Are You Being Conned?

(second edition)

The Baronage Press

Are You Being Conned?

No! Of course not! You're street smart. You've been around a bit. I mean – you see 'em coming, don't you?

But look at this one. Smart suit, cut's a bit old-fashioned, but it's clean and has been pressed. Striped tie; good shoes (you always look carefully at the shoes, don't you?), hair a bit too long, and an English accent. Perhaps that's the famous old school tie they talk about in Agatha Christie.

What's that they're saying over there in the corner? He's a lord, an English lord? Well, that could explain his clothes. He looks a bit odd, but then perhaps they all do. It's the inbreeding, you suppose. But now he's smiling at you. And he's offering to buy you a drink. Wow!

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So you get into conversation. He's very amusing and not pushy at all. He has a neat ring on his pinkie, but when you ask about it he just says it came down from an ancestor. "1066?" you ask. "Well, yes, actually," he replies. Then he accidentally drops his credit card on the bar and you can see that the first word of his name is "Lord". Oh, he's the real thing. He really is! Wow!

He's in town on business, well, not really serious business – he represents a charity. And you're the sort who in this town would know the right kind of people he ought to meet. Would you enjoy that – introducing your new friend, a real lord, to your old friends? Well, would you?

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Then it's a few days later and you're sitting alone, crying into your beer. How could it be your fault? I mean, there are hundreds of English lords, and you had to meet the one phony. Just one among hundreds. How bad can your luck be? One among hundreds!

But you're wrong. He wasn't one alone. There are many dozens of these phonies around, and since the introduction of the Internet, their numbers have been growing fast. There are crooks out there producing fake lords every day.

Some of the fakes haven't yet discovered they are fakes; some have and are on ego-trips; some know full well they are fakes, but they want your money.

Do you want to know how to spot them? Read on!

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The Titles

Lords have titles. But what exactly is a title? Curiously, it is a word used too loosely for any of the general books on this subject to define it. In most cases it is said to be an appellation of dignity or of honour. In the 17th century, John Selden, in his great work on titles, described "Titles of Honour" as "those various names of Greatness or Eminence which are the most distinguishing titles of Civil Dignity". That's not very helpful, is it? Let's work with the idea that a title is just "a handle to a name".

To recognise the phonies we have to understand the system, and to do this we should look first at the British. That is the most complex, but it is useful to take it first because all the other systems can be related to it or to some part of it. If you understand the British system, you can then understand the rest. We'll look at **the nature of the titles**, and **how their holders should be addressed**, and **how their children are affected by them** — these being the three areas where the fakes betray themselves.

Fons honorum

The Sovereign of a country is its *fons honorum*, which is to say its "fount of honour". No titles of honour or dignity are valid for those who are the nationals of that country unless they have been granted or approved by their Sovereign or a predecessor. (Additionally, orders of knighthood must be founded by a Sovereign if they are to be recognised as valid by any governments.)

The British position on this is quite unambiguous. Queen Elizabeth I laid down the principle when Lord Arundell of Wardour accepted the title of a Count from the Hapsburg Emperor. No foreign shepherd, she proclaimed, would be allowed to brand her sheep. When Prince Philip, who was by birth a Prince of both Greece and Denmark, was naturalised as a Briton he became Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, R.N. The newspapers continued to refer to him as "Prince Philip", and on his wedding day, as had been widely expected, the King granted him the style of His Royal Highness, but he did not become a Prince again until his wife granted him the title in 1957, five years after she had become Queen.

Princes and Princesses

In the first edition we wrote that you are unlikely to find anyone posing as a British prince (because the real ones are too well known and an intruder would stand out), but that you can meet someone posing as a prince from

some other European country, often one that no longer exists. Since then a bogus "British prince" posing as a Mountbatten has been detected in Australia.

A prince is sovereign in his own country. Often he is a king. Thus a prince may be a queen (Mary Queen of Scots described herself in her letters as a prince, as indeed she was in the correct sense of the word). In the United Kingdom the Prince of Wales is a prince, but all the other princes of the Royal House, bear that title as a courtesy. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, husband of Queen Elizabeth II (who of course is also a prince in its true sense), is, as mentioned above, a prince by royal warrant, not a prince in the sovereign sense.

Countries ranking as principalities are ruled by princes (in the true sense) and their children have the title of prince or princess by courtesy. Monaco is the best known example of this. There are a few others, but you have to be wary of any princes claiming to be from the countries of Eastern Europe, for these are titles often sold by the fraudulent Internet merchants.

Peerage

This is a difficult word to use because it has acquired two meanings. A peer is **a member** of a peerage where the word means the body of peers. And a peer is said to **have** a peerage because he is a peer. (Some commentators understandably insist that in this second sense it is preferable to employ the term "peerage title" to remove ambiguity.)

In the British Isles there are five peerages (in the first sense) — those of England, of Scotland, of Great Britain, of Ireland, and of the United Kingdom. That is the order of their precedence. There are also five grades or degrees or ranks in the peerages. These are Duke, Marquess, Earl, Viscount and Baron (in that order of precedence) — but a Marquess may use the spelling of Marquis (as in France), and in the Scots Peerage the equivalent to the rank of Baron is Lord of Parliament (a Baron in Scots law being the holder of a feudal barony *~ see below*).

The beginning of the peerage is difficult to date. In England there was the baronage consisting of the great men of the realm, and this slowly merged into what is now known as the peerage during the 14th century. In France the concept of peerage had developed earlier, but then only a few of the titled nobility were peers, originally only twelve, these being six warriors and six churchmen. In Flanders similarly, the number of peers was small. In early Scotland there were the seven earls who advised the King and ruled the country if the King was a minor, and these could be described as peers.

