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Scottish heraldic gifts and exchanges since 1502

ELIZABETH A. ROADS¹

In January 1502 the contract of marriage between King James IV of Scotland and the 12 year old Princess Margaret of England, daughter of King Henry VII was concluded and the marriage took place in the Abbey at the Palace of Holyroodhouse on 8 August 1503. This was an alliance of enormous significance both politically and eventually dynastically. In 1603 Queen Elizabeth of England died and was succeeded by her nearest heir King James VI of Scotland, great grandchild of the Marriage of the Thistle and the Rose which had taken place 100 years earlier.

A sumptuous Book of Hours² was presented to Margaret Tudor and it would appear most likely that it was a gift on marriage from her husband rather than from her father. James IV is recorded in the various accounts as having spent a considerable sum on the wedding.³ One folio has an appended inscription⁴ in the handwriting of Queen Margaret:

*Madame I pray your grace
Remember on me when ye
Loke upon thys boke
Your lofing systyr
Margaret*

From this note it is clear that the book must later have been a gift from Margaret to her only surviving sister Mary, who in 1514 married King Louis XII of France. As King James IV was killed at the Battle of Flodden in September 1513 it is nice to think, although there is no evidence to support the theory, that the gift on marriage which Margaret received became, after her widowhood, a gift on marriage to her sister.

The following history of the book is unclear although it is likely that it was in England at least during the 1530s after Mary's death

¹ Snawdoun Herald of Arms.

² Öst. Nationalbibliothek Wien, Cod. 1897.

³ Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, 11 and The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, XII.

⁴ Book of Hours of King James IV and Margaret Tudor, folio 188.

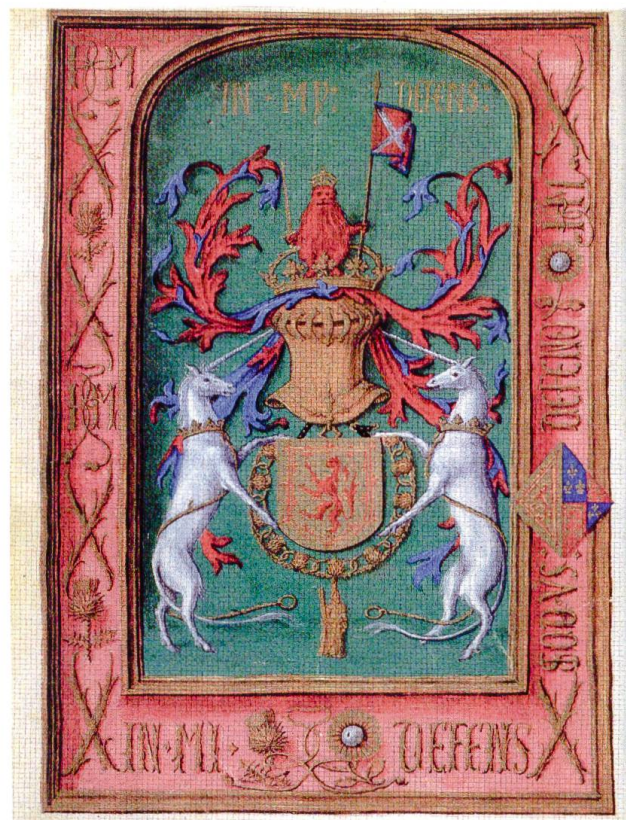


Fig. 1: Vienna Book of Hours.

