

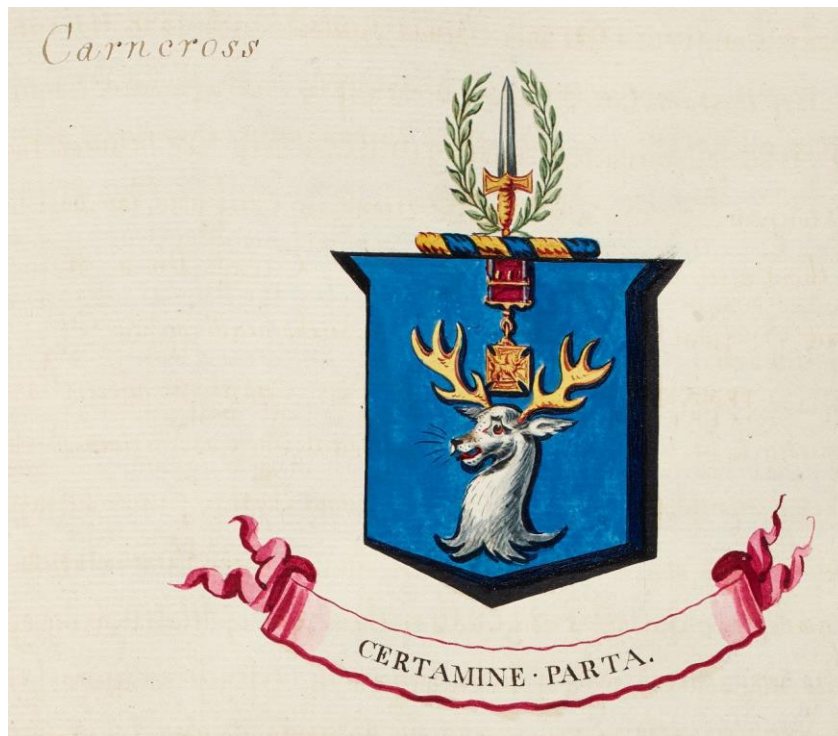
A medallic coat of arms

Sir Joseph Carncross KCB

By Jon Toohey

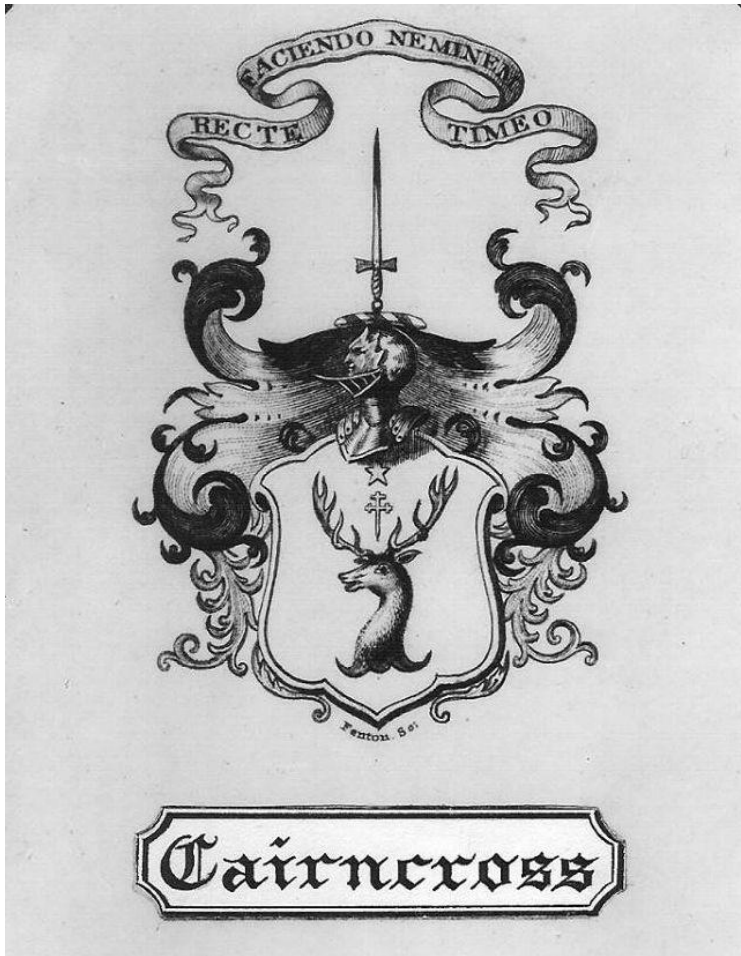


The Army Gold Cross with clasps of Sir Joseph Hugh Carncross KCB
(courtesy of Spink)



Coat of arms of Sir Joseph Hugh Carnecross KCB

(National Archives of Ireland)



Scottish Cairncross of Colmslie coat of arms

(Frontispiece of the book "Cairncross - the history of a Scottish family")

How many medals have found their way into a coat of arms? This article will not answer that question but will describe one example of this happening. The medal is the Army Gold Cross 1808-1814 and the coat of arms is that of Sir Joseph Hugh Ca(i)rncross (1770-1847).

A word on the rogue "i" – is it Carncross or Cairncross? For reasons unknown Hugh Ca(i)rncross, the father of Sir Joseph, dropped the "i" despite his birth record clearly being Cairncross with the "i" (1). For this article I will drop the "i" and use Carncross spelling as it pertains to Hugh and Sir Joseph.

The Army Gold Cross

Sir Joseph Hugh Carncross was awarded the Army Gold Cross ("the cross") with 2 clasps (2). A total of 163 crosses were issued with only 18 having 2 clasps. The maximum number of clasps was 9 and that went to the Duke of Wellington and is on view at Apsley House, London. The criterion for the cross were laid out in the London Gazette of 7 October 1813 and makes it clear the cross was for senior officers who were recommended for having "merited the distinction by conspicuous service" and "peculiar brilliancy" in 27 named actions from 1808 until 1814. The cross was a follow on from the Army Gold Medal ("the medal") that had been instituted in 1810 (which itself was a follow on from the Naval Gold Medal that started in 1794) and replaced the medal once 4 awards for

