

Some Notes Concerning the Armory on the Embo Armorial Marriage Stone

The stone purports to show the marital arms of Sir Robert Gordon of Embo, 2nd. Baronet, and his wife Jean, daughter of Robert Leslie of Findrassie. Sir Robert was the son of the first baronet, Sir John, who was created a Baronet of Nova Scotia in 1631. The twelfth and last Gordon of Embo baronet was a bachelor with no children who died in 1956, when the title became dormant. This means that there was no immediate heir, but that there remains the possibility that an heir exists but has not been identified, or that more than one possible heir exists, the sons of daughters of earlier baronets for example, but that none has a definite claim. Despite this long history it is notable, and unusual, that no armorial bearings have ever been registered by the Lord Lyon for this family.

Nevertheless, here we have a rather splendid and vigorous representation of a coat of arms clearly used by early Gordons of Embo. The armorial bearings on the stone may be the work of a local mason with no specialist knowledge, perhaps based upon a description or a sketch provided to him. Sir Robert Gordon belonged to the extensive clan of Seton-Gordons, descended from Elizabeth Gordon, daughter of Sir Adam Gordon of Huntly and his wife Elizabeth Keith, Lady of Aboyne, who in 1407/8 married Alexander Seton, son of Sir William Seton of Seton. Their second son Alexander (Seton) became the first Earl of Huntly and adopted his wife's surname of Gordon. From the marriage of the Earl to Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Crichton of that Ilk, the first Lord Crichton, who was High Chancellor of Scotland during the minority of King James II, there descended several distinguished families of Seton-Gordons, including the Earls and later Marquesses of Huntly, the later Earls of Sutherland, the Gordons of Gordonstoun and Letterfourie, baronets, and the Gordons of Embo, all of whom bear the crescents of Seton along with the boars' heads of Gordon in their coats of arms. The arms depicted for Gordon of Embo on the stone show the Gordon boars' heads with the Seton crescents rather oddly tucked into a smaller space beneath them, perhaps a misunderstanding on the part of the mason as the two quarters for Gordon and Seton should really be the same size. Since the Embo line is a cadet of Huntly, from the first Earl's third son Adam, their coat of arms should have a distinctive difference, which would usually take the form of a border, to distinguish them from those of the senior line. In this case the crest is the Seton crescent, rather than a Gordon boar's head. The other interesting point to note is that as Adam Gordon, Dean of Caithness, and Vicar-General of the diocese while it was without a bishop, was a clergyman his children were all illegitimate, and there were several of them. The Dean died in 1529.

The progenitor of the Embo line was Dean Adam's third son, John Gordon of Drummoy, whose wife Margaret Mackreth outlived him and was a remarkable personality with many gifts. Their son John Gordon was the first to acquire the estates of Embo and the father of the first baronet, Sir John Gordon of Embo. He married Margaret, the daughter of Robert Leslie of Findrassie and his wife, Margaret, daughter of Alexander Dunbar of Grange. This Robert was the son of George Leslie, the 4th. Earl of Rothes, by his wife Margaret, an illegitimate grand-daughter of King James III. Lord Rothes married her in 1517 and was forced to divorce her three years later. They had two sons who, having been implicated in the murder of Cardinal Beaton, were declared forfeit and therefore unable to inherit. The Earl married secondly in 1525 Elizabeth, widow of the 3rd. Earl of Huntly, who died in 1529 without children. The Earl then married again, Agnes, dowager Lady Fleming, with whom he had four sons and two daughters. The eldest son, Andrew, succeeded to the Earldom. On the death of the Countess Agnes the Earl remarried Margaret, his first wife, with whom he had, with four daughters, a son, Robert, to whom he passed the estate of Findrassie. Robert's daughter Margaret married Sir John Gordon of Embo, the first baronet (and there was a marriage stone commemorating this marriage also on the old Embo House.)

The arms of Leslie of Rothes are three gold buckles on a blue 'bend' - a diagonal band - on a silver (or white) shield. In the early 14th. century an ancestor of the Earls of Rothes, Sir Andrew Leslie of that Ilk, married Mary, one of the daughters and co-heirs of Sir Alexander Abernethy, who had no sons. From that time the Leslies quartered with their own the arms of Abernethy: a red lion rampant on a gold shield with a black ribbon (like a bend but narrower) across it. These quartered arms (missing the Abernethy ribbon) appear on the Embo marriage stone for Jean Leslie, daughter of the second Robert Leslie of Findrassie and his wife Isabel Forbes, and her husband's cousin. However the Findrassie line was also a cadet of the main line of Rothes and as such differenced their arms with a checked red and gold border, which does not appear on the stone. They also used a different motto (*Firma Durant*) from the more usual Leslie motto *Hold Fast*, or as it appears on the stone, *Grip Fast*.

