

Origins Part 2: Emigrants, Birthbrieves, Red Hand of Ulster, Stag & Deer Motifs

This section examines some of the armorial designs found in Europe used by **Emigrant Davidsons**. We describe the procedure of **Birthbrieves** where merchants and others had to prove their status before being allowed to work at home or abroad. We also show the source of the **Red Hand of Ulster** motif and the fact that the **Strachan families** also used the stag/deer motif.

Emigrant Davidsons used their family arms when they settled abroad. A Davidson family “**of Greenan**” is listed by Reitstap in Continental sources, but no date is given. It takes the shape of the **New Davidson** design. Greenan is in Ayrshire and the family goes back to the late 15th century and to a grant by the Lord of the Isles of land in Ayr. Branches of the Greenan Davidsons were to be found in Ulster after the Settlement of the Pale.

A **Daniel von Davidson**, who was born in Poland in the 1647, used the older form of the Davidson Arms, when he lived in Danzig. His father was born in Edinburgh in 1591 and emigrated to Poland when Daniel was 14 or 15. The arms are divided with the sinister half showing a running deer, transfixed with an arrow, on a hill. The crest appears to be a cat, standing erect on its hind legs between deer horns, and holding a second arrow. Was the cat a reference to the Davidson Clan Chattan connection? If so, it is interesting that such a reference was made in the 17th century.

The sketch of von Davidson’s arms and crest are included in the publication *The Scots in Eastern & Western Prussia* by Thomas Fischer. The dexter half [from the right hand of the holder of the shield] shows an indistinct lion rampant on what is possibly a field of vegetation. The sketch may be a mirror reproduction, a printer’s error.

The well known book of Continental arms, “*Armorial General*” by Reitstap, includes the blazon of the arms of a Dutch Davidson.

‘D’azur a la fasche d’argent, ch d’un cerf en repos de qu et acc de trois tulipes d’or.



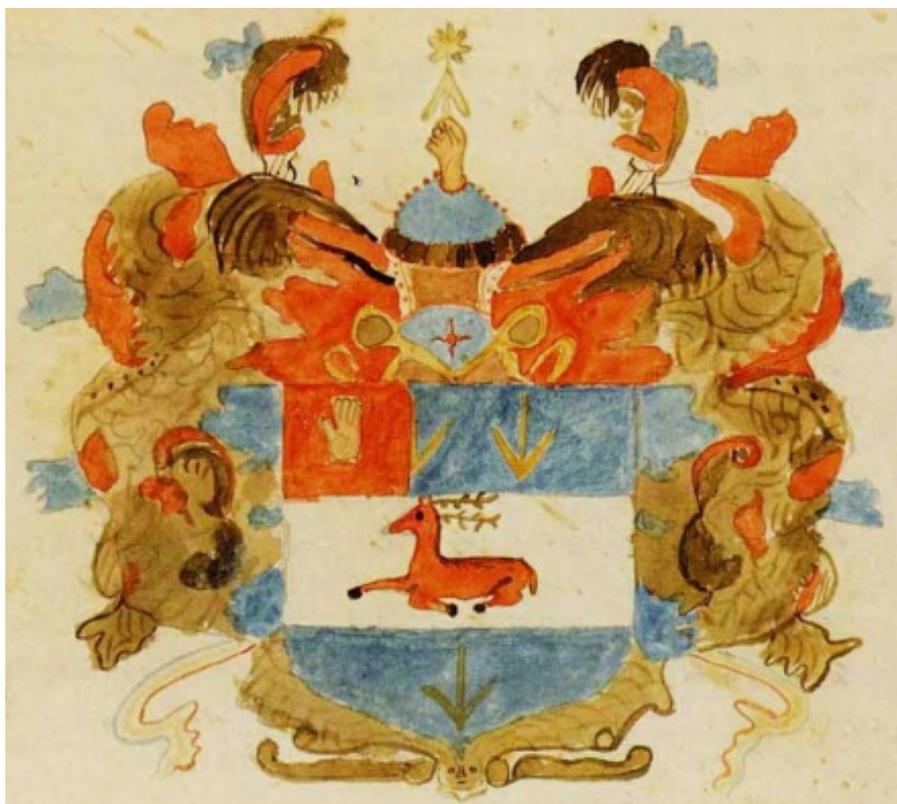
Sketches of von Davidson’s Arms

Davidson Arms: Extract from Reitstap



We also find other Dutch Davidson families were using arms [and still do today] based on those of William Davidson of Corriehill.