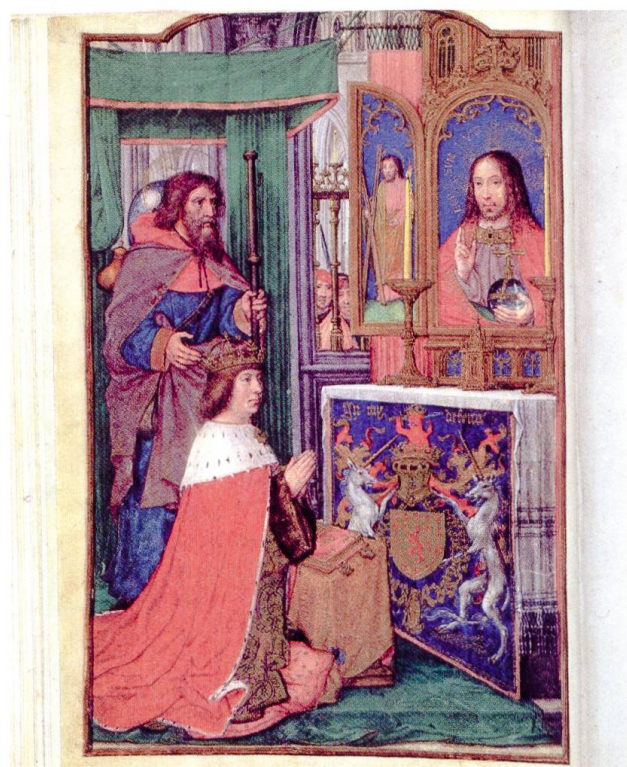


Fig. 2: King James IV at prayer.

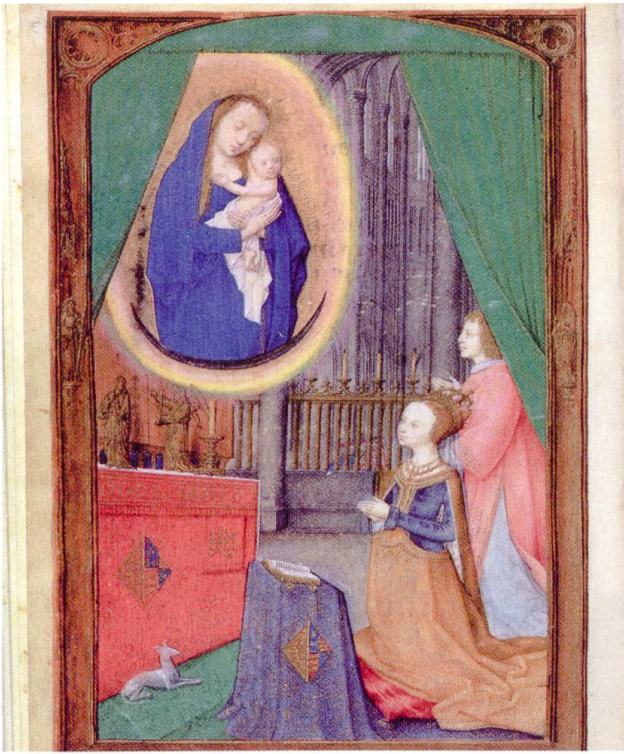


Fig. 3: Queen Margaret at prayer.



Fig. 5: Vaulted ceiling of Thistle Chapel.

in 1533. Her second husband was Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk who survived her. What happened to it for the next century is unknown but it next surfaces in the library of the bibliophile Leopold, Archduke of Austria who became Emperor in 1658 and eventually



Fig. 4: Entrance to Thistle Chapel.



Fig. 6: Thistle Chapel stone windows.

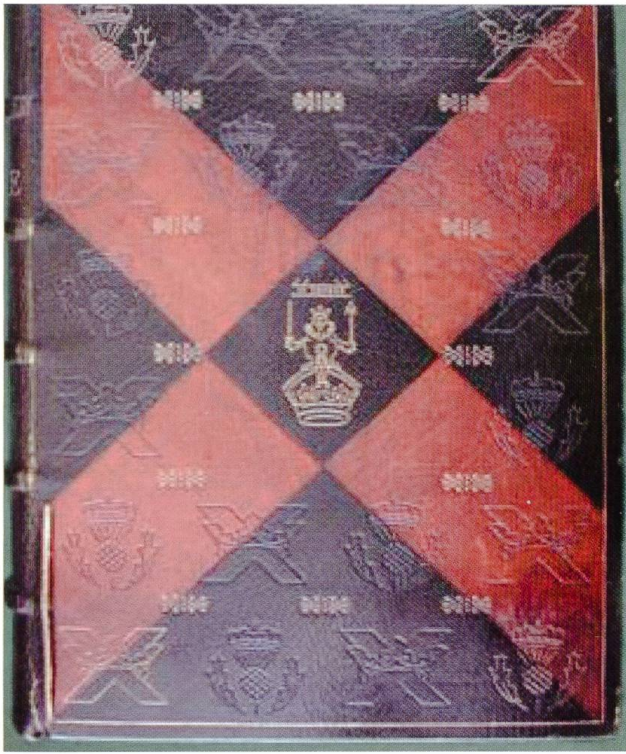


Fig. 7: Thistle Bible.