The critical difference between the English Peerage and the Baronage that preceded it and, for a time, was to continue in parallel with it, is that the members of the Baronage owed their titles to the land they held, whereas the peerage titles were personal and almost always hereditary. (In Scotland the Baronage continues today in parallel with the Peerage.)

Nobility and Gentry

Nobility is another word with, for the purpose of our discussions, a double meaning (plus others we may ignore). In England, Wales and Ireland it is a collective noun for the peers, while the remainder of the upper classes forms the gentry. In Scotland and in continental Europe nobility maintains its original feudal meaning formed in a society separated into three sectors – those who worked, those who prayed, and those who fought (and ruled and judged and owned the land). This third group was the nobility (in modern language, the upper class), and it includes today the peers and those who in England would be classed as gentry (that is – the peers' extended families, baronets, knights, feudal barons, esquires and gentlemen). In ancient times the nobility and gentry were distinguished from the workers and the churchmen easily – by their clothes, their language and their weapons, and by the fact that from the 12th century onwards they possessed coats of arms. Today the importance of clothes, language and weapons has diminished, but coats of arms ("ensigns of nobility") have retained their significance (and thus their importance to the phonies and to the fraudulent merchants who profit from them).

An understanding of these two terms, nobility and gentry, is of importance because the widespread lack of understanding is easily exploited by those selling bogus "titles".

Dukes and Duchesses

The highest rank in the British peerages is that of Duke. Unlike all the other degrees, whose male holders are addressed as "Lord Xxxxxx" by their social equals and superiors (which now means everyone except servants), a duke is addressed in speech as "Duke" (and his wife as "Duchess"). In writing and on the most formal occasions a duke is styled "The Most Noble". This style is used only by dukes and by phonies with bogus knighthoods (of which many have been sold recently).

British dukes are few in number and, although the "title" of Duke of Westminster has been offered for sale on the Web (there is a real duke with that name), it's unlikely you will meet a phony. However, phony dukes of foreign origin have become common, mainly through

the efforts of a fraudulent merchant who has invented and sold "noble titles" from such countries as Albania

A duke's children will bear courtesy titles. The eldest son will use his father's next highest peerage title and will thus be, for example, the Marquess of Yyyyyy. Then his eldest son will perhaps be, for example, the Earl of Zzzzzzz. All the duke's other sons will be Lord Forename Surname, and all his daughters will be Lady Forename Surname. This is important to remember, because so many phonies use their forenames in the wrong way. If you meet "Lord Brian Blogges, Earl of Bloggeston", for example, you've met a phony. "Lord Brian Blogges" has to be the younger son of a duke or a marquess. (If he is a character in a novel, then he is a younger son who has been created an Earl, but that does not happen in real life today.) Similarly, "Lady Sarah Uuuuuu", who helps to sell bogus titles on the Internet, would have to be the daughter of a duke or a marquess or an earl, and she is not (which implies that the "titles" she sells are bogus also). The Earl of Bloggeston would be Lord Bloggeston, not Lord Brian Blogges.

Marquesses and Marchionesses

The second highest rank in the peerages is that of Marquess. If you met one you would address him in speech as "Lord Xxxxxx" (and his wife as "Lady Xxxxxx"). On the most formal occasions, and in writing, a marquess is styled "The Most Honourable". This style is used by marquesses only (and by phonies with bogus knighthoods). Again, as with dukes, you are unlikely to meet any fake British marquesses, but because of its relatively high rank it seems to be a popular choice in the non-British bogus "titles" market. One notorious example of the phonies claimed to have been granted the title by the Pope (despite not being a catholic and despite being divorced several times); another pretends that his title is from Portugal (a good choice for the phonies because very few people know much about that country). In Scotland marquess may be spelt marquis.

The rules outlined for the use of courtesy titles by a duke's children are similar to those for the children of a marquess.

Earls and Countesses

These are titles that existed in both England and Scotland before the peerages were created. The continental equivalent, Count, existed in continental Europe also from early times. It was thus a feudal title *(see below)* before it became a peerage title. The prefix is "The Right Honourable", which is shared by Viscounts and peerage Barons and members of the Privy Council, but this style also is used by phony knights. British earls

are addressed as "Lord Xxxxxx", but continental counts are addressed as "Count" or as "Count Yyyyyy".

Earls can have "Earl Surname" as their title, but usually the title name is different from the surname and is in the form of "Earl of Placename". The placename is of a town or city or county, so if you run into an earl whose placename appears to be of a village, as is often the case with the phonies, then you ought to be a little cautious. (The other warning signal, as has been stated above, is the use by a supposed Earl of "Lord Forename Surname" on his visiting card or business card or on an introduction.) If the placename has been taken from a country outside the British Isles, it is then likely to be associated with a wartime victory.

The children of earls follow a complex system. All the daughters are Lady Forename Surname. The eldest son takes his father's next title, so he may be Viscount Yyyyyy or Baron Zzzzzz and in either case would be addressed as Lord Yyyyyy or Lord Zzzzzz. All other sons have the prefix "The Honourable", abbreviated to "The Hon." or "The Honble", and they are not Lords. The prefix "Hon." or "Honble" is used only in writing, never in casual speech or on invitations or on visiting cards (so if it is used to address someone in conversation, or even during an introduction, it is a signal that something is wrong).

Viscounts and Viscountesses

In feudal times a count (*comes* in Latin) could have a deputy, his *vice comes* or viscount. In Britain the feudal *vice comes* was less a deputy to the earl rather than a representative, in the the earl's earldom, of the King. As such his role merged with that of the sheriff, so that you will find *vice comes* used to mean sheriff. The office of sheriff was not an hereditary position, although sometimes it effectively became so as the office holders handed on their profitable positions to their sons. This is important to remember because some of the bogus title merchants take the names of these ancient sheriffs, call them viscounts, confuse them with the viscounts that much later were introduced into the peerages, and then sell them to their victims with long stories of how these noble titles have been kept alive in families which do not want their names revealed but now need to earn a little money discreetly.

