

Clan BURNETT



- ARMS** Argent, three holly leaves in chief Vert, a hunting horn in base Sable, garnished Or, stringed Gules
- CREST** (on a chapeau Gules furred Ermine) A cubit arm, the hand naked, vested Vert doubled Argent pruning a vine tree with a pruning knife Proper
- MOTTO** Virecit vulnere virtus (Her virtue flourishes by her wounds)
- On Compartment** Alterius non sit fdqui suos esse potest (Let not him be another's who can be his own)
- SUPPORTERS** Dexter, a Highlandman in hunting garb, videlicet: a kilt or fealag of the proper tartan of Burnett of Leys, a peplum jacket Vert, broad collar Argent, and across his sinister shoulder a cord Gules, and therefrom pendent on his right hip a hunting horn Sable garnished Or, holding in his exterior hand a bow Sable, stringed Or; sinister, a greyhound Proper, collared Vert
- STANDARD** The Arms in the hoist and of two tracts Argent and Vert, upon which is depicted the Crest three times along with the Motto 'Virescit vulnere virtus' in letters Argent upon two transverse bands Sable
- PINSEL** Argent, bearing upon a Wreath of the Liveries a cubit arm, the hand naked, vested Vert doubled Argent, pruning a vine tree with a pruning knife Proper within a strap Vert buckled and embellished Or inscribed of this Motto 'Virescit vulnere virtus' in letters Or, all within a circlet also Or, fimbriated Vert, bearing the name and style 'Burnett of Leys' in letters Sable, the same ensign of a chapeau Gules furred Ermine, and in the fly a sprig of holly leaves Proper
- BADGE PLANT** A sprig of holly leaves

This ancient family claims Norman descent, but it is possible that the name is also connected with the great Saxon family of Bernard who held estates in England before the Norman Conquest. The Saxon 'beornheard' means 'brave warrior'. It seems likely that the family, now calling themselves de Bernard, first came to Scotland on the return of David I from England, and they appear to have settled in Roxburghshire. Alexander Burnett was a faithful adherent of Robert the Bruce, and on the defeat of the English he was rewarded by a grant of land in the royal Forest of Drum, together with the title of forester. In the main hall of the ancient seat of the Burnett's Crathes Castle, pride of place is still given to an ancient and splendid ivory horn said to have been presented by Bruce as a symbol of the barony and title bestowed upon Burnett.

Nisbet states that the Burnett's were great benefactors of the Church, and they appear granting lands and other endowments throughout the fifteenth century. However, the relationship with the Church was not always cordial. A dispute arose between Burnett and his neighbor, the Laird of Drum, over some land, and the local priest, one Father Ambrose, was asked by Burnett to intercede, but he declined to do so. In his rage, Burnett stopped the local monks from fishing in the Loch of Leys, and when he was rebuked and cursed by them, he planned to drain the loch. However, his son was killed attempting to clear a large rock, and Burnett abandoned the project and was ultimately reconciled with the Church. The death of the chief's son was not to be the only family tragedy: according to one legend, the ghost of a cousin of the family once haunted Crathes Castle, seeking her lost love.

Bertha de Bernard came to stay at Crathes where she soon fell in love with one of her cousins. Sadly for the young lovers, the boy was already betrothed to a daughter of the powerful Hamilton's. The Hamilton match was dear to the ambitions of Lady Agnes Burnett who arranged for her son to be sent on an embassy to England by James V. Bertha pined for her sweetheart but then mysteriously died. Lady Agnes was suspected of poisoning the girl to ensure she could not obstruct the family advancement but nothing could be proved. Bertha's father returned from the wars in France and laid a curse on his kinsmen. Thereafter a 'Green Lady' haunted Crathes and her appearances always heralded death and destruction for the family until she disappeared in the seventeenth century.

Sir Thomas Burnett, who had been created a Baronet of Nova Scotia in April 1626, was a staunch supporter of the Covenant, but he was also related to the great Marquis of Montrose, and entertained him at Crathes Castle and accompanied him on his march towards Aberdeen. His son, the third Baronet was Commissioner for Kincardineshire in the last Scottish Parliament and was strenuously opposed to the union of Scotland and England which was ultimately to be affected in 1707. On the death of Sir Robert Burnett of Lees without issue, the title passed to his cousin, Thomas Burnett of Criggie.

The seventh Baronet was an officer in the Royal Scots Fusiliers and served throughout the American Wars, being taken prisoner after the surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777. The family's great military traditions were carried on in more recent times by Major General Sir James Burnett of Leys, thirteenth Baronet, who commanded a brigade in the First World War and was colonel of the Gordon Highlanders. He was mentioned in dispatches eleven times and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order twice. He was appointed a companion of the Order of the Bath, and decorated by France with the Legion of Honor. His grandson is the present chief and he still lives on the family lands although Crathes Castle, one of Scotland's greatest historic monuments, is now in the care of the National Trust for Scotland.

Other distinguished Burnett's included Robert Burnett, raised to the Scottish judiciary as Lord Crimond in 1661 and whose son, Gilbert, became an eminent historian and clergyman. In 1698 he was appointed preceptor to the Duke of Gloucester, son of Queen Anne.

James Burnett of Monboddo, the eminent eighteenth-century lawyer, philosopher and judge, was born in 1714, the son of George Burnett and Elizabeth Forbes, sister of the laird of Craigievar. A descendant of the eleventh lair of Leys, he studied law in the Netherlands and at the University of Edinburgh before being admitted to the Faculty of Advocates in 1737. He came to prominence as one of the counsel in the famous peerage case, 'the Douglas Cause'. He became a sheriff in 1764 and a Supreme Court judge, with the title 'Lord Monboddo', three years later. He was an intellectual with varied interests including the origins of man; he was ridiculed for his belief that man was related to apes and originally had tails. He also, however, believed in mermaids and satyrs. The poet Robert Burns was a frequent guest of Monboddo at his house in Edinburgh. He died in 1799 at the age of 85.

Charles Burnett, a prominent museum curator, is Ross Herald at the Court of the Lord Lyon.

Taken from *Scottish Clan & Family Encyclopedia*, by Collins, HarperCollins Publishers 1994

This Clan information sheet has been prepared by
The Scottish Society of Louisville
PO Box 32248
Louisville, KY 40232-2248

www.scotsoflou.com

