



# THE Marjoribanks LETTER

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## EDINBURGH MEETING FOUNDS 'THE MARJORIBANKS FAMILY'

"It is the proudest moment of my life, to have the honour to greet you here."

With those words, Will Marjoribanks of that Ilk, head of the Marjoribanks family, opened a meeting of some 50 family members, gathered in Edinburgh last June 4 to form a new family organization.

"I will strive for the few years left to me," he said, "to keep in touch with members of our family, and especially the old, to let them know that someone cares about them, and that they won't be forgotten."

Because of the strong sense of being members of the same family, the meeting unanimously agreed that the new organization would be known simply as The Marjoribanks Family — without any reference to a society or an association.

It was also agreed that membership would be open to anyone, "regardless of name or spelling, who considers himself or herself to be a member of the family, or who has a strong interest in the family, its origins and its history."

It was also unanimously agreed that the Marjoribanks of that Ilk would be *ex officio* the honorary head and patron of The Marjoribanks Family, having precedence over any elected officers.

Andrew Marjoribanks, Younger of that Ilk, of Greenock, chairman of the meeting, and Robert Marjoribanks of Ottawa, Canada, were elected members of a committee to draft a constitution for consideration, and to recommend any necessary rules and regulations.

Another committee was named to be concerned with history and genealogical research, made up of: John Marjoribanks, Zimbabwe; Roger Marjoribanks, Guilford, Surrey; Sir James Marjoribanks, Edinburgh; William Jackson, McLean, Virginia; Andrew Marjoribanks, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire; Catriona Marjoribanks, Greenock.

After his introductory remarks, Will Marjoribanks of that Ilk turned the meeting over to his son Andrew, Younger of that Ilk, who began the formal proceedings by ringing "the Marjoribanks Bell", a gift of Hazel Leslie, of Kilconqhar, Leven, Fife.

The bell was used at Balbardie, the Marjoribanks estate in Bathgate, from 1727 to 1824, when the laird had news or edicts to pronounce. The bell-ringing ended in 1824 when Alexander Marjoribanks of that Ilk voluntarily relinquished the superiority of the lands so that Bathgate could become a self-governing borough.

Prior to the meeting, members of the family — including several grandchildren — assembled at noon at the Bridge Inn in Ratho, an ancient Marjoribanks barony, where they boarded the barge Countess of Edinburgh for a cruise on the Union Canal, during which they enjoyed drinks and lunch, and an opportunity to get to know each other.

Following the meeting, all those attending were entertained at a reception given by Sir James Marjoribanks, a brother of Will and the first British ambassador to the European Economic Community, at his flat in Regent Terrace. There they had a chance to inspect a number of family documents, portraits, photographs, and other Marjoribanks memorabilia.



Photo by Nancy Marjoribanks

*Will Marjoribanks of that Ilk addresses the inaugural meeting of The Marjoribanks Family in Edinburgh, June 4, 1988. At his side is his son Andrew, Younger of that Ilk, chairman of the meeting. On the table before them is "The Marjoribanks Bell".*

## Marchbanks

After some 650 years of careless diction, the family name Marjoribanks now sounds like "Marchbanks", and many people spell it that way, or as Marchbank, without the S.

No doubt many Marchbankses — maybe all of them — are descended from Marjoribankses who got tired of explaining that their name was not spelled the way it was pronounced.

(One family member, on being asked how the name is spelled, now has a standard answer: Oh, just the usual way — with two Rs and a J.)

George Marjoribanks, who went to Virginia from Scotland in 1715, changed his name to Marchbanks soon after he arrived, and there are now an estimated 600 Marchbanks households in the U.S. — although not necessarily all descendants of George.

We have the addresses of about 60 Marchbanks (or Marchbank) families in different parts of the world and, on the assumption that we are all kin, we would like to hear about all of them.

If you have addresses to add to our list, please send them along and we'll send them the next issue of The Marjoribanks Letter. In the interest of accuracy, please print names and addresses in full, in block letters, and include the postal code.

## How Do You Spell Marjoribanks?

In an excerpt from a family history by the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Marjoribanks of that ilk, published in *The Marjoribanks Letter* No. 2, Dr. Marjoribanks referred to a collection of "envelopes, telegrams and other missives" in which the family name was misspelled in more than 350 different ways.

Dr. Marjoribanks' son, Sir James, of Edinburgh, has been custodian of this collection since his father's death. He has now turned this responsibility over to his nephew, Andrew Marjoribanks, Younger of that ilk.

"That there could be so many separate renderings of a name of only twelve letters seems well nigh incredible," Sir James says.

"The first entries dating from the twenties were not all that spectacular," he recalls. "But one which I remember was 'J. Cruikshank Esq., D. D.' of which, as my father pointed out with delight, the only correct part was the 'ank'."