Viscounts were introduced into the English Peerage as late as 1440 and, being a peerage title, the title cannot be bought and sold (although that has not stopped one imaginative Internet merchant from trying). If you met one on a formal occasion or socially you would address him in speech as "Lord Xxxxxx" (and his wife as "Lady Xxxxxx"). All sons and daughters have the prefix of "The Hon." or "The Honble", so they are not lords and

ladies. If you should meet a viscount from a continental European country you would address him formally as "Viscount". The style of a Viscount, as that of an Earl (above) and a Baron (below) is "The Right Honourable".

There are several "Viscounts" around who bought their "titles" from merchants who convinced them that *vice comes* titles dating from 11th century Normandy and 12th century Ireland are still valid today. They have been advised that they are hereditary titles in the "feudal peerage". Such people may stretch the truth a little, perhaps by pretending that they have inherited the title rather than having bought it, but these people are usually victims, not crooks.

Barons and Baronesses

This is the lowest rank of the peerage (and remember that in the Scottish Peerage these are not Barons, they are the Lords of Parliament). It was introduced into England with the Norman Conquest, and subsequently into Scotland and Ireland. Initially it was a feudal rank tied to the land that the Baron held on a grant from the King. When the King wanted advice from his Great Council or from his Parliament, his Barons were summoned, and when he went to war his Barons mustered with their own retainers to form the royal army. If the ownership of the lands changed, by descent or by exchange or confiscation, the rank and privileges of Baron went to the new owner with the lands.

In those early days only the nobles could hold land, and insofar as any lands in, for example, Scotland and France, carried the rank of a feudal lord with them, that position remained in a sense unchanged for centuries. Laws were passed in France specifically to emphasise this principle, so the purchaser of lands carrying the rank of, for example, Count, could use that title only if he was noble already. In Scotland it was until recently possible to buy a feudal barony that would give the title of a Scottish Baron to a purchaser who already had a coat of arms (and was thus accounted noble), but if he did not have arms, then he had to wait until the Lord Lyon had received his Petition and granted him arms before society would accept him as a noble Baron. (The Scottish situation has been changed by the recent Act abolishing feudal tenure, as explained below.)

In England in the 14th century there was a process towards making titles personal, and in 1387 the King made the first Baron by Patent, by which time the summons to Parliament which confirmed a Baron's status had become hereditary and was thus personal. This was effectively the beginning of the English Peerage as we understand it today, but it should be noted that many of the laws said to apply then were invented much later.

The title of Baron is important to us because it is one of the most common for the "titles" merchants to exploit. For example, the early feudal baronial families in England who died out before the peerage was created left their names connected with specific lands, and the "titles" merchants then claim that their status as feudal (i.e. non-peerage) barons continued down the years (through fictitious descendants) until they were held by unnamed modern families which recently sold them to a merchant bank as an investment, and the merchant bank now wishes to dispose of them discreetly!

A peerage Baron is addressed in speech as "Lord Xxxxx" (and his wife as "Lady Xxxxx"). All sons and all daughters have the prefix of "The Hon." or "The Honble", so they are not lords and ladies. If you should meet a Baron from a continental European country you would address him as "Baron". The style of a Baron, as given above for an Earl and a Viscount, is "The Right Honourable". Feudal Barons are described below.

Baronets

The Baronetage of England and the Baronetage of Ireland were created in 1611, and the Baronetage of Scotland or Nova Scotia in 1625. The holders of a baronetage title are addressed as Sir Forename Surname and their wives as Lady Surname. Their children have no title (although the eldest son is technically an esquire, as some authorities insist all a Baronet's sons are), but the title of Baronet is hereditary and the eldest son inherits it. Buyers of bogus titles usually aim higher than this and we have in these last twelve years encountered only one bogus baronet.

Knights

Knights often belong to orders of knighthood such as those of the Garter and of the Thistle (the two highest and most exclusive) and the Order of the Bath or the Order of the British Empire. Knights not belonging to orders are known as Knights Bachelor, and all British knights are addressed as Sir Forename Surname, their wives being Lady Surname. Their children are untitled. Many of the countries of Western Europe have orders of knighthood, and their members are styled "Chevalier".

The Internet has proved a fertile breeding ground for bogus orders which sell "knighthoods" to "noble" candidates. Candidates who are not already "noble" can acquire "nobility" from a bogus "title" merchant, and thereafter they need only pay the "passage fee" for their installation and the annual "stallage fee" for membership of the order. An interesting development of this idea was the invention of "knightships" which could be seen offered on eBay for several thousand pounds.

Despite knighthoods and "knightships" being the lowest of the "titles" on offer, they appear to be very popular among those taking their first step into the ranks of the bogus "nobility", perhaps because these newcomers are a little hesitant about adopting too high a profile too soon. Promotion to being a duke, perhaps they think, can come a little later when they have more experience.

Feudal Barons

These have been mentioned earlier. Despite what the "titles" merchants claim, no feudal baronies survive in England that were not absorbed into the Peerage, and British Peerage titles cannot be bought and sold. The situation is the same in Ireland, a country that has had a very difficult time with bogus titles, but Scotland is different, for feudal law has survived there and feudal baronial titles continue to exist, although their status has been modified by the recent legislation that abolished feudal tenure.

The terms "baron" and "barony" may be used in a generic sense. A Scottish feudal barony can be of a rank higher than Baron. It may be a lordship or even an earldom, and while its owner may thus be a feudal lord or a feudal earl, reference will often be made to him as a baron. Similarly in England during the period in which the Baronage continued effectively to exist in parallel with the Peerage, all the peers of whatever rank could be described as barons. (Warwick the Kingmaker, the most famous earl perhaps in English history, has been described by historians as "the last of the barons".)