Fig. 9: Earl of Strathmore.

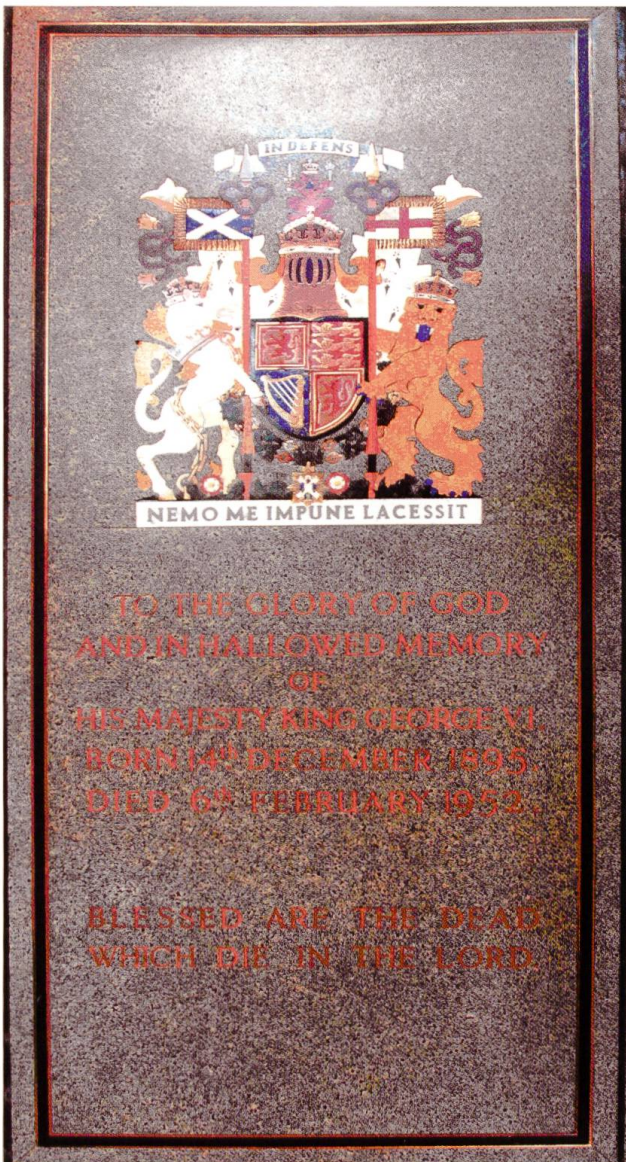


Fig. 8: Memorial to King George VI.

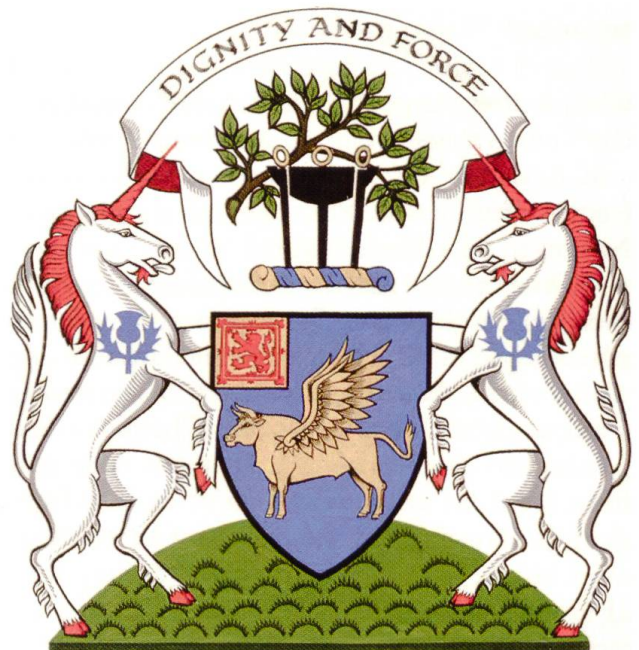


Fig. 10: Royal Scottish Academy.

it passed into the Imperial Library of Vienna where it remains today.

It is, however, the inclusion of three paintings in this splendid illuminated manuscript which makes it of interest to heraldists. The work was carried out by Flemish artists, most probably Gerard Horenbout of Ghent and Simon, son of the famous Alexander Bening who may have been of Scots origin.⁵ He certainly had Scottish connections not only with Hugo van der Goes

⁵ Leslie Macfarlane 'The Book of Hours of James IV and Margaret Tudor', Innes Review Vol. II (1960), pp1819.

