



WELCOME TO THE EXHIBIT OF ARMORIAL BOOKPLATES

BY R. Gordon M. MACPHERSON



The exhibit highlights Mr. Gordon Macpherson's oeuvre in bookplate design – a less spectacular technique than his heraldic paintings, but profoundly important aspect of the artist's career, in which his interests in heraldic design and in drawing find best expression. Featuring works created between 1960 and 2008, the selection celebrates the artist's career.

Roderick Gordon Murdoch Macpherson, FRHSC, is the most prominent Canadian heraldic artist and designer of the last 40 years. He gained international recognition through his bookplate designs which sought to bring heraldry to the more popular use in Canada. In his bookplates of the 1960s and 1970s Gordon Macpherson developed his own imagery and technique, which featured stylized black & white representations of the coats of arms. During his early years, Gordon Macpherson drew upon the heraldic design innovations inaugurated in Toronto by Alexander Scott Carter. Young Gordon Macpherson adopted his design principles and studied his technique. His mature bookplates are formally distinctive; characterized by bold heraldic figures and expressive rich mantling, his works also feature decorative borders framing the centrally situated armorial bearings.

Gordon Macpherson was born in New Westminster, B.C. in 1927. The family had their roots in Scotland; his father was a Presbyterian Minister. The Macphersons moved to Ontario when Gordon was only 3 years old. Since 1936 they have lived in Toronto, where his first recollected encounter with heraldry took place through his colleague from high school. He began his pursuit of the subject by reading "Clans, Septs and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands" by Frank Adam, followed by a little book by A.C. Fox-Davies, "Heraldry Explained". Since then all the original heraldry he was exposed to was in Toronto, mostly at Hart House, but also at Trinity College, at Simcoe Hall and at St. Thomas Church; he didn't have to travel very far to find the best examples to study from. Mr. Macpherson assisted his father to matriculate his arms at the Court of the Lord Lyon in 1955.

The young aspiring artist first met Alexander Scott Carter in 1946, while still at school in Toronto, and on several occasions thereafter. Gordon Macpherson remembers Scott Carter as "most kind and gracious to a self-taught artist who admired his work enormously". He designed his first bookplate (for himself) in 1949. Of other heraldic artist's, who's work interested him he

mentions Graham Johnston, A. G. Law Sampson, John R Sutherland ('all excellent bookplate artists of the past') at the Lyon Court in Scotland, and Gerald Cobb of the College of Arms in England.

Besides Scott Carter, he corresponded with (Sir) Conrad Swan and finally met him for the first time in 1959. At that time, there were very few people around him who had a serious interest in heraldry, the only other person he knew, who also shared this interest, was Alan Beddoe. The two corresponded regularly for many years. A. Beddoe stayed with Gordon and Nancy Macpherson's in 1965 when they were living in Queenstown, Ontario, prior to the formation of the Heraldry Society of Canada.



While heraldry was his passion, Gordon Macpherson's principal occupation was in the investment business for many years. Upon retirement as a Vice-President of Dominion Securities in Hamilton in 1987, he began work with the newly formed Canadian Heraldic Authority in Ottawa. 'I simply left one job and moved on to another which had been my hobby for over 40 years'.

Gordon Macpherson has done work for the Canadian Heraldic Authority since 1988 and was appointed Niagara Herald Extraordinary by the Governor General in 1999. He painted shields of Arms for heraldic displays in many academic institutions and churches, including St. John House, Ottawa; St. Andrew's College, Aurora; St. Michael's College, Toronto; and as many as 60 for

the Clan Macpherson Museum in Scotland. He has been a member of the (Royal) Heraldry Society of Canada since its formation and has been Honorary Art Editor since 1975. He was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1975 and appointed Dean of Fellows in 1999.

Gordon Macpherson was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1957 and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in the same year. He is a Knight of Justice of the Most Venerable Order of St. John, and is a former Genealogist of the Order.

Over the years, Gordon Macpherson has produced 231 bookplates, many of them for prominent Canadians, and still continues to create beautiful examples of this ancient craft from his home in Burlington, Ontario.

*Iona Jurkiewicz, SHA, Exhibit curator:
The quotes came from a correspondence (2007 – 2008) with R. Gordon M. Macpherson*

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