There were as with most landed families many interconnections down the generations, and it is of interest to note that the couple commemorated on the stone, in addition to being cousins-german, shared a distinguished common ancestor. The first Lord Crichton, who as father-in-law of the first Earl of Huntly, was four-times-great grandfather of Sir Robert Gordon of Embo, was also, through the infidelity of the third Lord Crichton, three-times-great grandfather of Jean Leslie.

Armorial Marriage Stone from Embo House

Dornoch stonemason Joanne Coombs was commissioned by Historylinks Museum to carve a copy of an unusual and beautiful armorial marriage stone that is sited at Embo House.



FEATURES OF THE DESIGN OF THE STONE:-

- Probably here the Gordon motto 'Forward Without Fear.'
- The Crest: A crescent, for Seton, which rests on a wreath of twisted fabric with six twists showing.
- The helm: an open helm with the visor raised which indicates a knight or a baronet.
- The Mantling, a decorative treatment of the cloth, held in place by the wreath, used to keep the sun off the helm.
- Initials 'S R G' for Sir Robert Gordon, 2nd. Baronet of Embo, and 'D I L' for his wife Dame Jean Leslie.
- The shield of arms with, on the dexter half (on the viewer's left) for Sir Robert, three boar's heads for Gordon and three crescents for Seton, and on the sinister half (the viewer's right) for Dame Jean, three buckles on a diagonal band (called a 'bend') for Leslie and a lion rampant for Abernethy.
- In the decorative frame the date 1677
- The Leslie motto 'Grip Fast'

Sir Robert Gordon of Embo died in 1693, so it is likely that 1677 is the date of his marriage to his cousin, Jean Leslie. The couple lived in a former dwelling house which was demolished to make way for the present Embo House on the same site.

Sir Robert Gordon of Embo was great-great grandson of Adam, third son of the first Earl of Huntly, whose father Alexander Seton had married a Gordon heiress, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Adam Gordon of that ilk. This couple were the progenitors of the great Seton-Gordon branch of Clan Gordon.

Seton

cr. 1445

Alexander 1st. Earl of Huntly = Elizabeth d. of Wm. Lord Crichton #

| 3rd. s. [of 3s. all of whom took the name of Gordon]
Adam Gordon, Dean of Cathness, d. 1529

| 3rd. s.

John Gordon of Drummay = Margaret Mackreth
d. 1598

Gilbert Gordon
of Garty

|
John Gordon of Golspitour, slain ~~1588~~ 1588, of Embo m. Jean

| eldest of 4 sons + 4 daus.

Sir John Gordon of Embo, cr. Baronet of R. S. 1631

m. 1627 Margaret, dau. of Robert Leslie of Fendrasie
d. 1649

| [2nd. best eldest surviving son]

Sir Robert Gordon of Embo, 2nd Bt., m. Jean Leslie
d. 1693

George 2. E. of Huntly m. Jean, dau. of R. Jos 1

Alexander
3rd E.

Adam
m. Eliz. C of S
John 10 E of S

William

James & letterforme
↓

Alex. 11 E of S
m. Jean d. of 4 E of Huntly

John 12 E of S

Robert Gordon
of Gordonston
1st. Bt. of NS 1625
d. 1652 b. 1560

[Tutor of Sutherland]

→ letterforme
10th Bt. ext. 1508

Sir James Gordon
12 Bt d. 1956
cricket writer

↓
All these lines are
Seton-Gordons
from this marr.
Hence Seton arms
and crest
was shared with
Gordon.

* the Lord s. of
the 3rd E. m. Eliz.
Cess of Sutherland

Sir Adam Gordon temp. Robert 1

2. William

Adam 51 of thich 11k

Lord Strathbogie 1370

srw. Keith E. Marshall

Sir John

Sir Adam of thich 11k 1395 K X Hamilton 1402 m. Eliz. Keith

Elizabeth, heir m. 1408 4th Seton, s. of Sir Wm. 5 of S

↓
Alex. E. of Huntly c. 1445

George 2 E Sir Alex. of Absgloche

Adam (see above)