

The Public Register of the Arms and Bearings in Scotland

By Liam Devlin

Unicorn Pursuivant

The Lyon Register, properly the Public Record of Arms and Armorial Bearings of Scotland, celebrates its 350th anniversary in 2022, having been set up by Act of Parliament in 1672.

It consists of a series of nearly 100 heavy, bound volumes of vellum. When a coat of arms is recorded or matriculated, a vellum certificate engrossed by a court artist is given to the armiger and the details copied into a volume of the Register. As the Register is only a public record, it might be thought that a scrawled entry in a paper record-book would suffice, as it does for Births, Marriages and Deaths. In fact, for most of the history of the Register, the entries have been carried out to the same high standard of calligraphy and artistry as the Letters Patent/Extracts of Matriculation sent out to armigers for public display: the result is that the Lyon Register constitutes an unique collection of historical and artistic documents and an integral part of the patrimony of Scotland.

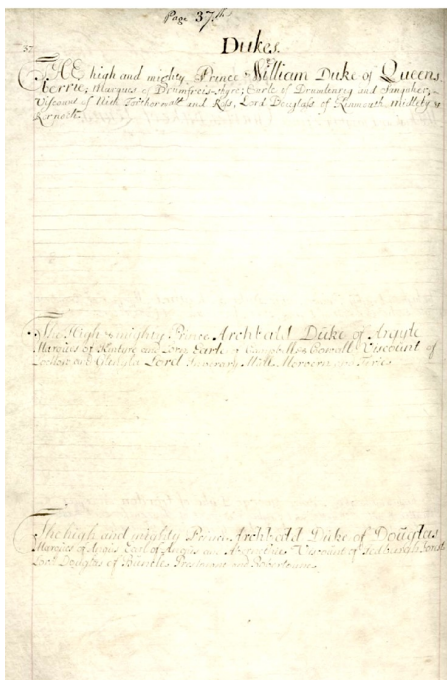


Currently the volumes of the Register are stored vertically in the Public Office in wooden cabinets. A key part of the proposed refurbishment of the Lyon Office is to update the storage in line with expert advice to ensure as far as is possible the protection of this unique collection of Scottish historical documents from water-damage and the possibilities of damage by excessive handling. The solution will involve the installation of archival-quality drawers to enable the volumes to be stored horizontally in a safer setting.

A quick sum will suggest that 100 volumes in 348 years works out as an average of nearly three and a half volumes per year. This would be highly misleading.

VOLUME ONE

Volume One of the Register actually covers the period from 1672 until the beginning of the 19th century - well over a third of the period in question. When the first Volume was created, spaces were marked out to record the arms of some of the great nobles who were expected to record as required by the Act. However, for a variety of reasons, many nobles never got around to recording their arms, which had often been used for centuries, so there are many spaces in Volume One and yet it still lasted over 130 years.



Here, for example is folio 37, prepared for three sumptuous blazons – for the “High and mighty princes” the Dukes of Queensberrie, the Duke of Argyle, and the Duke of Douglas but sadly none of these three Graces saw fit at that point to record his arms. So all we can see is some of the writing on the next page showing through.

The same holds true of several other members of the Peerage, for whom space was left; the section devoted to “Gentlemen” is laid out alphabetically with plenty of room for additions.

Volume One begins by setting down the image and blazon of the seal by which documents issued by the Lord Lyon will be validated—this continues to be the seal of the Lord Lyon to the present day.



The blazon indicates that the arms shown on the seal can be impaled with the “paternal arms” of the Lyon of the day so the next folio provides an image and then blazon for the arms of the current Lord Lyon, Sir Charles Erskine of Cambo.



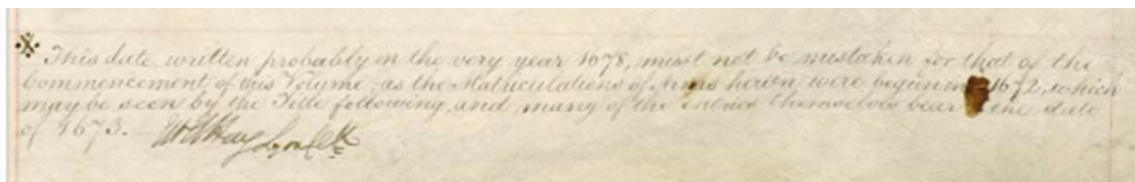
Blazon of the paternal Achievement belonging to the Lyon King of Armes.

