



THE Marjoribanks LETTER

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An Invitation



Every now and then I get a magazine from America about Scotland and the doings of the Scottish clans — notices about gatherings and other meetings of clan societies. The interest in things Scottish seems quite intense.

It occurred to me that, although we are a bit thin on the ground compared with the McLeods, the Grants, the Campbells and the rest, perhaps some of the people who bear the ancient Scottish name of Marjoribanks might like to form a society of their own. (There is an attraction in being one of a small and select band!)

As a first step, my good friend Robert Marjoribanks of Ottawa, Canada, has kindly agreed to produce this letter, as a way of putting Marjoribankses in all parts of the world in touch with each other. If there seems to be interest in the idea of a Marjoribanks society, we can then go about setting it up.

This first letter is going to all the Marjoribankses we know — mainly members of Robert Marjoribanks' family and my own — but we hope our mailing list will grow as our correspondents report hitherto-unheard-of Marjoribankses, culled in the course of their travels from telephone directories and other lists.

We would like to hear about famous or distinguished Marjoribankses, of course, but everyone who bears the name is important to us.

To all of you, wherever you are, I send my greetings and a warm invitation to share the fellowship of our Honourable and Ancient House.

Will Marjoribanks of That Ilk,
Kirklands of Forglen,
By Turrif,
Aberdeenshire,
Scotland.

"The Ilk"

Will Marjoribanks of Kirklands of Forglen in Aberdeenshire is formally styled "Will Marjoribanks of That Ilk".

This is his explanation of the title.

"To style oneself 'of That Ilk', one has to be able to prove descent from the owner of the family lands — in my case, the lands of Marjoribanks in Annandale. My great-great-great-great-grandfather, Thomas Marjoribanks, whose arms were registered on July 30, 1673, was recognized by the Lord Lyon, the High Senachie or chief herald of Scotland, as 'Representer of Marjoribanks of That Ilk'.

"As I expect you know, 'of That Ilk' means 'of the same'. In my case, 'of Marjoribanks'. All of my ancestors, back to Thomas, styled themselves 'of Marjoribanks'. When I registered arms in 1962, being rather hesitant about the amount of time that could be taken up signing myself in that way, I asked the Lord Lyon if I might use 'of That Ilk' instead. He confirmed that it would be proper for me to use either, as I wished.

"He also confirmed that, even though the lands of Marjoribanks in Annandale had since passed into other hands, that fact did not prevent me from styling myself 'of That Ilk'."

Mr. Marjoribanks points out that the expression "of that ilk" is frequently used incorrectly, for example, to refer to "radio announcers and others of that ilk".

H. W. Fowler, the distinguished scholar and author of "A Dictionary of Modern English Usage", agrees:

"ilk means same; it does not mean family or kind or set or name. 'Of that ilk' is a form constructed for the case in which proprietor and property have the same name . . . The common mal-treatments of the phrase . . . are partly unconscious and due to ignorance of the meaning of *ilk* and partly facetious; indulgence in such worn-out humour is much less forgivable than for an Englishman not to know what a Scottish word means."

Will Marjoribanks — Mr. Fowler and heraldic traditions notwithstanding — is frequently referred to by his family, erroneously and facetiously, but affectionately, as "The Ilk".

Heraldry

The coat of arms which appears on the first page of this issue, at the head of Will Marjoribanks' "Invitation", was granted to Mr. Marjoribanks by the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, and may be displayed only by him. (The common practice of installing over one's fireplace the coat of arms of anyone of the same name is improper.)

By Scottish tradition, however, a chief's followers may display the crest — the device that appears above the shield and the helmet on the coat of arms — surrounded by a belt and buckle and inscribed with the chief's motto.

That design appears at the head of the page, on the left-hand side, next to the title. Mr. Marjoribanks says that this device may be displayed by anyone bearing the name Marjoribanks, as a bonnet badge, a brooch, or as part of a personal letterhead.

The motto, "Et custos et pugnax", might be translated "Both a guardian and a fighter".

“The Remarkable Ishbel”

A distinguished Marjoribanks, with an important Canadian connection, was Ishbel Maria Marjoribanks, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, wife of Lord Aberdeen, Governor-General of Canada from 1893 to 1899.

Her life has been recorded in an excellent biography written by her daughter, Marjorie Lady Pentland (A Bonnie Fechter, the Life of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Marchioness of Aberdeen; B.T. Batsford, Ltd., London, 1952)

In the opening chapter Lady Pentland gives this account of the origin of our name:

“The name Marjoribanks (pronounced Marchbanks) was held by the occupiers of the land in Annandale known as *Terre de Marjoriebankis*, because originally granted by Robert the Bruce to his daughter Marjorie on her marriage in 1315 to Walter, High Steward of Scotland. In the sixteenth century this Marjoribanks family moved from Annandale to Edinburgh and in the eighteenth century to Lees near the Tweed near Coldstream.”

