

Coat of Arms of the City of Edinburgh Council

History

From the 14th century (possibly earlier), Edinburgh, like other royal burghs of Scotland, used armorial devices in many ways, including on seals.

In 1732, the 'achievement' or 'coat of arms' was formally granted by the Lord Lyon King of Arms. It was used by Edinburgh Town Council until the reorganisation of local government in Scotland in May 1975. The new City of Edinburgh District Council was granted a new coat of arms, based on the earlier one. In 1996, the City of Edinburgh Council was formed from another local government reorganisation and again the coat of arms was updated.



Official description

The coat of arms for the City of Edinburgh Council is based on the castle which has long been a symbol for Edinburgh. The castle rock has been fortified since Neolithic times.

The shield is blazoned as:

"Argent, a castle triple-towered and embattled Sable, masoned of the First and topped with three fans Gules, windows and portcullis shut of the Last, situate on a rock Proper."

In other words, the shield is silver or white, and the castle is black stonework with white joints. It must be shown with three towers each surmounted by a red flag and must have two or more windows and an entrance coloured red, with a portcullis shown lowered. It stands upon a rock of stony colours.

Above the shield is a coronet, appropriate to the statutory council of a city.

The crest probably derives from the office of Admiral of the Forth, held by the Lord Provost. It is described as:

"an anchor tethered about with a cable all Proper (that is, in natural colours) set of a wreath of the colours."

This wreath or torse represents cloth coloured in the city's livery, silver on one side and black on the other and twisted so as to show three twists of each colour.

Above the anchor is the motto 'NISI DOMINUS FRUSTRA' associated with Edinburgh since 1647. The interpretation is 'Except the Lord in Vain' and is a normal heraldic contraction of a verse from the 127th Psalm:

*'Except the Lord build the house, They labour in vain that build it
Except the Lord keep the city, The watchman waketh but in vain'*

Two figures or 'supporters' flank the shield. On the 'dexter' (the viewer's left) is the figure of a young woman with long hair and richly dressed. On the 'sinister' (the viewer's right) stands a doe.

The adoption of the maiden as a supporter probably derived from the fact that Edinburgh Castle was known - certainly in the 13th Century, if not earlier - as 'Castrum Puellarum' (Castle of the Maidens). This name was probably a corruption of a Gaelic or Brythonic name sounding like 'Maiden' but meaning something else. However, there is a legend that in the Dark Ages the castle was used as a safe residence for royal princesses, and it is also believed that it housed a nunnery during this period.

The doe or hind is associated with St Giles, the city's patron saint. Until the Reformation they were often shown together on the civic seals. The earliest representation still existing of the maiden dates from 1640, carved on a stone in Parliament Hall.