actions had been made. Thus, the cross of Sir Joseph, with its 2 clasps, actually represented awards for 6 actions – all during the Peninsula campaign.

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars the cross and medal (army and navy), were discontinued and were replaced by the Order of the Bath. The cross is also known as the Peninsular Gold Cross but this is not technically correct as a number of the actions for which it could be awarded were not of the Peninsula campaign.

Of interest is that the Victoria Cross was modelled on the cross. Queen Victoria selecting it from the first drawings submitted to her and suggesting only that it should be 'a little smaller'. (3)

The cross of Sir Joseph presumably still exists in a collection as it was sold by Spink in March 1997 (with an estimate of £10-12.000). The Spink catalogue referred to Sir Josephs "Military KCB star engraved with his name and a fine portrait miniature" that was sold at Glendining in 1911. (4)

The Coat of Arms

On the 15 November 1814, Sir William Bertram (Deputy Ulster King of Arms and Principle Herald of all Ireland) confirmed the grant of arms to Sir Joseph. In his formal ratification he confirmed that "a representation of the golden cross to the said Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Hugh Carncross by His Majesty in testimony of His Royal approbation of the signal intrepidity displayed by him .. in divers (sic) actions with the enemy in the peninsular of Spain should be introduced as a charge into the arms". He added "having duly considered the premises and thinking it perfectly consistent with the principles of heraldry whose chief object it is to hand down to posterity the emblems and recollections of valour and good desert".(5). In addition, the motto to be incorporated in the arms was confirmed as "Certamine Parta".