"As time goes on, however, the entries become more and more extraordinary. My cousin Alan who served in the Indian Police became a valuable source of Indian attempts at the spelling of our surname. From this period date such curiosities as 'Messwing', 'Maniwikantes', 'Marjoribsubs', and so on.

"My favourite example, dating from a period which I spent in the consular service in the United States, is 'Mr. Meyerback, British Vice Consultant, Miami.' And my brother Will recorded 'El Mister Spinks' when he was serving in the Sudan. There are many other delightful renderings, 'Major Hens', for example!

"Then there was The Man Who Gave It Up. My father records a letter received by his brother addressed: 'Lieutenant Colonel...' That's as far as this correspondent would venture."

Andrew has now put the entire collection on a computer to ensure that there are no duplications.

No doubt many readers could add to the collection. If you have a bizarre spelling of our family name that you would like to contribute, send the original envelope or mailing label to:

Andrew Marjoribanks, Younger of that ilk,  
10 Newark Street,  
Greenock, Scotland PA16 7UH

A visitor to Government House in Ottawa recently inquired about a portrait of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Lady Aberdeen, which was known to hang in one of the rooms in the vice-regal residence.

A member of the Governor-General's staff explained that the huge portrait of Lady Aberdeen, wife of a former Governor-General, hung at one time in the Royal Chamber, the bedroom the Queen occupies during state visits to Canada.

Lady Aberdeen was well known to the Queen. She was a very imposing figure at court during the Queen's childhood. All of the royal children were frightened of her, a kindly but somewhat overwhelming personality.

During a visit to Government House, the Queen awoke in the Royal Chamber, not a large room by regal standards, to find Lady Aberdeen, a ghost from the past, looming over the foot of the bed.

Ishbel was subsequently banished to a remote corridor.

Incidentally, anyone with a special interest in Lady Aberdeen and British Columbia's Okanagan Valley might like to read "The Journal of Lady Aberdeen, The Okanagan Valley in the Nineties."

It is edited and annotated by R. M. Middleton and published by Morriss Publishing Limited, Victoria, British Columbia.

The Aberdeens spent many happy months at ranches they established in the Okanagan in the 1890s. The book includes a foreword by the Marquess of Aberdeen, Lady Aberdeen's grandson.

## Peg-leg Jack Marchbank

One of our more colourful kinsmen was Peg-leg Jack Marchbank, a Canadian, who like many thousands of North Americans, went to seek his fortune in the Klondike gold rush of 1896.

Unlike many of his companions, Jack Marchbank found his fortune, but unfortunately lost his leg, in a mining accident.

When the gold fever subsided, Peg-leg Jack went to Los Angeles where he bought The Northern, the largest gambling house in town. As business prospered he bought the Tanforan horse-racing track and introduced a betting system that skirted the California gambling laws.

With the proceeds from the track, he became the state's biggest breeder of thoroughbred horses and established a show-place ranch which he named — no doubt with a thought for his Scottish ancestry — Heather Farm.

Mr. Arthur Johnston of Breadalbane, Prince Edward Island, sent along the Los Angeles Times' account of Jack's death, in 1947.

By that time he had outlived his nick-name Peg-leg Jack. His wealth and property, and his numerous charitable donations, had earned him the genteel soubriquet, "Squire John Marchbank."

The squire's estate, valued at some four million 1947 dollars fell to his widow who, seven months earlier, had been employed as his secretary.

At least one Marjoribanks fought and died on the British side in the American Revolution.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Marjoribanks of that ilk (1871-1947), in his history of the family, records that Major John Marjoribanks of the 19th Regiment of Foot was mortally wounded at the battle of Etaw Springs in 1871, and left to the care of the Americans. He died a day or two later and was buried by the roadside, his grave marked by a wooden slab.

"This in time rotted away, and a benevolent old man of the community had a stone erected over the grave instead," Dr. Marjoribanks wrote.

"Years afterwards a public utility scheme caused the place where he lay to be submerged; on which the authorities placed a heavy concrete block over the remains, and re-erected the stone above the level of the water, where it still stands, monument to once of a brave man and of a chivalrous enemy."

Dr. Marjoribanks wrote that account 45 years ago, and it is not known whether our kinsman's grave is still to be seen.

Perhaps members of the family living in America would know, or could discover, if any trace remains.

If you have information or observations that you think might interest other members of the family, we would be delighted to hear from you. If you know of Marjoribankses — or Marchbankses — who would like to receive *The Letter*, please send their complete postal addresses (printed in block letters). Until the proposed constitution is approved, and annual fees have been established, *The Letter* will continue to be privately financed. The cost of printing and postage amounts to about \$2.00 a copy in Canadian funds. If you would like to share this cost, your contributions will be gratefully received. Cheques or money orders should be made payable to *The Marjoribanks Letter* and sent to:

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