Feudal titles belonged to the lands and were borne by the lands' owners. A barony was in effect the combination of the baronial land and the baronial jurisdiction, and if this combination passed to another as "all and whole the lands and barony of ……", then the right to bear the title passed with it. The new legislation that became active on 28 November 2004 separated the title from the land (the jurisdiction had been ineffective for a long time) and recognised the title as a distinct dignity. This dignity, the baronial title, can be sold, but future heraldic rights to accompany it are as yet uncertain.

Below the rank of feudal Baron in Scotland is that of Laird. All feudal Barons are Lairds and some Lairds may be Barons, but this is a complex subject in which the definitions change over time and in different areas. A Chief of a clan, for example, is its Laird even if he is also a Duke. (When the Chief of Clan Grant heard that the King intended to make him an Earl he immediately demanded to know who would then be Laird of Grant.) So, as with Lords all over the British Isles, the usage of Laird (the Scottish equivalent of Lord) is blurred.

This is exploited by some Internet "titles" salesmen in this way. They argue that a Laird is a Scottish landowner and that by buying one square foot of land the purchaser becomes legally a Scottish Laird, equivalent to a Lord in England. It is legal, they claim, to use the word Lord instead of Laird because outside Scotland the word Laird is unknown. Thus the buyer can name his square foot of land whatever he wishes and may then legally represent himself as being Lord Landname. Thereafter, the buyer is assured, airlines will upgrade him, head waiters will give him the best table, and girls will be falling over to reach him. Ridiculous? Yes, of course it is ridiculous, but some have been selling this fraud, to people who live outside Britain and know little of what we describe in this briefing, for several years.

The correct way to address a Scottish feudal Baron or a Laird is by the name of his estate, his territorial designation. John Smith of Glensmith is thus addressed as Glensmith and his wife as Lady Glensmith or Madam Glensmith. Their eldest son is Robert Smith, younger of Glensmith, and he is addressed as Young Glensmith. Other sons have no distinguishing form of address, but all daughters use Smith of Glensmith as their surname, as in the example – Alexandra Smith of Glensmith.

In recent years the Lord Lyon has been persuaded to recognise feudal Barons on the basis of their ownership of a superiority, a link, often of very little value, in the feudal tenure chain abolished by the recent legislation. Such feudal Barons are not recognised as having a territorial designation and if they do use one without the Lord Lyon's authority they must be viewed with grave suspicion. There has been a recent case of an English businessman who, having recorded his arms in Scotland, changed his name formally to include an imitation of a territorial designation, therewith allowing the unwary to believe he is what he is not. There may be others.

In respect of rank the feudal system in France, as mentioned earlier, was similar to that in Scotland. Land could be raised to a seigneurie or a barony or a county, for example, and the owner would, if noble, bear that title. If the land was later alienated, then the rank would go to the new owner. The Revolution of 1789 changed the social structure and, it may be argued, destroyed the concept of nobility (which cynics defined as exemption from taxes), but the nobility as a caste continued and at the Restoration of the Monarchy its legitimacy was confirmed. The feudal titles anciently held by the lands and not, it is argued, destroyed in the fires to which the title deeds were consigned, are believed, in the absence of a royal or government edict abolishing them, to have survived. However, this view is controversial, and while some lawyers are content to help their clients buy these lands for the sake of their titles, others will not. As the

Notes on French Titles (a recently revised PDF file now in its third edition) explain, the great changes in the definition and structure of the French nobility down the centuries was a far more complicated progression than known in England or Scotland, and the French situation today in the 21st century allows few certainties (being either complex or chaotic, as the individual's prejudices persuade). Thus on meeting someone with a French title it is advisable to accord the usual courtesies, to accept at face value what is presented, and to be cautious until the identity is confirmed.

The Rest of Us

Esquires and Gentlemen are the lowest two ranks of the nobility, but as no one is selling them as titles they can be ignored here. However, it is worth pointing out that the word Gentleman has two meanings. In England it is the lowest rank of the Gentry and in Scotland it is the lowest rank of the Nobility (as that term is used there – and also in much of continental Europe), but it is also the status of all who are noble. This is illustrated by the tale, perhaps untrue but valid nevertheless as an illustration, that Louis XIV in France was begged by his nurse to make her son a gentleman. The King replied that he was willing to give him a title, but that only God could make him a gentleman — by which he meant that the true status of a gentleman was in the blood, not in the title.

Lords of the Manor

Although manorial lords used to be primarily members of the nobility or gentry, the title itself carried no legal status of nobility or gentry with it, and a "lord of the manor" is not a lord in the sense in which it is generally used here; nor is he addressed as "Lord". On the website of the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. is the following warning to potential victims —

> "A manorial lordship is not an aristocratic title, but a semi-extinct form of landed property. Lordship in this sense is a synonym for ownership. It cannot be stated on a passport, and does not entitle the owner to a coat of arms."

When manorial lordships are offered for sale today by auction houses, often the only tangible evidence of their existence is a couple of documents that show the lordship once existed. For the continuation of that existence potential buyers are given a Statutory Declaration provided by the seller testifying to a belief that the lordship has continued since the most recent document was created. Reliance on such a belief cannot be advised.

The Scams

We have implied that many of the bogus aristocrats you may meet do not have criminal intent. They are victims of an expanding Internet business selling bogus "titles" to unsuspicious buyers. The development of the Internet has been a scam merchant's dream. It was so even before it could allow instantaneous commercial transactions, but now that late-night readers, drifting tiredly and incautiously from site to site, may be persuaded to type in sixteen digits and an expiry date, the Web has become a fast track to easy riches, and the friends the new "lords" make become their road to easy riches.