The Army Gold Cross (with its two clasps) is clearly represented in the coat of arms and it is also clear where the rest of the coat of arms and motto come from. The Cairncross name is a Scottish one and a Cairncross coat of arms had existed for some time and this was used. Sir Joseph was well aware of his Scottish origins but when he submitted his family tree to the Heraldry office he went no further back than his grandfather (also a Joseph) with only a reference to him being "descended from Scotland" (6). It is believed that Sir Joseph is related to Alexander Cairncross, Bishop of Raphoe, Ireland from 1693 to 1701 (the year of his death). Previously Alexander Cairncross had been Archbishop of Glasgow (and Chancellor of Glasgow University) but was "deposed" from the archbishopric for being too anti-Catholic and was moved to Ireland.

The seal of Alexander Cairncross (when he was Archbishop of Glasgow) incorporated both the Glasgow coat of arms on one side, and on the other a stag with a cross between its antlers since Alexander was from the "ancient family of Cairncross Balnashanan" (7). Their motto being "Certamine Parata" meaning "prepared for the conquest" (8). Note the slight difference in spelling from that adopted by Sir Joseph where an "a" was dropped (dropping vowels seems to have run in the family). Although descriptions and surviving pictures of the Cairncross coat of arms are all basically the same, there is another motto for the Cairncross of Colmslie family (9) (see the illustration) and its significant that Sir Joseph adopted the one of the Archbishop thus implying a connection.

Whilst Alexander had no children, it seems members of his family subsequently joined him in Ireland. It was a very rare name – the 1901 Irish census (the earliest full census available) shows no Carncross and only two Cairncross families (brothers Henry and Austin Cairncross (9)). Despite its

rarity, robustly locking down the entire Irish Cairncross tree from the Archbishop to Sir Joseph to those recorded in the 1901 census, is frustrating and not helped by the deliberate pulping of the census records prior to 1901 and the inadvertent blowing up of the public records office during the Irish Civil war of 1922. That said, there is enough to reasonably presume the linkages.

Sir Joseph Carncross

Joseph was the son of Hugh Carncross who was a veteran of the 47th foot and had served in America. Hugh was also very politically active and a member of the Irish Parliament from 1795 to 1798, not long before it was abolished in 1801 (having been in existence since 1297). The family had a long term lease (1754 to 1826) on Barberstown Castle just outside Dublin, which is now a hotel – each room having the name of a previous owner on its door, with both Hugh and his father (also a Joseph, and a coachmaker) having named rooms(10). However Sir Joseph based himself at nearby Rose Lawn, Celbridge.

As regards Sir Joseph himself I cannot do better than replicate his obituary from the Annual Register;

"Deaths, Dec. - At his seat, Rose Lawn, Celbridge, Co. Kildare, in his 78th year, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Joseph Hugh CARNCROSS, K. C. B., Colonel-Commandant of the 8th Battalion of Royal Artillery. He was the eldest son of Capt. Hugh Carncross, of the 47th Foot. He entered the Royal Artillery as a cadet in 1783; was appointed a Second Lieutenant in 1793; served in the West Indies from 1797 to 1801; at Waicheren in 1809; and in the Peninsula and France from 1811 to 1814. He received a cross and two clasps for his services at the Battles of Salamanca, Siege of Burgos, Vittoria, the Pyrenees, Nivelle, Nive, Orthes and Toulouse; and was created a Knight Companion of the Bath in 1815. He became a Major-General in the Army in 1837; was appointed Colonel-Commandant of the 8th Battalion of Royal Artillery in 1839; and attained the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1846."

The Descendants of Sir Joseph Carncross

Joseph had no children of his own and the grant of arms makes reference to his only surviving brother William (two other brothers having died by this time) whose descendants could "bear and use" the arms but with a catch in that, instead of the Army Gold Cross, there would be a "Sattire Argent" – the X shaped cross of Scotland. It is not known if William or his descendants ever used the coat of arms. William had served in the 57th foot during the Peninsular Campaign but moved to London where he was a timber merchant dying in 1864. So who were his descendants? The 1841 census shows he had four children;

