



Titles – A Primer

The Society of Scottish Armigers, INC.

Information Leaflet No. 21



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The Peerage – There are five grades of the peerage: 1) Duke, 2) Marquess, 3) Earl, 4) Viscount and 5) Baron (England, GB, UK)/Lord of Parliament (Scotland). Over the centuries, certain customs and traditions have been established regarding styles and forms of address; they follow below:

- a. Duke & Duchess: Formal style: "The Most Noble the Duke of (title); although this is now very rare; the style is more usually, "His Grace the Duke of (Hamilton), and his address is, "Your Grace" or simply, "Duke" or "Duchess." The eldest son uses one of his father's subsidiary titles as a courtesy. Younger sons use "Lord" followed by their first name (e.g., Lord David Scott); daughters are "Lady" followed by their first name (e.g., Lady Christina Hamilton); in conversation, they would be addressed as Lord David or Lady Christina. The same rules apply to eldest son's sons and daughters. The wife of a younger son uses "Lady" prior to her husband's name, (e.g. Lady David Scot)
- b. Marquess & Marchioness: Formal style: "The Most Honourable the Marquess/Marchioness (of) (title)" and address is "My Lord" or e.g., "Lord "Bute." Other rules are the same as dukes. The eldest son, by courtesy, uses one of his father's subsidiary titles. Wives of younger sons as for Dukes.
- c. Earl & Countess: Formal style: "The Right Honourable the Earl/Countess (of) (title)" and address style is the same as for a marquess. The eldest son uses one of his father's subsidiary titles as a courtesy. Daughters follow the rules for the daughters of dukes and marquesses. Younger sons are "The Honourable" and all children of the eldest son are "The Honourable." Wives of younger sons also use "Honourable".

- d. Viscount & Viscountess: Formal style: "The Right Honourable (the) Viscount/Viscountess (of) (title)" and address style is the same as for a marquess or an earl. Occasionally, viscounts are called just that, e.g., "Viscount Dunrossil." All sons and daughters are "The Honourable." Wives of younger sons also use "Honourable".
- e. Lord of Parliament (Scotland) and Baron & Baroness (England, GB, UK): Formal style: "The Right Honourable Lord (title)" and address style is, e.g., "Lord Borthwick." All sons and daughters are "The Honourable."

Caveat 1: All titles belong to the peer. Courtesy titles, including those of the heir, are just that, courtesies. Legally, the sons of peers are esquires. The exception is that the heir of a Scots peer or his/her heir may be known as "The Master of X," e.g., "The Master of Balhormie," or, in the case of a female heir "The Mistress of X."

Caveat 2: A peer's first name is never used with his title, so if you introduce or refer to The Earl of Caithness, he is never referred to as Earl Malcolm Caithness or Lord Malcolm Caithness: the first person doesn't exist, and the second would indicate that he was the younger son of a duke or marquess. Neither is he (to use his family name) Earl Malcolm Sinclair or Lord Malcolm Sinclair (although he is "Sinclair" as Chief of the Name and might be referred to more familiarly as "Malcolm Caithness"); he correctly is, however, Malcolm, Earl of Caithness.

Caveat 3: There are special rules for the wives of deceased peers, who become "The Dowager (Countess) of (Caithness) and for the divorced wives of peers, who are Mary, (Countess) of (Blackstone)" unless they remarry, at which point they take their new husband's style.

Minor Nobility

- a. Baronet & Baronetess: A baronetcy is the only hereditary honor which is not a peerage. A baronet is styled "Sir" like a knight while his wife is styled "Lady." A female Baronetess is styled Dame (first and last name), Btss. A baronetcy is not a knighthood and the recipient does not receive an accolade.
- b. Knights: A knight is a person granted a non-hereditary title of knighthood by the monarch. Males are styled "Sir" while females are styled "Dame." Males may be either a "knight bachelor" or a knight grand cross or knight commander of one of the Orders of Chivalry. Females are not made "knight bachelor" and are members of one of the chivalric Orders, most often the Order of the British Empire. The wife of a knight is styled "Lady" followed by her husband's last name.
- c. Chiefs of Scottish Clans and Names: In Scotland it is normal to write to Chiefs and Chieftains by their designation or estate, and not by their surname. Neither 'Mr.' nor 'Esq.' is added to the name on the envelope and it

is inappropriate to refer to a Chief or a Chieftain as "Mr." Thus, the Chief of Urquhart would be referred to as "Urquhart" or "Urquhart of Urquhart." The eldest son of a Chief or Head of Family takes as his style that of the Chief, followed by "yr" or "younger, e.g., "Wilkins Urquhart of Urquhart, yr."

The husband of a female Chief or Chieftain derives no title from his wife, but the eldest son of a female Chief would have the same style "younger" as does the eldest son of a male Chief.

Many wives of chiefs or chieftains use the style of 'Madam,' e.g. Madam Chisholm, which has met with the Lord Lyon's approval. To be sure of the designation preferred, you should check with the individual family.

- d. Scottish feudal barony: This is not a peerage title and used to be a jurisdictional right attached to a particular piece of land upon which was the "*caput*" or "head place" of the barony, normally a building, such as a castle or manor house. It is now a dignity separate from the land, although the holder of the barony may also possess the land as well. The holder of a Scottish feudal barony is called "Baron of X." The wife of a Scots baron may be called "Lady X." If a woman holds a barony, her husband is not addressed as "Baron of X," but simply according to his personal rank.

- e. Territorial Designation (TD). In Scotland, certain people have the words "of X" following their family name which proclaims a relationship with a particular area of land. If recognized by Lord Lyon it is considered a TD and legally is a part of one's surname. Holders of TDs are referred to and addressed as "Y of X" or simply "X" - the name of their property/territory. Thus, John Smith of Glasmont's name is not "Smith" but rather "Smith of Glasmont" and he usually is addressed simply as "Glasmont." He would sign his name as "J. Smith of Glasmont" or "John Smith of Glasmont" but not as simply "Glasmont" as the single name is limited to peers by an Act (1672, cap. 42) of the Scottish Parliament.

The wife of TD holder usually is referred to as "Mrs Y of X." There was a time when they were referred to as "Lady X" but that has not been the custom for many generations (Debrett's says it died out at the end of the 18th century) and it may be considered to be obsolescent or archaic. It also risks confusing the designation with a peerage title, which should be avoided for obvious reasons. Eldest sons are referred to as (Name) Y of X, yr., as for Chiefs' sons. Unmarried daughters of TD holders are referred to as Miss (name) Y of X.

It should be noted that while a woman can hold a TD in her own right her husband does not gain the right to use the TD, unless he assumes his wives name.

- f. Esquire: Esquire is a separate rank above gentleman. Most esquires hold their rank *ex officio*. As previously noted, all sons of peers are esquires. Others holding the rank include HM Consuls, mayors, barristers and solicitors, and persons holding the military rank of substantive (full) colonel or the naval and air force equivalent. Do not mix and match: one is either referred to as “Colonel John Smith” or “John Smith, Esq.”; “The Honourable John Smith” or “John Smith, Esq.”; “Mayor John Smith” or “John Smith, Esq.”

Caveat: Laird: a laird is not a lord, and the style of “laird” is not much used these days. In the past it was used by or of the owner of an estate, especially in the case of substantial landowners. It is best avoided.