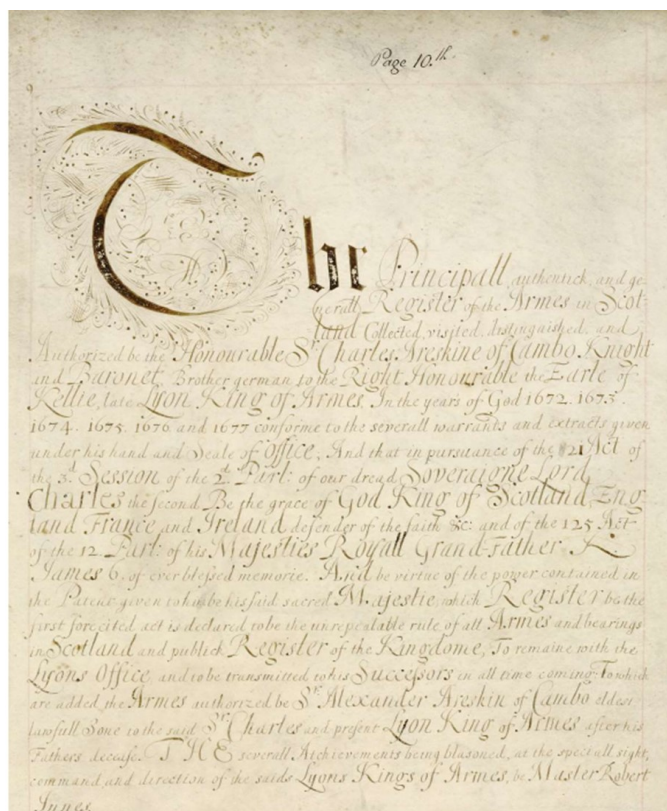
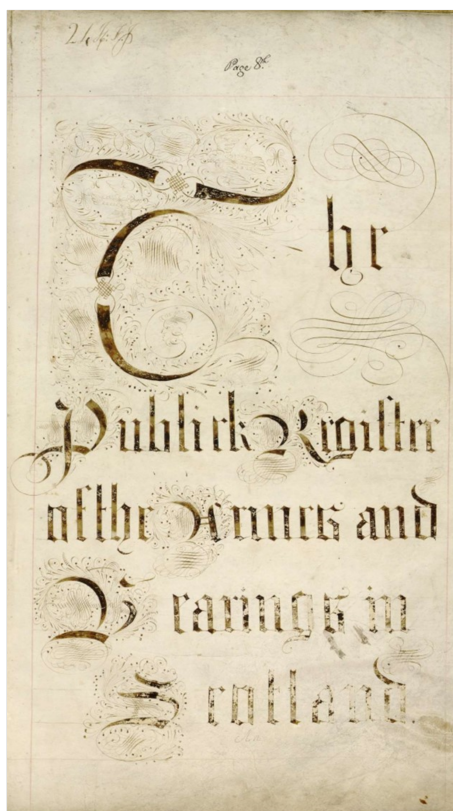
The Honourable Sr. Charles Areskine of Cambo, Knight and Baronet Lyon King of Armes for his Achievement gives two Coates quarterly first Gules ane Imperiall Crown within a double tressure counterflowered or, second argent a pale sable thirds as the second fourth as the first and as a difference from the Earl of Kellie (whose brother german he is) a crescent argent in the coeur point. On ane helmet befitting his quality with a mantle gules doubled argent, on a torse of his colours is set for his crest a garb or banded azure lying on its side and thereon a cock standing in a crowing posture proper, supported by two sportsmen vested proper he on the dexter holding a bended bow and arrow, he on the sinister a golf-club, both standing on ane compartment placed underneath and for his motto in ane escrol "Excutit inde canit".