The Blatantly Immoral Approach

There seem to be three approaches. The first is quite blatantly immoral. This is how one merchant promotes his products —

> People want degrees and titles for different reasons. Here are some of the more common:
>
> * To gain equal status for a job interview or to attain promotion.
>
> * For prestige – i.e. to gain acceptance or a title, e.g. Doctor or Lord.
>
> * For addition to letterheads &c., i.e. to enhance business in a particular field.
>
> * To get qualifications missed out on earlier in their education.
>
> * To achieve recognition for experience gained in their given field of expertise.
>
> * As a door opener to follow a particular interest or enterprise.

That seems fairly straightforward, but look carefully at the following:

> * To enhance both current and various fallback identities. Nothing lends more credibility to a new, alternative identity than an academic record dating back for decades. Only amateurs will rely on passport, ID card and driving licence alone to provide smooth mobility.
>
> * Better thoroughfare – as an academic scholar and/or an aristocrat, the chances are that you will most usually be given VIP treatment at no extra charge.

* As an additional cushion against government thugs running wild – even hardboiled law enforcement officers (lower and higher echelons alike) are likely to be more polite, considerate and careful when dealing with "**Prof. Dr. John Doe**" or "**John Lord of Doestead**" instead of plain vanilla "**Old John Doe the Pushover**".

* In most cases, degrees and titles spell out affluent well-connectedness, and civil servants, clerks and secretaries all over the world have learned to heed that lesson or ignore it with a vengeance *(sic)*. So what it boils down to is the insinuation that your international (if not local) contacts could create a considerable stink if you are not treated well enough.

* In offshore business and finance, appearances matter more than elsewhere. If you are short of a credible bank reference, a title of nobility on a business card – preferably in combination with an academic degree – may very well do the trick.

* Hence, valid degrees and titles are no mere vanity items to impress the clueless. Instead, they may very well pay for themselves many times over provided you play it right and employ them wisely and with proper discretion.

That last point seems almost an invitation to criminality. But let's look at some of the products on offer 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Under the slogans of "Nobility by Mail" and "Blue Blood for the Asking!" appears the following notice —

> The Following Titles & Honors Are Currently Available:
>
> Scottish Lord titles ("Laird"):
>
> Laird of Camster (fee: US$ 365)
>
> Laird of John O'Groats (fee: US$ 960)
>
> Laird of Cranachan (fee: US$ 2,300)
>
> Laird of Muness (fee: US$ 8,300)
>
> Note that these are no mere "mock" titles! They are very much for real, and public usage by holder is accepted by all UN countries, regardless of prevailing local political system.
>
> Some jurisdictions even allow entry of nobility titles into holder's passport – please check with your local legal advisor whether this may apply to you and if so, how to proceed.

All titles come with a small patch of land: one square foot each in the case of Camster, O'Groats and Cranachan, one square yard for Muness.

Also included are ~ deed, coat-of-arms, ID card, documentation &c. This is vital, as Scottish law permits transference of title to any owner of pertinent land, similar to the British "Lord of the Manor".

Time frame – Please allow appr. 4-6 weeks till delivery.

A note on usage: The title "Laird" being widely unfamiliar outside of Scotland, it is common, acceptable and legally sound usage to convert it to "Lord" elsewhere. Hence, you may sport a "Lord" with impunity on your letterhead, your business card, your door plate, &c.

(It is, of course, neither "common" nor "acceptable" nor "legally sound" to convert "Laird" to "Lord" in order to "sport" it on your letterhead, business card or doorplate.)

There are several merchants with operations similar to this, some of them offering other advantages not listed here. Some assure the buyers that bank managers will "lean over backwards" in their efforts to lend them money, that tough businessmen will melt and swoon in their impressive presence, that they will never want for companionship because all girls want to bed a lord, that everywhere they will be treated as a VIP and, of course, the airlines will always upgrade them to first class.

The example quoted above appears to offer only Scottish titles, but the competitors offer English titles too, these also being often based on the purchase of one square foot of land to which they promise any title can be added – Lord, Baron, Count, Earl, Duke, Chevalier – all at different prices.

It is perhaps unnecessary to state here that what is offered is, apart from the square foot of land, absolutely worthless.

The Discreetly Immoral Approach

The second approach is discreetly immoral in that it is implied that the buyer is acquiring a mark of respect which is only his due, a mark of respect that will lead those he meets to accord him the respect he desires and believes he deserves automatically and justifiably. This approach tends to emphasise that the "honour" will be hereditary, "a constant reminder to the descendants of what they owe to their ancestor".

This is how one typical merchant presented his wares —

> You will be able to acquire the rights to a "styled titled name and legend" with a genuine place in British history, dating back to circa 1066 A.D. possibly earlier.
>
> You will be able to call yourself the "Lord of the Manor" of an actual town or village in England.
>
> Your spouse will automatically become "Lady of the Manor".
>
> You may add your title to official documents, such as passports (local regulations apply), driving licence, credit cards and bank accounts.
>
> English solicitors process all legal documentation, therefore, transactions are covered by Solicitor's Compensation Fund, underwritten by the Law Society of Great Britain.
>
> All our Titles can be passed to an heir, therefore able to be conveyed / transferred.
>
> You don't have to live in the U.K. to be eligible for a Lord of the Manor Title.
>
> Researched family seal of honour with Latin motto (if found) incorporated in a certificate of Title.
>
> Display documents on hand made Egyptian papyrus (aged to give them an "antique" effect) are provided to adorn the walls of your castle / home.

Now what, you may want to ask, is a "styled titled name and legend"? Well, it isn't a noble title. It is actually a trademark. What this merchant was doing was finding the names of old manors long since lost in history, then registering their names as trademarks, and placing part of the resulting paperwork among the documents he manufactured to support the apparent existence of a manorial lordship or a barony since the time of the Domesday Book, 1086 A.D. The documents, you note, are said to be of "handmade Egyptian papyrus" and are apparently artificially "aged to give them an 'antique' effect".

