. John Davidson of Newlands in Peeblesshire, which includes a flower head [a cinquefoil?] as differentiation. Given such a differentiation, then the basic form that the arms originally took must be earlier than 1536.

Sons of an armiger when using their father's coat of arms would differentiate the arms using a crescent for the second son, the mullet for the third son, and so on.

In 1575 the English College of Arms granted a variation on the *Old Davidson* design, "*Argent, a stag trippant Proper attired Or*" to a **William Davidson or Davison**, Secretary to Queen Elizabeth I. His grandfather, it was stated, "came out of the North" ie Scotland or the Borders.

This is a case where arms, possibly originating in Scotland, were subsequently matriculated by the English Heralds, probably differentiated by a change of tincture or colour, to an English descendant of a Scot. A son of William Davidson, who later lived in the Virginia colony, used a variation of the 1575 arms by altering the tinctures.



Arms of Sir William Davidson/Davison

The *Old Davidson* appears to have been formalised into the second format when the *running deer pierced by an arrow* was changed into the format of *two pheons points downwards above, and one below, with the fess, the centre band, showing a reclining deer*. The bottom pheon varied, usually pointing down.

For convenience, let us call this form the *New Davidson*. Stoddart refers to an illuminated Ms of 1565 where the pheon in the base pointed upwards. This was a minor variation. It can therefore be said that the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century use of the 2 + 1 pheons with a reclining stag by Davidsons was a formalisation of the earlier running stag or deer motif.



New Davidson design

The earlier motif, the *Old Davidson* may have been in use from the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, but only one example, the *Newlands seal*, is known to exist in Scottish records.

The arms of Davidson or Davison took another form. Stoddart gives an example of the arms for Davison. The spelling of a surname in the late medieval and Renaissance years was a matter for the writer. Aberdeen Town Records of 1398 to c.1415 state the name of Alderman Robert Davidson at different times as "David", "Davisone", "Davidson" and "Davidsoune". The Davidsons on the Northumberland side of the Borders, when spelling their name, in many cases dropped the second 'd', as did many Davidsons who settled in Ulster in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

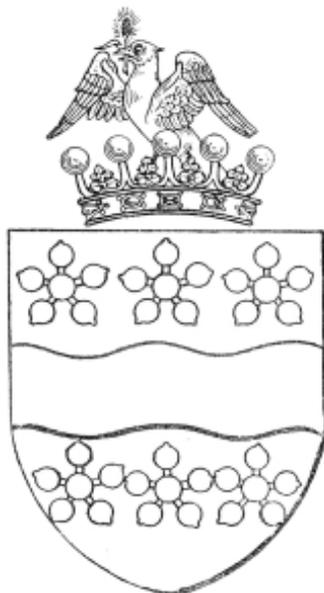
Sir James Balfour Paul, Lord Lyon King of Arms, quoting from a Ms of 1630–40, referred to yet another early set of arms known as *Davidson AD 1520* ... Or, a mullet Sable on a chief of the second three crosses formy of the first ... and is similar to the arms used by the Scottish Dawsons, another form of Davidson.

This use of the cross patee or formy/Maltese crosses shows up in the Davison arms of northern England usually in the form of cinquefoils.



Davidson AD 1520 design

The arms of those of the name of Davidson or Davison in the north of England, apart from Davison of Warkworth in Northumberland, do not follow the northern pattern of pheon/arrow head and deer/stag motifs, but do comply with some reference to the *Davidson AD 1520* design with the Maltese crosses /and cinquefoils. As such, it might suggest a kinship of the Border Davidson families south through to the northern English Davisons.



Sir Alexander Davison  
of Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
& Blakiston 1631



Revd Robert Davidson, 1819  
based on earlier ancestors



Davidson of Warkworth  
- undated



Morton Davison of  
Beamish Durham, 1740

## Oldest References

In Black's *Surnames of Scotland*, there is a reference in the Ragman's Roll of a list of Scots who in 1219 swore [under some duress] allegiance to Edward I of England. This includes **Adam fiz David of Forfarshire** who had a seal bearing a long-legged bird and "*S' Ade filii Davit*". There is no way of knowing whether any son of Sir Adam was filii David or filli Adam had arms. A long-legged bird suggests possibly a heron but more likely a pelican, an ecclesiastical emblem of purity. Such a blazon was later used by those of the name of Paterson, formerly Patrickson.

There were only a few Davidsons who matriculated in the immediate years 1672-77, following the 1672 Act of Parliament.

**Sir William Davidson of Corriehill [Curriehill]**, a Low Countries merchant, who was knighted in England by Charles II, had arms matriculated in 1676 in the Lyon Court.



Sir William Davidson

He was followed by **Robert Davidson of Balgay, Dundee**, where earlier Davidson families had used recognizable *Old Davidson* armorial designs on their graves.

The Balgay and Corriehill Davidsons were of Dundee merchant stock. Their matriculated arms follow the format of the *New Davidson* design which had been illustrated by Stoddart.

**Alexander Davidson, Advocate, of Carnbrogie [Cairnbrogie]** followed, the last named being of particular interest to me in that the Carnbrogie Davidsons were of Auchenhamperis family descent, from the Garioch area in Aberdeenshire from whence my own forebears hailed, and are of the same stock.

We have no surviving image of the Carnbrogie arms, only the description in the Lyon Court records which indicate a variation of the *New Davidson* design.

In the 1700s **Davidson of Hallbise [Halltree]** and **Davidson of Muirhouse** also matriculated arms at the Lyon Court.

We have a description of the **Hallbise** arms from the Lyon Court records but no surviving image. The description would indicate the use of the **New Davidson** design.

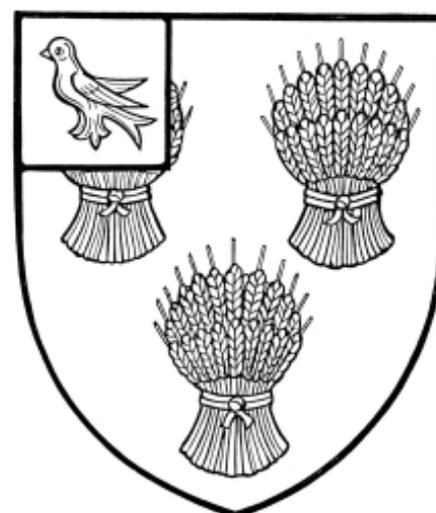
Several original images of the **Muirhouse** arms have survived. One in particular is still on display at the Cramond kirk near Muirhouse, located in what is now a western suburb of Edinburgh. These arms show up again when Randall Davidson, a descendant is made Archbishop of Canterbury early in the 1900s. This design is a variation of the **New Davidson** design.



Davidson of Muirhouse arms at Cramond Kirkyard



In England, **Davison of Brand Hall in Shropshire** had a set of arms granted in 1793. These are similar to what could be read as cadet Comyn arms later adopted in the region of Chester, in England. Why this is so I cannot say.



Davison of Brand Hall,  
Shropshire, 1793