(The full achievement is not illustrated)



The page which follows gives the date 1678 but there is a footnote, signed by Lyon Clerk Hay, listed in Charles Burnett’s invaluable book “Officers of Arms in Scotland 1290-2016” as holding his office from 1823-1845, to the effect that this is not to be taken as the date of the start of the Register as many of the recordings are dated 1673.





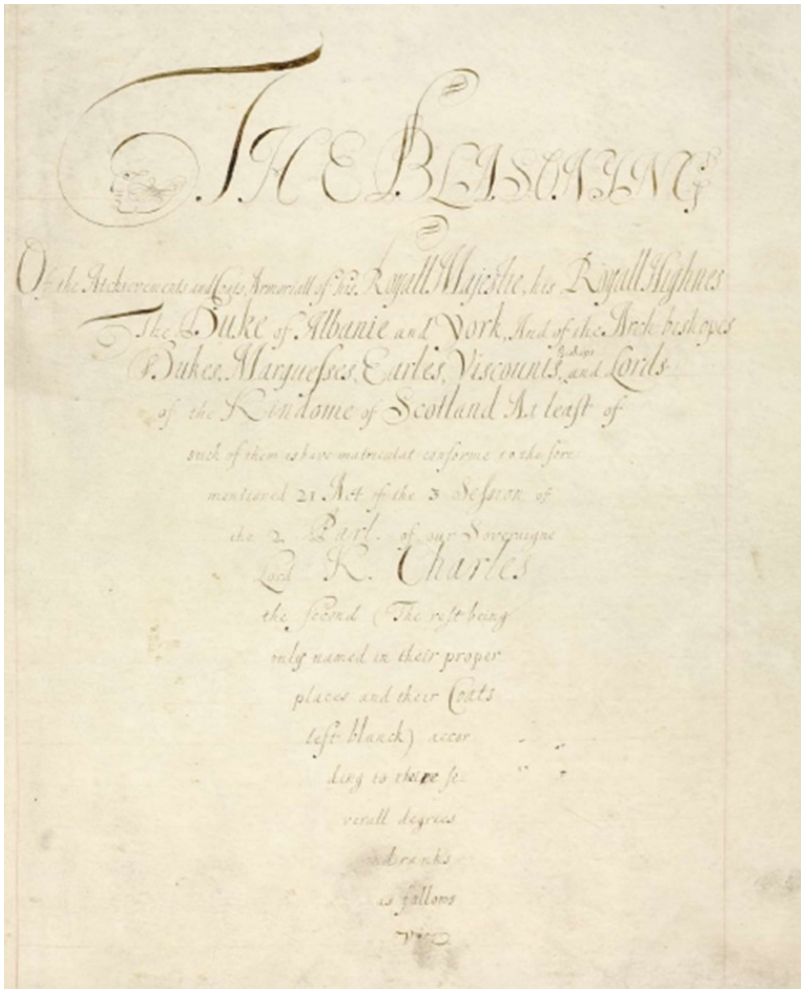
The title page is next, followed by a description of the contents:

The Principall authentick and generall Register of the Armes in Scotland Collected, visited, distinguished and Authorized by the Honourable Sir Charles Arskine of Cambo, Knight and Baronet, Brother german to the Right Honourable the Earle of Kellie, late Lyon King of Armes. In the years of God 1672, 1675 (sic), 1674, 1675, 1675 and 1677 conforme to the severall warrants and extracts given under his hand and seale of Office.

And that in pursuance of the 21 Act of the the 3rd Session of the 2nd Part. (parliament) of our dread Sovereigne Lord, Charles the Second By the grace of God King of Scotland, England, France and Ireland defender of the faith & c. and of the 125 Act of the 12th Part. (Parliament) of his Majestie's Royall Grand-Father King James 6 of ever blessed memorie. And by virtue of the power contained in the Patent given to him by his said Sacred Majestie which Register by the first fore-cited Act is declared to be the unrepealable rule of all Armes and bearings in Scotland and publick Register of the Kingdome. To remain with the Lyon's Office and to be transmitted to his Successors in all time coming. To which are added the Armes authorised by Sir Alexander Arskin of Cambo eldest lawful Sone to the said Sir Charles and present Lyon King of armes after his father's decease. The severall Achievements being blasoned at the speciall sight, command and direction of the saids Lyons Kings of Armes by Master Robert Innes.