- One son – Septimus Carncross emigrated to the USA and served with the Confederate Union army from 1853 until 1873 (the year of his death). He was involved in an interesting court case involving Willie McGee, who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honour aged sixteen ("in a charge, was among the first to reach a battery of the enemy and, with one or two others, mounted the artillery horses and took two guns into the Union lines") but later committed murder. A recent book on Wille McGee (11) includes this reference to Septimus which is worth repeating in full: "The third witness for the defence was Lieutenant Septimus Carncross. Carncross was General Sykes' adjutant, and had been a professional soldier since 1849. Born in England in 1829, Carncross became a career soldier as soon as he reached legal age. In 1868, at the time of the McGee trail, Septimus was almost forty and perhaps the most respected soldier in Baton Rouge. Carncross had begun military life as a private in Saint Louis and had risen through the ranks from lieutenant to captain to

major. Septimus Carncross had served in the artillery, the infantry, and as an aide-de-camp for some of the most prestigious leaders of the Civil War. He was a soldier's soldier, and it seemed his testimony was sure to be sombre, direct, and truthful. He, like Sykes, may have wondered why he was a defence witness and not speaking for the prosecution, but would, as he had done for twenty years, perform his duty admirably."

- Another son – Joseph - emigrated to Australia and later to New Zealand, his eldest son was Sir Walter Carncross who achieved the British Empire record for the longest serving speaker – 21 years - in the NZ parliament (and third place for 50 years' service in the house)(12). A son of Sir Walter, Cyril Carncross, was killed on the 12 October 1917 serving with the NZ rifle brigade in Passchendaele and a nephew, Murray Ellis Carncross, was killed on 29 July 1942 serving with the Royal NZ airforce in Europe.

In his pedigree Sir Joseph does include a cousin (and descendants) of his father, but (as mentioned above) it is clear that it is only the descendants of his brother that were lawfully allowed to use the coat of arms.

Conclusion

The principles regarding this one example of a medal being incorporated into a coat of arms hardly sets a precedent and it would be interesting to know of other examples. From the example of Sir Joseph there seem to be two principles. Firstly, that it is "perfectly consistent" to incorporate a medal into a coat of arms but, secondly, that it could not be so used by the descendants.

Acknowledgements, references and notes

Thanks to several members of the britishmedalforum.com who assisted and Ian Cairncross who maintains the Cairncross family website (home.freeuk.com/iancx/)

- (1) St Marys Church baptismal records (5 Dec 1738 page 110)
- (2) Haywood, Birch and Bishop, "British Battles and Medals" (7th Edition 2006) - Appendix 2
- (3) Michael J Crook, "The Evolution of the Victoria Cross" (1975)
- (4) If anyone can help share a copy of the portrait I would be most grateful as I have no picture of Sir Joseph.
- (5) National Archives of Ireland, Genealogical Office, Dublin, "Copy of grant of arms to the descendants of the late Hugh Carncross, son of Joseph Carncross, both of Barberstown, Co. Kildare and to Hugh's son, Lt. Col. Joseph Hugh Carncross, Nov. 15, 1814". MS 106 pages 73 and 74
- (6) National Archives of Ireland, Genealogical Office, Dublin, "Pedigree of Carncross of Dublin, of Barberstown and Possickstown, Co. Kildare, c.1720 – 1815". MS 168 pages 390 and 391
- (7) Andrew Macgeorge, "An Inquiry as to the Armorial Insignia of the City of Glasgow" (1866)
- (8) James Fairburn "Royal book of crests of Great Britain and Ireland, Dominion of Canada, India and Australasia" (1883)
- (9) Arthur and Bertram Cairncross, "Cairncross - the history of a Scottish family" (1959, although certain sections were written 1920)
- (10) Their sister, Emily Toohey (nee Cairncross), being my great grandmother
- (11) As confirmed with the Barbartown Castle office www.barberstowncastle.ie. Another door is named Eric Clapton who owned the castle from 1979-87.
- (12) Thomas Fox, "Drummer Boy Willie McGee – Civil war hero and fraud" (2008)

(13) Obituary in the Auckland Star, 1 July 1940