

History 101

or

A SHORT MUSING ABOUT HOW THE LYON ARMS APPEARED ON A SKIRLING GRAVESTONE

In the Kinnettles Kirkyard is a stone, formerly likely to be of a 'table' style, of some antiquity (1657) that features bare, stark block lettering as follows mostly around the edge and three images in the middle. It is now placed in an upside down position against a metal frame alongside others. The Scottish Genealogical Society refers to it as stone number 31 in their publication.



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Interpreted today as -

**THE BURIAL PLAQUE (or PLACE) OF MARGARET
LYON SPOUSE TO JOHN SKIRLING IN INGLISTON WHO
DEPARTED THE 19 DAY OF JUNE 1657 YEARS OF HER
AGE WAS 26**

In the centre are three images.



The first appears to be the initials of John Skirling and Margret Lyon, intertwined. It is a common device for couples, from monumental inscriptions to the engravings on their dinner service. The "M" forms the frame of the whole image, the "T" or "J" next to that. The "S" of Skirling is in the exact centre with the lower tail connecting to the lower edge of Margret's "M", and the upper tail connecting to both the "L" of Lyon and the edge of the "M". Under, appropriate for the time and age, the "S" and to its right, is the "L" for Lyon.

Here you can see the initials of their surnames. . .



. . and here the initials of their forenames.

And here you can see the initials (forenames in white and surnames in black). You can see that, as was the usual convention, the initials of the husband overlay those of his wife, even though her “M” frames the entire image. The initials are intertwined and overlaid in a ‘Celtic knot’ fashion, the stonemason clearly showing that some letters overlapped, and some went under.



The bottom image is simply what is known in art historical terms a “*memento mori*”, and it even is named as such on the stone. The words literally mean ‘the influence of or place of the dead,’ and are an iconographic allusion to the concept of “you, too, shall follow”. *Memento mori* shown in countless images in art – from magnificent paintings to simple crafts, and almost always are represented by a skull.

The concept behind the idea is all the more visually appealing because of the weathering and lichens as well as the quaint quality of the rendering of the skull. Note to the left the grave symbol of an hourglass (representing our allotted time) and to the right the crossed bones, representing our eternity in death.



The middle image is the most intriguing. This is the image as I received it. It appears to be a shield, a coat of arms, or similar device. What could it represent?

This is where the story begins to become interesting. The surname “Lyon” is the same as the Lords of Glamis, later the Earls of Kinghorne and Strathmore, a family intimately tied to the history of Scotland from the time of Robert II to the present day. The late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, is perhaps the best-known daughter of this family. Is it possible that Margret Lyon was another?

Who was Lord Glamis in 1657? John Lyon, the 2nd Earl of Kinghorne. He was a close personal friend of the Marquis of Montrose, and was with him when the latter subscribed to the National Covenant in 1638. When Montrose broke with the Scots Parliament to fight for Charles I, the Earl of Kinghorne could not support him any longer and nearly bankrupted his estates supporting the Army of the Covenant against his friend. It has been said of the 2nd Earl of Kinghorne that he came “to his inheritance the wealthiest peer in Scotland, and he left it the poorest.” Glamis, under his tenure, was stripped of its furniture and allowed to fall into disrepair. Huntly (also called Castle Lyon), the family’s other holding in Perth, was also in a state of ruin.

John Lyon’s son, Patrick, received a new patent of nobility in 1677, and was known after as the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, Viscount Lyon, Baron Glamis, Tannadyce, Sidlaw and Strathdicthie. When he inherited his titles, he also inherited debts amounting to £40,000, a huge sum at the time. He was the re-builder of Glamis; he paid off his father’s debts through skilful management of his estates. Patrick Lyon is, in short, substantially responsible for the Glamis Castle we see today. Interestingly, Patrick’s mother was Lady Elizabeth Maule, a daughter of another Angus family of great influence – the Panmures – as well as a family who, like the Lyons, were Jacobites after the Reformation.

So, was Margret a Lyon? Of this influential family dating back to the times of the Bruce? Of the same family that represents the maternal line of the present Queen Elizabeth? What IS the centre image on the gravestone? It appears to be a shield, can it be arms?

This is a representation of the first arms known for the Lyons:



It is recorded among the Scottish coats in the *Armorial de Berry* assembled for Charles VII of France by Gilles le Bouvier in the 15th century; “Argent a lion Azure, overall a riband Gules”. It was assigned to “*Le seigneur de Lion*”. Le Bouvier visited Scotland in 1450-55, and therefore it suggests that it was borne by Patrick Lyon, 1st Lord Glamis. The red “riband” indicates that Lord Glamis recognized a right to his arms being “undifferenced” (or without the ‘riband’). What this means is that he saw a right to the arms without the riband because of someone else’s claims that proved his own.

This is the earliest Scottish recorded version of the arms:



And to whom did they belong? John Lyon, Thane of Glamis, who obtained the barony of Kinghorne through marriage to Jean, the daughter of Robert II. He was also the Secretary to David II, Keeper of the Privy Seal, and Chamberlain of Scotland to Robert II.

The red riband is a charge added to the basic coat “*Argent a lion rampant Azure*”, and when one looks at the arms *without* the riband, something becomes very clear.

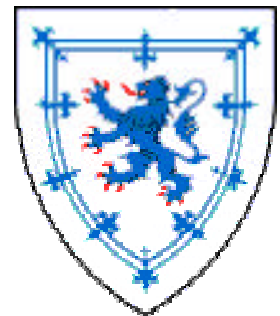
These are the arms of the Lords of Skelton in England, better known as the Bruces. The Bruces of Skelton were the family which were the forefathers of Robert the Bruce.

How did a stranger, before now unknown, become Secretary to the King and bear the same arms, though differenced, as the King? How did such a man have the “connections” to marry the King’s own daughter in a day when royal marriages were highly political? How did such a man come to possess such high office?

The evidence in the heraldry points to an origin within the line of the Bruces.

However, more to the point, these are the arms as they are today, with the additional tressures, etc., that reflect the changing fortunes of the family.

The arms are interesting comparisons to the representation on the stone and do, it seems, represent a connection. It is difficult to say exactly what the connection may be, however, it is interesting that, stylistically, the earliest representation is the closest to that on the stone. Namely:



Note the “far” hind leg of the lion; note the tail. They are very similar. Also note in the far bottom right corner, the appearance of a line – could it be a riband? - or a continuation of the lion’s tail? It is difficult to tell for certain.

Is this something that would have been fabricated on the stone for posterity? Not likely. These things were taken quite seriously, and were much better understood, in the middle ages and the period shortly after. In short order: this would not have been allowed had there not been a connection to the arms that could be proven by the claimant.

The questions raised by this stone are enormous for Skirling researchers.

- ❑ Who was John Skirling and how did he have the means and standing to marry a Lyon?
- ❑ Is this a connection to the burgesses of Edinburgh?
- ❑ Is this a possible link to how the Skirlings came to be in Angus?
- ❑ Are the Stirlings (and occasional Skirlings) in Perth also kin?
- ❑ Is the other marriage of a Skirling to a Lyon possibly connected (William Skirling and Janot Lyon)?