Sir Alexander Erskine held the office of Lord Lyon jointly with his father at this time; Robert Innes of Blairton held the now-defunct office of Lyon Depute.

The volume is then laid out in an orderly manner beginning with the King, Charles II, and the royal family, followed by sections for Dukes, Marquesses, Earls, Viscounts, Barons, Archbishops, Bishops, Gentlemen and one or two other categories like royal burghs and incorporations.



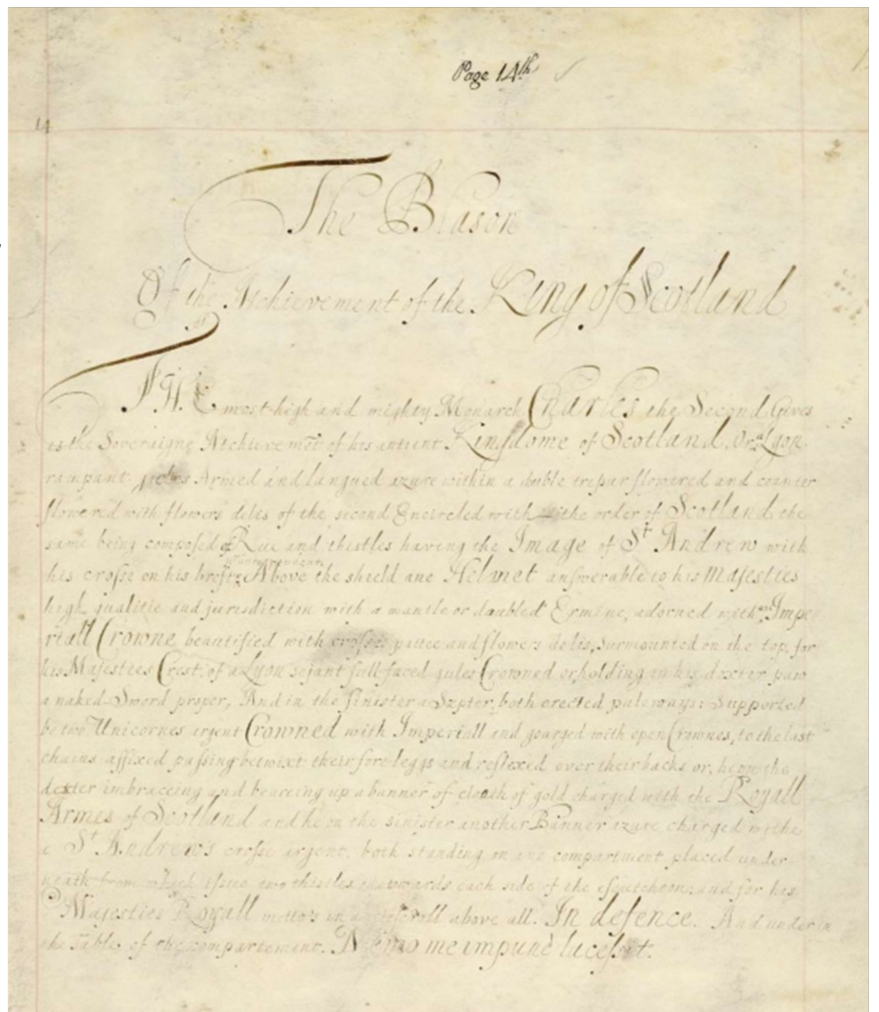
The blazoning of the Achievements and Coats Armorial of his Royall Majestie, his Royall Highnes The Duke of Albanie and York, and of the Archbishopes, Dukes, Marquesses, Earles, Viscounts, Bishops and Lords of the Kingdome of Scotland, at least of such of them as have matriculated conforme to the fore-mentioned 21. Act of the 3 Session of the 2 Part. ouf our Sovereigne Lord K. Charles the Second. The rest being only named in their proper places and their coats left blanck) according to there severall degrees and ranks as follows:

The blason of the Achievement of the King of Scotland.