The "researched family seal of honour with Latin motto (if found)" is a coat of arms once borne by someone who shares the buyer's surname, arms to which the buyer has, of course, no right whatsoever. (The arms scams are discussed separately later.)

The merchant explained the advantages of buying a title thus —

> With a Title in your name we are confident you will experience a difference in the attitude of people towards you. Titled people are mostly treated like V.I.P.s or Aristocrats. In the business world people take you more seriously, resulting often in the clinching of deals. In your career you may find it to be a real door opener. When you make reservations in restaurants, you may find yourself sitting at the best table, with very attentive service. Check in to an hotel to experience the ultimate preferential treatment – the best room, the best service, often complimentary fruit baskets or wine in the room. You can use your Title when and where you choose, at home or abroad, it could say more than a Gold or Platinum credit card!

As guidance on the use of the title the merchant helpfully explains that –

> In the same context that we don't use middle names when introducing ourselves, or on letters or business cards, modern day names are often abbreviated, this practice is permitted providing that the use of the "styled titled name" is not to be used to purport to be a peer of the realm, or to deceive in any way.

– so that, for example, the Lord of the Manor of Vwxyz (which, remember, is bogus anyway), was encouraged to abbreviate his "titled" name to "Lord Vwxyz", which would most certainly be a deception in whatever way.

Critical readers will have noted that all these merchants tend to be weak on syntax, grammar and punctuation. They are weak on history, too, as their attempts to brief their victims on mediaeval society reveals only too well. This particular merchant, the author of the extraordinary sentence quoted above, was responsible also for the hilarious advice that – "The name 'noble' comes from the belief that they were to act in a 'noble' manner." – which ignores both the reality of the word's origin ("noble" meant "known" and by implication "free"), and the fact that in English the adjective came from the noun, not vice versa.

The Investment Approach

One of the merchants developed a sales line based on the alleged investment value of what he offered. His company pretended to be British, but it was actually American and thus avoided the law which prevents British companies from offering investment advice unless licensed to do so by the Government.

His pitch was similar to many others, but included the word "profit" twice.

> People possess noble titles because they confer instant celebrity, glamour, prestige ... and they are one of the best investments in the market today.

(Actually, people possess genuine noble titles because they are either born with them or inherit them or are granted them by a sovereign.)

> To enjoy the glamour and status accorded to the elite of society and participate in the world-class distinction and social promotion a title affords (and also to profit financially from it), our firm will show you how you can interweave the illustrious histories of the great ancient landed families and royal houses with those of your own family creating a unique heritage to pass on to your heirs or to re-sell and profit from.
>
> Become a genuine Lord, Lady, Baron, Viscount ... make your dreams come true in this lifetime, not the next!

Additionally, there was the suggestion of a pyramid operation in which buyers of feudal titles may create and sell other titles themselves —

> Each of these feudal lords was entitled to appoint his own Court baron or court Leet. The officials of these Courts formed under the feudal system what was in effect the local government. The Court usually had a Baron Marshall, Baron Steward, Baron Serjeant, Baron Constable, a Clerk of the Green Cloth, a Keeper of the Hawks, a master of the Horse, etc. <u>These were Offices of</u> <u>Nobility</u> and could be bought and sold also. Our firm has a variety of these available. They could be hereditary or for life. (A person acquiring a feudal Lordship of the Manor, Barony or Viscountcy can appoint his or her own Court or sell these offices legally.)

Assuredly **NOT** "<u>Offices of Nobility</u>" !!! Emphasis of the investment value was hammered home explicitly:

> Financially, the feudal titles market has been booming. The cost of feudal titles has risen approximately 900% since the mid 1970's when auctions began to be held regularly in London. This provided a ready market in which to buy and sell these interesting historic properties, often making their owners substantial profits in a very short time. *Feudal titles are a limited resource* – they can no longer be created, thus those which exist are preciously sought-after.

> This has made the market rise every single year. Weathering recessions, inflation, stock market crashes, currency devaluations and a host of other economic crises in the last quarter century, the feudal titles market is an extremely stable and thriving investment opportunity. Even if you don't re-sell your title, you can profit by selling the offices of nobility under it that pertain to it's *(sic)* Court.

It is worth making a few comments here. First, the price being asked for bogus "feudal titles" has indeed risen significantly since the Internet expanded the potential market at almost zero marketing cost, and the fakes that were once impossible to sell for more than a few dollars could be advertised for ten times as much. Second, genuine feudal titles are indeed limited in number, but the imagination of those inventing bogus titles appears to be unlimited. Third, a Baron Bailiff was the bailiff of the barony. The Baron Marshal was the marshal of the barony. These were not noble offices and any attempt to sell them as such would be as unlawful as this merchant's operation.

A serious effort was made to make the operation appear respectable by using photographs of the Royal Family on the website and by bringing into the documentation evidence (?) of Government recognition —

> Additionally we register and legalise all feudal titles sales with the relevant government agencies such as with Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and under other international treaties and government agencies where applicable.

Now what happened here was that an apostille was obtained from the Foreign Office (under a 19th century procedure that is now outdated) to add a measure of formality to one of the documents (for example to a letter from a lawyer certifying the authenticity of the seller's signature). This apostille was then introduced into the bundle of documents to give the impression that the Foreign Office stamp was now authenticating the entire transaction. This sleight of hand was as dishonest as the "titles" the merchant offered for "investment".

Orders of Knighthood

A recent development has been the growth on the Internet of bogus orders of knighthood. These tend to model themselves on the genuine Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta, publicise as their aim the support of a variety of charities, and charge their members entry and membership fees. Promotion and advancement up the ranks of knighthood is usually possible according to the fees paid.

