Clan BETHUNE

ARMS   Quarterly, 1st & 4th, Azure, a fess between three mascles Or (Bethune); 2nd & 3rd, Argent, on a chevron Sable, an otter's head erased of the First

CREST   An otter's head erased Argent

MOTTO   De bonnaire (Gracious)

A name principally believed to derive from the French town of the same name, lying in the department of Pas de Calais. There is also a quite separate Highland derivation as an anglicized form of the Gaelic, 'Macbeheatha'. This means 'son of life', and the family were renowned physicians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. According to tradition, Macbheatha came to Scotland from Ireland in the thirteenth century as part of the retinue of Margaret, wife of Angus, the Lord of the Isles. Macbeths or Beatons were found as physicians throughout the Western Isles. Their influence and skills were lost in the upheaval brought to the Highlands and Islands in the wake of the overthrow of the Stuart monarch in 1688. The first de Bethunes are believed to have come to England in 1066 with William the Conqueror. The Bethunes accompanied Richard the Lion Heart, King of England, on his crusade to the Holy Land, and one is said to have been held prisoner with the king when he was held to ransom by the Duke of Austria. The first record of the name in Scotland appears around 1165, when Robert de Betunia was a witness to a charter of lands near Tranent in East Lothian. The principal possessions of the family appear to have been in Fife and Angus. Sir Robert de Bethune rendered homage to Edward I of England and in the Ragman Roll it states that the seal of Robert de Bethune was 'a fesse and on a chief a file of three pendants'. This is very similar to the arms used in more modern times. The Bethunes, despite having adopted the political expedient of appearing to support the English cause, soon became faithful supporters of Robert the Bruce. Alexander de Bethune was knighted by the king for his bravery in battle. He was killed at the Battle of Dupplin Moor in August 1332. Robert de Bethune married the heiress of Sir John Balfour of that Ilk, and their son succeeded to the extensive Balfour estates, thereafter being designed 'Bethune of Balfour'. Sir David Bethune, second son of Sir John Bethune of Balfour, acquired the lands of Creich in Fife during the reign of James IV. He had been a boyhood friend of the king and remained a court favorite. He was appointed Lord High Treasurer of Scotland. His daughter, Janet, was to become the wife of James Hamilton, Earl of Arran and a nephew of James III. Janet's son rose to be Regent of the kingdom and Duke of Chatelherault in France. From the family of Bethune of Balfour, many names famous in Scottish history were to descend, including James Bethune, Archbishop of St Andrews and Chancellor of Scotland, and his even more illustrious nephew, Cardinal Bethune or Beaton. David Bethune, the last cardinal and primate of Scotland before the Reformation, was born at Balfour in 1494. He studied at the University of St Andrews and later at Paris, where he became an expert in canon and civil law. He entered the priesthood and when, in 1523, his uncle became Archbishop of St Andrews, he was appointed Abbot of Arbroath. He was a man of great industry, zeal and influence, and in 1538 he received the red hat of a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church. He was determined to stamp out the growing threat of Protestantism, and embarked upon a campaign of persecution. Protestant heretics were condemned to death, including the celebrated George Wishart, the most renowned preacher of his time. The martyrdom of Wishart was to prove a fatal mistake for the cardinal. On 29 May 1546, William Kirkcalky of Grange, James Melville of Raith and several others seized the cardinal in his castle of St Andrews and killed him. The body of the murdered cleric was hung from the castle battlements. Robert Bethune, a younger son of the Liard of Creich, accompanied the young Mary, Queen of Scots to France on her marriage to the heir to the French throne. On the queen's return to Scotland in 1561 he was appointed a Master of the Royal household and keeper of the Royal Palace at Falkland. His eldest daughter, Mary Bethune, has passed into history as one of the famous 'four Maries', the queen's ladies-in-waiting. The family contracted many spectacular alliances by marriage into other noble houses, including the Earls of Rothes, Glencairn, Lindsay and Wemyss. The Earls of Lindsay still hold lands in Fife, and bear the name and arms of Bethune, placing them in precedence to their equally ancient Lindsay ancestry.

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