The most high and mighty Monarch Charles the Second gives as the Sovereigne Achievement of his antient Kingdome of Scotland, Or a Lyon rampant gules Armed and langued azure within a double tressure flowered and counter-flowered with flowers delis of the second encircled with the order of Scotland the same being composed of rue and thistles having the image of St Andrew with his cross on his breste (something "pendent" has been added). Above the shield ane Helmet answerable to his Majesties high quality and jurisdiction with a mantle or doubled ermine, adorned with ane Imperiall crowne beautified with crosses pattee and flowers delis, surmounted on top for his Majesties Crest of a Lyon sejant full-faced gules Crowned or,

holding in his dexter paw a naked sword proper and in the sinister a Scepter, both erected paleways; supported by two Unicorns argent Crowned with Imperiall and goarged with open Crownes, to the last chains affixed passing betwixt their forelegs and reflexed over their backs Or, he on the dexter imbracing and bearing up a banner of cloath of gold charged with the Royall Armes of Scotland and he on the sinister another banner azure charged with a St Andrew's Cross argent, both standing on ane compartment placed underneath from which issue two thistles towards each side of the escutcheon and for his Majesties Royall mottos, in an escroll bove all In Defens and under in the table of the compartment Nemo Me Impune Lacessit.

Even the King did not qualify for a picture in Volume One and, as Alice said: *What is the use of a book without pictures?* So here are HM's Scottish arms:



Having established the arms of the King of Scots, the Volume proceeds to define the arms of Charles II as King of Great Britain (sic), Ireland and France. The shield is the same as that used by his grandfather, James VI.

The Blazon
Of the Achievement of His Majesty of Great Britain

The most high and mightie Monarch Charles the Second Be the grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland defender of the faith &c. for his Majestyes achievement and Sovereigne conquests armoriall Beares these most Royall Coats quarterlie quartered &c. First Or a Lyon rampant within a double trefour counter-flour-de-lis gules armed and langued azur As the Royall armes of Scotland. Second quartered first and last azur three fleurs-de-lis Or as the Royall armes of France. Second and third gules three Lyons passant guardant in pale or for the Royall ensignes of England, third azur an Irish harp or stringed argente for the ensigne of his Majestyes Kingdome of Ireland, fourth and last in all points as the first. All within the orders of S^t Andrew and of the Garter. Above the same an Helmet as before with this Majestyes Sovereigne Iuris-diction and there on a Mantle of cloath of gold doubled ermine, Adorned with ane Imperiall Crowne surmounted on the top for his Majestyes Crowne, of a Lyon sejant full faced gules crowned or, holding in his dexter paw a naked sword and in the sinister a Scepter both erect. Supported on the dexter be ane Unicorn argent crowned with ane Imperiall and charged with ane open Crown to the chaine affixed passing betwix his fore-leggs and reflexed over his back or, and on the sinister, be a Lyon rampant guardant or crowned also with ane Imperiall Crowne as the other. The first embracing and bearing up a Banner azur charged with S^t Andrews crose argent, and the last ane other Banner argent charged with a crose (called of S^t George) gules both standing on one rich compartment placed underneath from the middle whereof issue a thistle and Rose as the two Royall badges of Scotland and England. And for his Majestyes Royall motto In ane scroll above all. In defence for Scotland, and in the Table of the compartment, Dieu et mon droit, for England, France, and Ireland.



1. Scotland.
2. France.
3. England.
4. Ireland.

This is followed by a description of the royal emblems of the four kingdoms—Thistle (Scotland), Rose (England), “Flower de lis” (France) and harp (for Ireland) as well as the flags of Scotland and England as today.