One of the more notorious of these "orders" was formed under English law as a limited liability company (limited by a guarantee of just one pound sterling, but nevertheless claiming that this formation represented official recognition by "Her Majesty's Secretary of State") and two months later was advertising itself as "one of the world's most prestigious orders of knighthood". Candidates were dubbed as knights (ladies were admitted as dames) and encouraged to use the prefix "Sir" in their ordinary lives. You are more likely to meet these in Great Britain than in any other country, because they expect to blend into the genuine knights already there. When they are forced to confess that their order is not one of those authorised by the Queen, it is best to dismiss them.

An interesting development was the emergence of "knightships" which, according to their salesmen, were not knighthoods but carried the same prefix of "Sir". They appeared on Internet auctions where, it is claimed by the merchants, they fetched up to US$ 25,000. They are, of course, utterly worthless.

The past tense has been used in the descriptions of most of the scams above because some of the merchants, such as the vendor of "knightships", are no longer in business. Their tactics, however, will be copied, and in some cases have been licensed to "affiliate" scams.

Coats of Arms

Arms are the ensigns of nobility and, as such, are given away with bogus titles as they are bought, exploiting the "family coat of arms" fraud. With the one exception of Poland, where for historical reasons arms are tribal, not personal, arms belong at any one time to a single living individual. Others in the same family bear similar coats but incorporate in them small differences. When one speaks of "family arms", the term includes the stem or basic coat borne by the head of the family and usually associated by others with that specific family, plus, loosely, the differenced arms of the family's cadets — although today strict differencing is only in Scotland.

Salesmen having recognised a long time ago that it would be very uneconomic to produce different arms for everyone, have fostered the myth that each family surname has its own "family coat of arms", and in consequence in shopping mall boutiques, and especially on the Internet, scrolls and teeshirts and shields and mugs emblazoned with "Your Arms" can be bought for a few dollars. Such gimmicks are historically worthless. If your name is Smith, for example, you might be given, as several Smiths were, the arms of a baronet, the last member of an extinct Canadian family with which you have no connection at all, and which you could not use as your own arms even if there was a blood connection.

Some Frauds

You now have a rough sketch of the background, so you already know a few of the identification features which will reveal the potential frauds. In this section we shall look again at these.

The first point to remember is that the genuine lord knows all the rules. He knows how titles are used formally and informally, and he knows how to live easily with his own (because usually he has done so for many years before he met you). Seldom is he pushy. Some fakes really throw their weight around, because they think that is how all real lords behave — a few may do, actually, but they are a small minority.

Fake lords tend to talk a lot about themselves, their relations and their friends, principally because that is supposed to impress you. This is where they are at risk, for they will be talking about people who have titles, some real, some fake.

The first item to check is nationality. Next is the origin of the title – is it English, Scottish, Irish, of Great Britain, or of the United Kingdom – or is it from some other country? If the holder is British and the title is foreign, then without a royal licence its use is forbidden (even if it is genuine). If the holder is American, then the example of those Americans granted British knighthoods should be remembered — they can place the appropriate initials after their names (for example, K.B.E.) but they cannot, in accordance with American law, use the prefix "Sir".

If the title originates in the British Isles and the holder is British, check whether it is a peerage title, a feudal title, or a baronetcy, or a knighthood. If it is a peerage title or a baronetcy, then you should find it in a current copy of a Peerage & Baronetage published by Burke's or Debrett's, or in Who's Who. You may also check online with Burke's Peerage & Gentry. Check the information given there with what your acquaintance has provided. If he claims a peerage title or a baronetcy and is not included in Burke's or Debrett's or Who's Who, then he has some difficult explaining to do.

If a Briton claims a British feudal title you may safely disregard all except Scottish Barons and Lairds. These should be found in Volume I of Burke's Landed Gentry series, but in fact not all are present, and you should check online with Burke's Peerage & Gentry, or

with Lyon Office. For a time it was possible to find the owner of a questionable Scottish feudal barony attempting to perfect it by prescription. This was quite lawful and may become so again, but the owner must present himself as a Baron, and he should be prepared to explain that he is involved in the prescription process.

Britons with feudal titles from England, Wales or Ireland have most probably acquired them from bogus "titles" salesmen. They may fully believe, at the time you meet them, that they are genuine earls or Viscounts or Barons, and the fact that they are not does not mean they are crooks — more often they are victims.

Lords of the Manor may have bought a genuine manorial lordship, or they may have bought a "styled titled name and legend". In either case they are not Lords and should not style themselves as such. You will find, however, that many of those in the second group ask to be addressed as "The Right Honourable Lord Manorname", which sounds as if they are peers, but the truth will be revealed by checking Burke's or Debrett's or Who's Who.

By far the most common indicator of the fake, as has been described above, is the misuse of the Christian name. A recent case of two brothers borrowing heavily and fraudulently from a bank revealed that the elder was "Lord Forename Surname" while the younger claimed to be "Viscount Surname". These two titles, the bank manager had been persuaded, were hereditary. If the two men had changed their titles around, then the elder must have been the eldest son of a duke or marquess using one of his father's junior titles, and the younger would have been using the correct courtesy style. In that case all the bank manager would have to do would be to ask who their father was (and then to call for the police if he was not a duke or marquess). However, with the titles used as they were the manager should have called for the police immediately, for the younger son was using the courtesy title of an eldest son while he had an elder brother. (For a half-brother who had a different mother who was a countess in her own right, and if their father was a duke or marquess, the titles could have been valid, but that possibility was remote.)

The next most common indicator of the fake is the misuse, usually by bogus baronets and knights, of such prefixes as Most Honourable and Right Honourable. If you do meet a Right Honourable Sir John Smith he is a member of Her Majesty's Privy Council (a rare privilege) or he is a fake (increasingly less rare, regrettably).