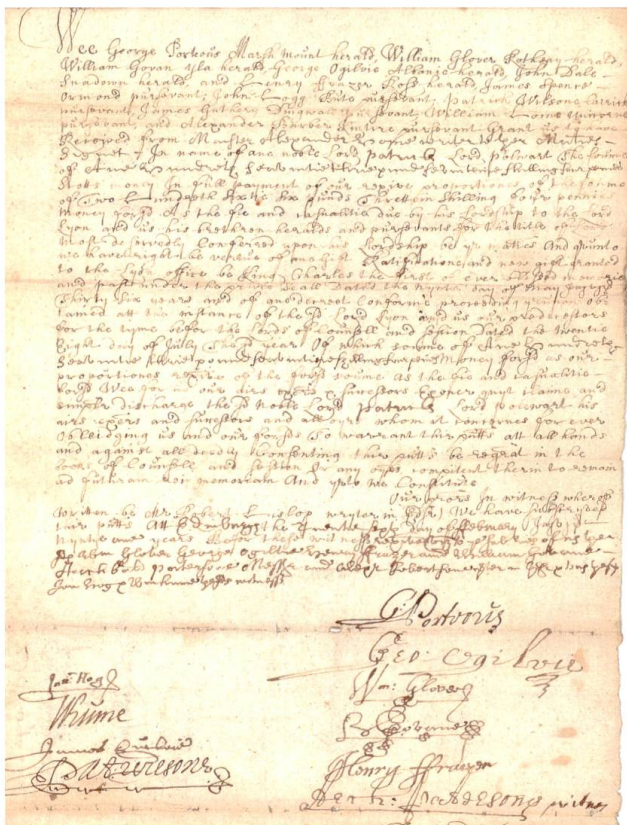


Fig. 11: 1691 Deed of Gift.

who painted a triptych of which the paintings in the Vienna Books of Hours are reminiscent, but also as his son in law was Andrew Halyburton, Conservator of the Privileges of the Scottish Nation in The Netherlands.⁶

While there are in fact four paintings showing heraldry it is the frontispiece and two portrait pieces which are especial interest and which show that the artist had an extremely good understanding of Scottish heraldry and symbolism. It may be that sketches were sent from Scotland to the Low Countries. The frontispiece shows the Royal Arms of Scotland as used in the late 15th early 16th century (Fig. 1) and is not dissimilar in style to the contemporary Royal Arms as carved on a wooden panel commemorating Cardinal David Beaton (c. 1495–1546) and as painted in the 1542 Armorial of Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount although the Royal Arms in the latter are thought to have been painted rather later than the majority of the other shields. The large panel showing the Royal Arms is surrounded by a border showing thistles and marguerites intertwined with the initials of the royal couple and the long form of the motto «In my defens God us defend» now shortened to «In Defens». The other two paintings are companion pieces

⁶ Rev. D MacRoberts 'Notes on Scots-Flemish Artistic Contacts', Innes Review Vol X (1959) p.92.



Fig. 12: Tabards.



Fig. 13: Lyon's Collar of Thistles.

in a form highly suitable for a book of hours as they show the king and, separately, the queen, at prayer both apparently before small private altars emblazoned with their Arms, in the case of the queen the Arms being impaled versions of the Royal Arms respectively of Scotland and England (Figs. 2 and 3).⁷

It will be noticed that in the panel showing the Royal Arms and in the portrait painting of James IV the Arms are surrounded by a collar of thistles. It has been held by many writers that notwithstanding depictions of a collar of thistles on arms prior to 1687 no Order actually existed until King James VII promulgated Statutes in that year.⁸ It does seem, however, that there are other adminicles of evidence, not just pictorial, which would suggest that an order, not entirely restricted to being used as a

⁷ Figures 1, 2 and 3 by kind permission of Adakemische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, Austria from the facsimile of the Book of Hours of King James IV and Queen Margaret Tudor.

⁸ Most recently Peter Galloway in a scholarly work «The Order of the Thistle», Spink 2009.