S^t Andrews

1. A thistle of gold, crowned.
2. The white crose of S^t Andrew on a blue field.

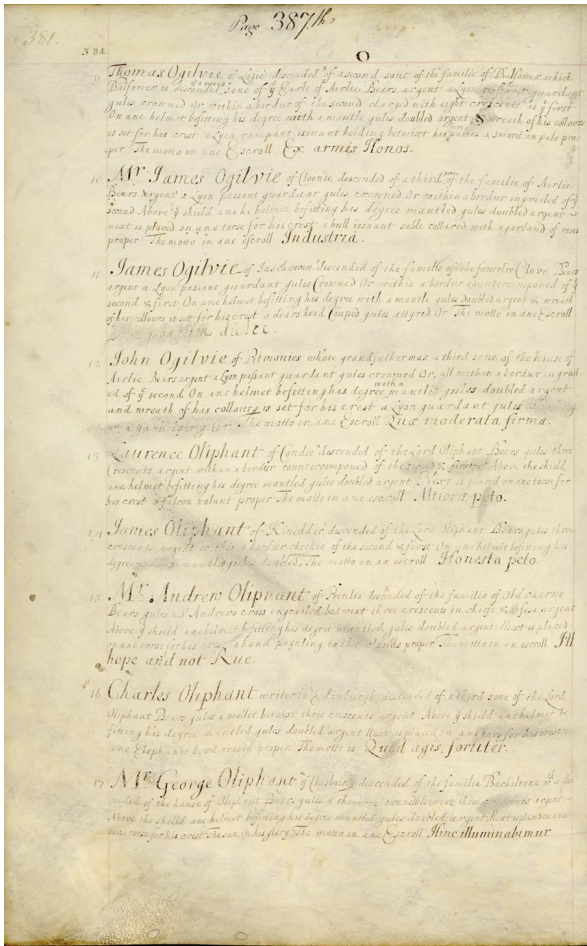
The description of the collar, and of the chain, badge, and badge belonging to the Honourable and ancient Episcopall order of the Thistle (or S^t Andrew) in Scotland. Which order is instituted by Achaius King of Scotland, and of which his Successors Kings of Scotland are Sovereignes. The number of the Knights being Thirteen including the Sovereigne, In addition to our Sovereigne and his immediate Heires.

1. The collar of the order is composed of Thistles interwoven and linked with spires of gold of fine all of gold. Having thereon pendant on a blue roundle the Image of S^t Andrew with his vesture of cloth of gold with the white crose of his martyrdom on his breast and underneath expressing the figure beautified with pearls this gypographic writes Nemo me impune lacessit.
2. The ordinary and common ensigne borne by the Knights of the order was a green ribbon interwoven with a thistle of gold crowned with ane Imperiall Crowne within a circle also of gold bearing the famous motto Nemo me impune lacessit, &c. &c.

Upon the feast of S^t Andrew yearly being the Twelfth day of November with the Knights wear habitually in the Cathedral Church of the Towne of S^t Andrew for celebrating the Feast. They were during the solemnitie richly and wore their Parliament Robes having fixed on their left shoulder ane azur roundle on which was embroyded S^t Andrews crose argent environed in the center with a Crowne beautified with flowers de-lis or.

A page follows which describes the insignia, and annual Service in St Andrews, of the Order of the Thistle and was presumably added after the “revival” of that Order by James VII in 1687.