Lady Aberdeen’s grandfather, Edward Marjoribanks, was one of the Lees Marjoribankses and later a senior partner in Coutts Bank, a famous institution founded by his cousin Thomas Coutts, which numbered among its clients members of the royal family.

Mr. Marjoribanks’ eldest son, also named Edward, inherited his father’s partnership but Ishbel’s father, Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, was denied a partnership and became a director of Meux Brewery. He was made a baronet in 1866 and was elevated to the peerage in 1881 as Baron Tweedmouth.

Ishbel’s mother was Isabel Hogg, daughter of James Weir Hogg, a rich and successful barrister.

Ishbel was born at Brook House, her father’s elegant residence in Upper Brook Street in London, in 1857. In the spring of 1871, at the age of 14, while riding in the park, she met and fell in love with John Campbell Gordon, the 7th Earl of Aberdeen, then an Oxford undergraduate. Lord Aberdeen was a far from tempestuous courtier, but six years later, on November 7, 1877, they were married at St. George’s, Hanover Square by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Lord and lady Aberdeen were loyal life-long Liberals and good friends of Prime Minister Gladstone. Lord Aberdeen had served briefly as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1886 but lost the post a few months later when Mr. Gladstone was defeated on the issue of Home Rule for Ireland. When Mr. Gladstone took office for the fourth time in 1892, the Aberdeens confidently expected to be re-appointed to the post in Dublin.

For tactical political reasons, however, Mr. Gladstone couldn’t arrange it and offered them instead Secretary of State for Scotland, Lord Chamberlain, Viceroy of India or Governor-General of Canada. They reluctantly chose Canada and Lord Aberdeen was installed in his new office in Ottawa in September, 1893.

There is an interesting account of Lady Aberdeen’s life in Canada in “The Private Capital: Ambition and Love in the Age of Macdonald and Laurier” by Sandra Gwyn (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1984)

It is clear from accounts by contemporaries that Lady Aberdeen was the Governor-General, in effect, and that her husband played the role of consort with grace and charm. In a chapter entitled “The Remarkable Ishbel” Mrs. Gwyn writes: “Never before and never since has anyone attempted to use the office of Governor-General as an instrument for social reform.”

In the face of considerable opposition, she founded the National Council of Women, to lobby for improvement in the condition of women and children. In spite of resistance by the medical establishment, she also created the Victorian Order of Nurses, in honour of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. Both of these institutions still flourish and are widely admired.

She was not above taking a hand in politics, if such an intervention would serve her cause, but she was often high-handed and clumsy. As she wrote, her goals were frequently accomplished “by being desperate and troublesome”.

When the time came for the Aberdeens to go home, in November, 1898, many Canadians were reluctant to see them — particularly “the remarkable Ishbel” — take their leave. Others, who had been crossed politically or upstaged socially, did not contemplate their departure with the same regret.

In 1905, with the Liberals once more in ascendancy in Britain, Lord Aberdeen realized his wish to return as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. During their nine years in Ireland, and long afterwards, Ishbel committed herself with characteristic fervour to the causes of Irish women and children, particularly the battle against tuberculosis, for which she received international recognition.

She died on April 18, 1939.

The Cowboys

Two Marjoribankses had brief careers as cowboys — or at least as ranch managers. They were the brothers of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Lady Aberdeen: the Honourable Archie Marjoribanks and the Honourable Coutts Marjoribanks.

Their father, Baron Tweedmouth, was a successful breeder of Aberdeen Angus cattle in Scotland and he thought he would like to try his luck in the American West. He bought two ranches: the Rocking Chair Ranch of nearly 200,000 acres in Texas, on North Elm Creek, a tributary of the Canadian River; and the much smaller Horse Shoe Ranch, near Towner, in North Dakota.

The Honourable Archie was made assistant manager of the Rocking Chair Ranch, and the Honourable Coutts managed the Horse Shoe Ranch with the help of an experienced foreman. Neither of the sons received any pay from the ranches, but father sent each of them a yearly allowance of £400.

When Ishbel and Lord Aberdeen visited Archie in 1887 the nearest town to the ranch was renamed Aberdeen in their honour.

Lady Pentland’s biography of her mother includes a photograph of Coutts seated in his cowboy togs, wearing a ten-gallon hat on the back of his head, a bandanna at his neck, a bull whip across his knee, and two guns, one at his hip and the other protruding from the top of his boot.

The two earnest young remittance men may have been less than realistic in their dealing with their worldly neighbours but, in any case, neither of the ranching enterprises survived for more than a decade.

Papa, according to Ishbel, was “very angry”.

Note

If you have information or observations that you think might interest other Marjoribankses, we would be delighted to hear from you. If you know of Marjoribankses, or others, who would like to receive The Marjoribanks Letter, please send their complete postal addresses.

Five hundred copies of this issue were printed and privately financed. The cost per copy, including postage, was about \$2.00 in Canadian funds. If you would like to share the cost of this first issue, and help ensure continued publication, your contributions would be gratefully received.

Cheques should be made payable to The Marjoribanks Letter and sent to:

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