Fig. 14: Lyon Mace.

gift to foreign sovereigns, existed from at least the late 15th century.⁹

The Most Noble and Most Ancient Order of the Thistle is a small chivalric order and knight-hood with a maximum of 16 Knights Brethren and is within the personal gift of the sovereign with no political recommendation. It was extended to include ladies in 1987 and to date there has been only one non-Royal lady admitted to the Order. It is a means by which the Crown can recognise significant and outstanding service to Scotland in any field. Members of the Order have included Prime Ministers,

⁹ Lyon Office MS 66. Genealogy of the Earls of Caithness.



Fig. 15: Lyon Mace. Arms of donor.

principals of universities, governors of overseas dependencies, the most senior judges and those with dedicated public, military or medical service. The Order was re-established with Statutes in 1687 when it was determined that the Chapel Royal at the Palace of Holyroodhouse would be the spiritual home for the Knights. Sadly the Chapel, recently renovated for the first Knights, was badly burnt by a mob in December 1688 and the Order became homeless. It remained thus for over 220 years although plans had been drawn up to restore the Chapel Royal during the 19th century. In 1905 the Earl of Leven and Melville was created a Knight of the Thistle and soon after discussed setting up a trust fund to pay for the restoration of the Chapel at the Palace of Holyroodhouse. It transpired that the walls of the Chapel Royal would not support a new roof and soon after Lord Leven died.

His sons, however, decided to implement their father's wish and made a sum available to provide for a new Chapel to be built as an addition to St. Giles' Cathedral in the High Street of Edinburgh (Fig. 4). The Chapel is a tiny gem showcasing the outstanding talents of a number of Scottish artists and artisans working at the beginning of the 20th century in the Scottish Arts and Crafts movement. The heraldic theme was chosen to commemorate the Knights created by King James VII and Queen Anne and the Knights of 1910. The Chapel is festooned with heraldry with stone heraldic windows, stained glass, carved wooden shields and stalls with enamelled plates showing the Arms of all the Knights since 1910 with soaring above them helmets, mantling and coronets bearing the crests of the current knights. The vaulted ceiling shows the Arms of the original 1687 and 1707 Knights (Fig. 5) while the 1910



Fig. 16: Sir Iain Moncreiffe of that Ilk bronze.

Knights' shields appear in carved stone and stained glass as false and real windows of the Chapel (Fig. 6). As the Chapel is very small, 36 feet by 18 feet, but 42 feet high it conveys the impression of a miniature mediaeval cathedral and it a unique and glorious gift with heraldry as the decoration.

Many smaller gifts have been made to the Chapel and there are two closely connected to

the sovereign. In 1947, to commemorate the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip, King George VI presented the Order with a Bible (Fig. 7) which is used at all services of the Order and in 1962 The Queen unveiled a memorial to her father with the Royal Arms executed in marbles from all over Europe including Iona (Fig. 8).¹⁰

Physical heraldic gifts from the sovereign are not the only way in which royal recognition has been given to individuals or organisations who occupy a very significant place within the history of the nation. The king or queen can grant a warrant to the Lord Lyon ordering him to place an augmentation on the arms to show royal favour. In the case of people this has often taken the form of the addition of a tressure flory counter flory being a quotation from the Royal Arms. This addition appears twice in the Arms of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorn, once to commemorate the marriage in 1376 between Sir John Lyon, progenitor of the earls and Princess Johanna, daughter of King Robert II. The second occasion was much more recent and consisted of an inescutcheon granted by King George V to mark the marriage in 1923 between his second son the Duke of York to Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon, the future King George VI and Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother (Fig. 9).

¹⁰ Figures 3 to 8 by kind permission of the Chancery of the Order of the Thistle from 'The Thistle Chapel within St. Giles' Cathedral'.



Fig. 17: Wooden presentation plaques.