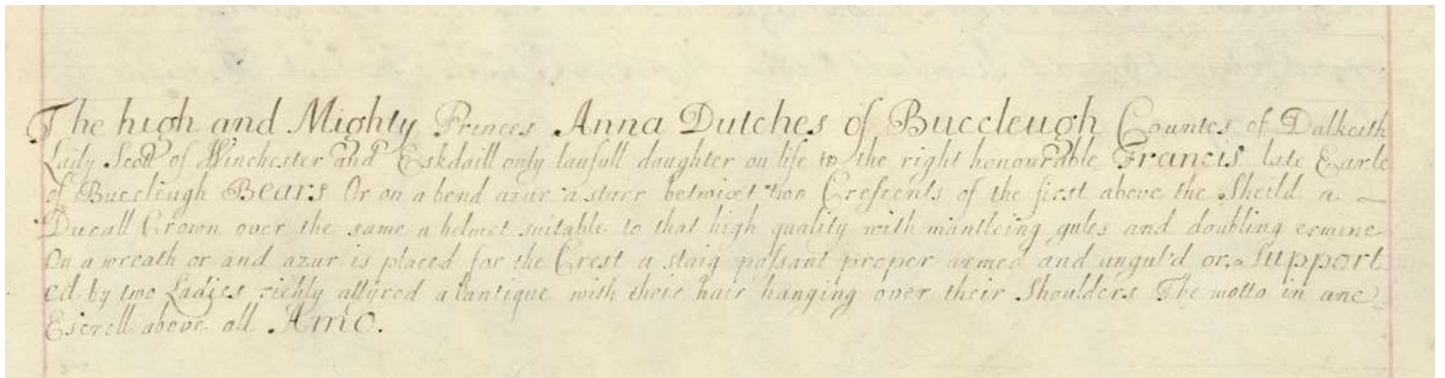


It will be remembered that the Register's prime purpose is the legal recording of coats of arms: a coat of arms in this connection means not so much a picture but a *blazon* or legal description of a picture. Volume One has almost no pictures - emblazments - merely *blazons*. This enabled huge numbers of arms to be recorded in a fairly short space - some pages have ten or more coats of arms recorded on them, a number greatly reduced from Volume Two onwards when it became the norm to illustrate the arms.

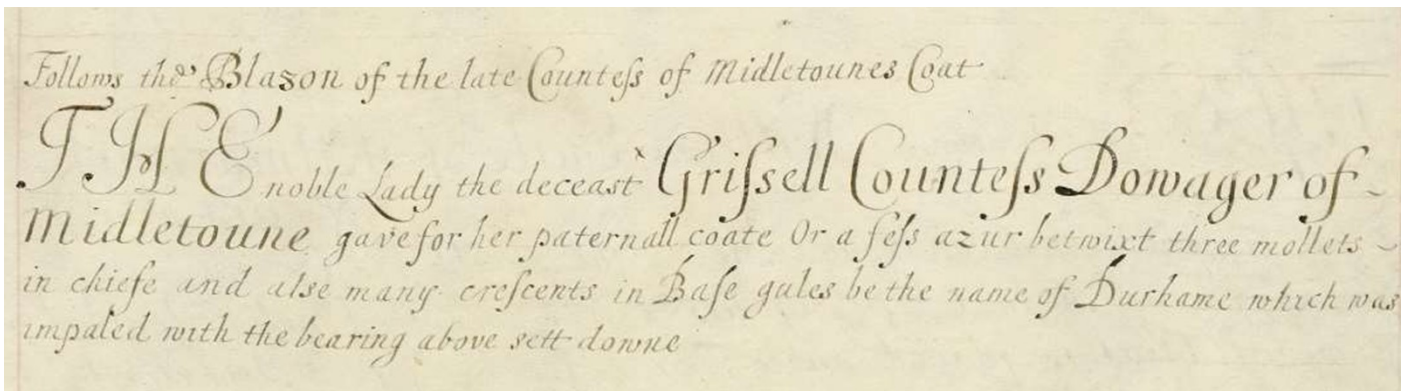
On the left you can see a sample page from the "O" section of the "Gentleman" division.

On folio 34, we encounter the first woman in the Register, the "High and Mighty Princes(s) Anna Dutches of Buccleugh":

The title **Duke of Buccleuch** was created twice: first in 1662 for James Scott, 1st Duke of Monmouth and natural son of Charles II. He was attainted after the rebellion of 1685 but the title of his wife, **Anne Scott, 4th Countess of Buccleuch** was unaffected and she became the first Duchess of Buccleuch in the second creation. This means that Duchess Anne is the very first woman to have arms in the Register and, be it noted, has them with shield, "ducall crown", helm and crest, as well as supporters.



On folio 68 we encounter our second lady, whose arms were recorded posthumously: Grizel Durham, Countess of Middleton, sister of a Lord Lyon and ancestress of HM the Queen



There are, of course, other women recorded in Volume One so not only were women permitted arms, contrary to myth they were allowed them on a shield and with a crest.

Volume One then, while not merely a dull and dusty tome, does not have many illustrations, apart from some added by later artists. This situation was remedied, as we shall see, from Volume Two onwards.