



CLAN ELPHINSTONE

ARMS

Quarterly, Argent, a chevron Sable, between three boars' heads erased Gules

CREST

A lady, from the waist upwards, richly habited in red, her arms extended, the right hand supporting a tower and the left holding a branch of laurel, all Proper

MOTTO

Cause cauit (Caue caused it)

SUPPORTERS

Two savages wreathed about the head and middle with laurel, holding on their exterior shoulders clubs, all Proper

The lands of Airth lie close to the barony of Plean in Stirlingshire. The family which took their name from this land, and probably erected the first castle at Plean, were known as 'de Erth'. The de Erths ended in an heiress, and the lands which were acquired by her husband near Tranent in East Lothian were probably names in memory of her family. The name first appears in East Lothian in a deed of about 1235 by Alanus de Swinton, where mention is made of the 'de Elfinstun'. De Swinton's son, John, is probably the same John who acquired the lands, to become John de Elfinstun. However, according to one tradition, the family claimed descent from Flemish knights called Helpenstein. Yet another version of the family history suggests that the name derives from 'Alpin's tun' – the farmstead of Alpin.

Sir John de Elfinstun married Margaret of Seton, the niece of Robert the Bruce. A descendent, William Elfinstun, became rector of Kirkmichael at the age of twenty-five. He studied Civil and Canon Law in Paris, eventually becoming Professor of Law in that university. In 1484 he was appointed Bishop of Aberdeen and later Lord High Chancellor of Scotland, a post he held until the death of James III in June 1489. In 1494 he obtained from Pope Alexander VI a bull for the founding of a university in Aberdeen. King's College was built in 1500. Besides building and designing a university, he left a large sum to erect and maintain a bridge across the River Dee at Aberdeen. After the death of James IV at Flodden, the bishop quit his see and left for Edinburgh to assist in restoring peace to his ruined country. He died soon after his arrival in the capital in October 1514. He left his compilations on Cannon Law and other writings which can be found in the College in Aberdeen. A cousin of the bishop, Sir Alexander Elphinstone, was created Lord Elphinstone by James IV and fell with his king on Flodden Field. It is said that he bore a striking resemblance to the king, and was at first mistaken for him during the battle. His son, Alexander, the second Lord, was killed at the Battle of Pinkie in 1547. The fourth Lord Elphinstone was appointed in 1599 a judge of the Supreme Court of Scotland and later Lord High Treasurer.

A cadet branch of the family were made peers with the title Lord Balmerino. They were staunch Jacobites and the 6th Earl was taken prisoner after Culloden. He was beheaded in August 1746 displaying such courage that many onlookers were moved to tears.

The eleventh Lord Elphinstone was lieutenant Governor of Edinburgh Castle. One of his younger brothers, George Keith Elphinstone, was a distinguished naval commander. He served with great distinction on the American station, the squadron of ships which served to protect British shipping interests off the eastern coast of America. In 1795 he was made vice admiral and commanded the fleet which captured the Cape of Good Hope and compelled the Dutch fleet to surrender without firing a gun. His reward was an Irish barony. He was later promoted to the rank of admiral, and created Baron Keith of Banheath, only to be advanced once more, to the rank of Viscount in 1814. William George Keith Elphinstone, the viscount's nephew, was a colonel at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. In 1837 he was promoted to major general and was commander-in-chief of the Bengal army, where he led the disastrous Afghan campaign of 1841. He was to face a court martial, but the efforts of long service and the Indian climate spared him this indignity, and he died before proceeding could be commenced. John, the thirteenth Lord, was Governor of Madras and a lord-in-waiting to Queen Victoria.

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