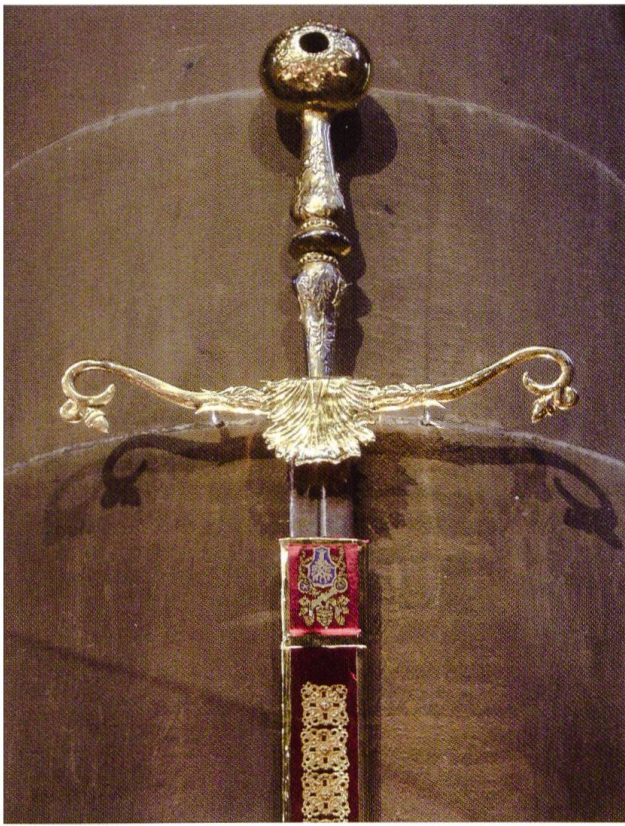


Fig. 18: Sword of State.

Another method of signifying royal approval is by granting a canton of the Royal Arms of Scotland as in the Arms of the Royal Scottish Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (Fig. 10).

The Lord Lyon and Officers of Arms were granted a significant gift or dispensation in the 1630s, ratified by the Parliament of Scotland in 1669¹¹, when they received Letters of Gift absolving them from paying taxes and at a similar period they became entitled to receive a monetary sum from each new peer created by the king (Fig. 11).¹² The sums were not insignificant and no doubt very welcome. The payment on the creation of peers and later of Knights of the Thistle ceased in 1867¹³ although in the early 20th century claims were made for exemption from local taxes sadly the claims were not allowed - but it is still possible for an Officer of Arms to obtain a passport without charge. Perhaps the most obvious heraldic present is that made when the Lord Lyon King of Arms on behalf of the sovereign makes a new Officer of Arms and allows the use of a tabard to be worn on ceremonial occasions (Fig. 12). The Lord Lyon himself was the recipient of a new

¹¹ Acts of the Parliament of Scotland, Vol VIII, 23 December 1669.

¹² 1691 Discharge on creation of Lord Polwarth.

¹³ Lyon King of Arms Act 1867 30 Vic. Cap 17.s.11.

Collar of Thistles in 1998, each link of thistle and rue having been donated by one of the many St. Andrew's Societies found all over the world from as far apart as Bangkok, Edinburgh and Sao Paulo, Winnipeg, Massachusetts and Queensland (Fig. 13).

The Royal Arms of Scotland and the quartered Royal Arms as used in Scotland appear on a magnificent silver mace gifted to the Lord Lyon in 1999 by the family of a long standing but by then deceased Macer to the Court of the Lord Lyon (Figs. 14 and 15). Designed by Yvonne Holton now Dingwall Pursuivant of Arms and Herald Painter, the mace shows in addition to the Royal Arms the Arms of the Lord Lyon and on the base the Arms of Thomas Campbell Gray, Lyon Macer in whose memory it was donated.

Lyon Office has at present the enjoyment, on long loan from his family, of a bronze statue of the late Sir Iain Moncreiffe of that Ilk dressed as Albany Herald, a unique piece of heraldic sculpture (Fig. 16).¹⁴

There are, however, numerous other heraldic gifts to be found bearing Scottish heraldry and these can commemorate significant events or important friendships. Heraldry adapts itself well to such pieces as engraved silver glass or painted china and to items indicative of ownership such as bookplates or mutual links denoted by the exchange of wooden plaques or heraldic visitors' books (Fig. 17).

Another early 16th century gift was the magnificent Sword of State presented to King James IV by Pope Julius II in 1507, the scabbard of which bears the Arms of the Pope, Azure an oak tree eradicated and fructed Or with above the shield the crossed keys and papal tiara.¹⁵ The sword is now very fragile and can no longer be carried but it was borne in front of the king at the opening of the Thistle Chapel in 1911 and later during Thistle Installation services in the 1970s and 1980s and is an integral part of the Scottish crown jewels, known as the Honours of Scotland (Fig. 18).

Heraldry will long have a place as a means of identifying donor and recipient whether the gift was made 500 years or more ago or in the last decade.

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¹⁴ Property of the Earl of Erroll.

¹⁵ Image: E. Roads.