Davidson Arms from 'Het Scholtze geslacht Davidson'



Birthbrieves

The Aberdeen Town Council Records of the 17th century and earlier periods include Birthbrieves, all formally witnessed. These documents were issued by the Council to foreign based emigrant merchants of Scottish parentage, confirming their birth, parentage and a description of any family origins they might have had. Such Birthbrieves were a requirement to prove that these immigrants were not serfs and were open to trade. The details of some Davidsons are found in these records.

Birthbrieves were also issued by other authorities such as the Privy Council.

One such was that of *Doctor or Professor William D'Avisson, 1593-1662*. He was the 3rd son of Duncan Davidson of Ardmachrone, Aberdeenshire, of Auchenhampers descent, who served at the French and Polish Courts. This eminent Davidson was botanist and a creator of a physic garden, and medical doctor to the Kings of France and Poland.

A surviving engraving of his portrait includes his arms.



Portrait & Arms of William D'Avisson/Davidson

We have no formal record of a grant of Arms to Dr William Davidson, but this engraving clearly shows what we would recognise as Davidson arms today, ie the *New Davidson* design.

The Red Hand of Ulster is another motive found in Davidson arms.

In 1608 after the death of Queen Elizabeth I of England, King James VI of Scotland and I of England offered lands forfeited in Ireland during the O'Neil Rebellion to certain Scottish Lairds. The recipients of such grants in Ireland were entitled to add at the "middle chief point" in their arms, a small shield bearing a red hand.

The Arms of **Sir William Davidson of Corriehill [Curriehill]** granted in 1676 show this entitlement, as do the Arms of the **Davidsons of Tulloch**, only matriculated in 1906. The Davidson of Tulloch family are not known to have had Arms in the 1600s, so one wonders where they sourced this motif if not from the Corriehill arms. The Dutch Davidsons have also continued to use this motif copied from the Corriehill arms to this day.

Portrait & Arms of Sir William Davidson of Corriehill [Curriehill]



Arms of Duncan Davidson of Tulloch, 1906



The Stag with an arrow through the neck motif has also been found in Scandinavia. A Swedish member of the Clan Davidson Association, Kent Williamson, has located it in "Norse Sigiller" by H.J. Huitfelt Kaas 1899-1950. The seal is not of a Davidson but of Ogmund Saxeson, dated 1343, and may have been an early adoption of the cult of St Giles as is discussed below.



Seal of Ogmund Saxeson

The **Stag and Deer motifs** were also used by the family of **Strachan [Strathavon] of Glenkindie and Strichen Aberdeenshire and Kincardineshire, and Thornton in Angus**, at an even earlier date, during the 15th century. There is no known connection between the Davidsons and the Strachan family other than a granddaughter of [Sir] Robert Davidson, Provost or Alderman of Aberdeen, who died at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411, married a Strachan of Thornton, a second son.

It is possible that a 15th century Aberdeenshire Davidson married a Strachan and their descendants adopted the mother's family crest. Such usage was known in the earlier centuries but, with a clear differentiation by the line of female descent to safeguard the original arms. However, the dating of seals showing a deer would make this unlikely. In later years, this practice was less used, except where the name of the male descendant through the female line was changed to that of the original armiger.

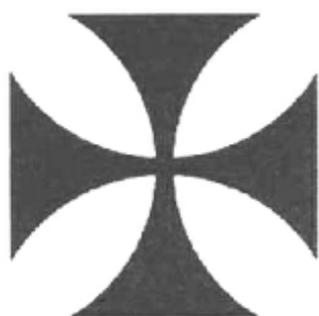
The Davidson and Strachan families could have a common heritage or they may have adopted the same cult motifs, the running stag, the pheon, the star and the cinquefoils. It is somewhat puzzling for two land-owning families living in the NE corner of Scotland to have similar arms.

However, other families in Scotland used the deer motifs in the 15th Century, so we should not place too much significance on such usage of similar motifs by differing families.

There are cases where a vassal or person holding lands from a Superior, who held the lands direct from the Crown, adopted the Superior's Arms duly differentiated. However, there is no common known Superior with stag motifs and so such a practice would not apply in the case of the Davidson and Strachan families.



Strachan Stag motif



The Cross Patee or Formy found in some Davidson and Davison arms was also used by other families. Sometimes this motif associated with the Knights Templars. Much later the Victoria Cross medal was also designed using a form of Cross Patee.

There is nothing unique in the Davidsons using this motif.