Arms of the Maclean Chief

This is the arms of the Chief of the Clan Maclean, House of Duart. These arms are the hereditary personal coat of arms of Sir Lachlan Hector Charles Maclean, Bt, CVO, DL of Morvern and Duart, 28th Chief of the Clan Maclean. It is a hereditary piece of property and is therefore passed to his heirs upon his death. It is common to re-matriculate the full achievement of arms every three to five generations. It is not to be used by any other member of the clan as their personal coat of arms. In fact, according to Scottish law, simply affixing a coat of arms to any particular item, makes that item the personal property of the one who owns the coat of arms.

TOWER EMBATTLED  There is little doubt that the tower represents Duart Castle which has been in use since it was occupied by the Macleans in 1360. The Tower was originally used alone on a shield as the earliest arms of the Clan Maclean. This is documented in the Lindsay armorial in 1542. The tower is even utilized in the earliest recorded Maclean seal.

SEAL  The specific meaning behind the use of the Seal is unknown. There is strong cause to believe that the seal is symbolic of the geographic location and close ties of the Clan Maclean to the sea since seals are commonly found in the region.

BARONET’S HELM  The addition of the baronet’s helm to the full achievement of arms most likely occurred when Sir Lachlan was made a baronet in 1631. It would have been customary to matriculate the arms after the bestowal of such a title. Since then, Maclean chiefs have held the hereditary title, Baronet of Morvern.

MEDALLION  The medallion is apparently a likeness of a medallion of a Baronet of Nova Scotia. Although these arms were last matriculated on behalf of Sir Fitzroy Donald Maclean in 1904, this medallion would have been added with the Baronet’s helm in 1631.

LOWER LEFT QUARTER  The *lymphad (black galley) demonstrates the Clan’s affiliation with the Lordship of the Isles. All clans that were associated with the Lordship of the Isles used the lymphad in their arms. The origins of the lymphad are clearly from Norse royalty and are symbolic of prowess at sea. There is speculation that the Norse kings specifically used the lymphad to identify with the pagan goddess, Nerthus, whose symbol was a crescent shaped galley.

OSTRICH  The ostrich usually symbolizes the sincerity and willing obedience. The use of the ostrich as a support charge in this full achievement of arms may be a reference to military and government service to Great Britain, and may explain it’s use as a supporting charge in the full achievement of arms. Before the seal was added, earlier achievements included “two ostriches proper with horseshoes in their beaks.” Although the symbolism of the horseshoe is unknown, it is very common and typically considered a symbol of good fortune.

UPPER LEFT QUARTER OF THE SHIELD  Although many believe that the rock represents the Isle of Mull, Some believe that the rock is actually symbolic of the Maclean fortress of Cairnburgh located in the Treshnish Isles. It was at the Cairnburgh Fortress that the Macleans regrouped after Duart Castle was conquered by the Campbell’s in 1681. The use of the rock was first recorded in 1591.

UPPER RIGHT QUARTER OF THE SHIELD  The red hand holding the blue cross refers to St. Moluag, St. Moluag was most remembered for founding a hundred monasteries in the 8th century.

LOWER RIGHT QUARTER  Although the double eagle usually signifies that the bearer is an individual of action and integrity who is often occupied with weighty affairs, there seems to be a much simpler explanation. The Exchequer Rolls record the fact that on several occasions, the Chiefs of Clan Maclean supplied hawks to the King for his personal and military use. Since the arms of the West Highland Clans depicted their social and political alliances rather than their bloodlines, the later explanation is most likely accurate.

The salmon, in Gaelic cultures, represents eternal life because it always returns to its birthplace to spawn and therefore a mysterious and important symbol. The silver salmon is a heraldic reference to the nobile Dálriadic origins of Gilleain na Tuaighe.

*A Lymphad or galley is a charge used primarily in Scottish heraldry. It is a single masted ship propelled by oars. In addition to the mast and oars, the Lymphad has three flags and a basket. The word comes from the Scottish Gaelic long fhada, meaning a long ship or birlinn. It usually indicates a title associated with islands, such as Lord of the Isles, specifically those on the west coast of Scotland, but not limited to the Hebrides. Also, it is not limited to Scottish arms, prominent examples including the coats of arms of New Zealand and New Brunswick.