Reports of criminal prosecutions of men posing as Lords reveal that the impostors seldom study the factors discussed in this briefing. In addition to the simple mis-

takes of misusing Christian names and prefixes, they betray themselves usually in references to their families, especially to their children. Fake viscounts and barons tend to give their children "titles", so that their sons become "Lord Forename" and their daughters "Lady Forename". Fake earls may refer to their daughters correctly, but "Lord Forename" will be wrong for all their sons.

If you are suspicious, it can be helpful to ask about the suspect's parents. If a father is said to be still alive, then the fake, if he has claimed an hereditary title (as is usual) will have to invent a title for him which is senior to the one he, the fake, is using. When he has to think quickly, he may, unless the situation has been anticipated, make a simple error. If he admits to having an elder brother who is not a half-brother (and he is not the Earl of Selkirk, at times the only possible exception to this) but yet is posing as a man with an old hereditary peerage title, he is a fraud.

As the previous edition of this booklet was being oompleted, the Australian newspapers were searching Sydney for the "prince" who, described as "Lord Andrew Mountbatten", had been passing himself off as a son of Earl Mountbatten of Burma, the last Viceroy of India. You did not have to know that Lord Mountbatten left no sons to continue his name to recognise this man as a fraud — all that was necessary to remember was that as Lord Mountbatten was only an earl, and "Lord Andrew Mountbatten" could only be the younger son of a duke or marquess, not of an earl, he was not a Mountbatten.

The most recent case of a fictitious title to hit the headlines is that of the "Earl of Buckingham", but this appears to have been a Walter Mitty fantasy, not a fraud and, apart from the psychological trauma for his family, comparatively harmless. This bogus lord was American and, unlike so many others, had studied the peerage and the behaviour expected of its members. Another American impostor deceived New York society in 2004 as the wife of a non-existent Saudi prince and, apart from the suspicions of a photographer who thought she had made an uncharacteristic pass at him, only her involvement in an insurance fraud betrayed her.

In the Republic of Ireland "Lord Arnold Johnson" and his wife "Lady Guinevere Johnson" duped a series of banks and mortgage companies before being exposed as Mr and Mrs Mallows, and as so often it was the bank frauds that led to their downfall, not the recognition of their titles as fictitious, but the case of the "Cranbrook" brothers in England was triggered by a neighbour who suspected their behaviour was inconsistent with their noble rank, checked the peerage directories, and called in the police. This booklet encourages such curiosity.

Genealogy Scams

Associated with the "Your Family Coat of Arms" scams mentioned earlier are several "family history" operations that sell boilerplate rubbish programmed to use the surnames of those whose attention can be caught as they incautiously enter a shopping mall or sleepily surf the Web late at night. For several years the most famous of these frauds was Halberts Family Heritage which at one time was associated with the Burke's Peerage Partnership of the late Harold Brooks-Baker. This link was exposed in 1997 when a male reader received a letter —

> *Dear **Ms** Daft,*
> *I have exciting news for you and fellow Dafts. The Burke's Peerage World Book of Dafts, and you, Ms Daft, are listed in it.*

— and replied —

> *Dear Mr Brooks-Baker,*
> *I am compiling the Daft Book of Berks, and you are in it. Want a copy?*

What Halberts provided for the victim's money was a collection of basic and often inaccurate facts about the pursuit of family history supplemented by a very substantial number of pages listing telephone numbers of people bearing the same surname as the victim — plus, of course, the "family coat of arms". The pages of telephone numbers could often amount to two-thirds of the total book, and the heraldic illustration was abominable.

The careless manner in which the Internet family history scams exploit computer databases was memorably illustrated by the following pitch for an "exciting heirloom book" —

> *Dear Mr. Bums,*
> *Many Bums inquire often as to when we intend to update our Bums Family Book. Now, I am delighted to share with you an incredible accomplishment. I know it will be of great interest to you and all the Bums.*

— but how many Bums it did interest is not known.

Perhaps the most effective exploitation of computerisation by this sector of the history scam industry is by a company that has established hundreds of affiliate operations across the world. These sell a "Family Name History" which is a computer-printed form with some gaps filled by the buyer's information, and other gaps filled from the computer memory. It is unnecessary to

illustrate the result at length, for websites kindly supply "Tasters" designed to whet the victims' appetites, introduced with these words —

> This is a Free preview of **part** of the information in your Family Name History. This is just a small portion of your complete history and is intended to give you a Free sample of a detailed, and thoroughly researched, family name history which contains a wealth of significant information.

This does not reveal the full monstrosity of what is offered to the customers, but it will demonstrate how the system works. The basic text of the part previewed may be as follows:

> **Authentic information** extracted from the <--1--> Family Name History.
>
> The <--1--> history has been located in the archives of the Research Center and this renowned resource has authenticated the following information:
>
> <--1--> is a surname found primarily in <--2-->. It should be noted that <--1--> family members have migrated through history thereby carrying the name to many areas.
>
> The <--1--> surname is classified as of <--3--> origin, taken from the <--3a--> of the original bearer.
>
> In studying our archives we found that one of the earliest references to the family name <--1--> dates back in history to the year <--4-->.
>
> There is documentation related to many <--1--> family members and we mention here <--5--> by way of example.
>
> The colour <--6--> in the coat of arms of the family <--1--> symbolizes <--6a-->. It also reflects the hopes, ambitions and aspirations of its original bearer.

Fields -1- and -2- are completed with the data supplied by the buyer – his name and country. Field -3- is fed by the databank, and might be, for example, "occupational", in which case Field -3a- would be "trade or profession". Fields -4- and -5- are filled with respectively a year and a forename supplied by the databank. Field -6- might be, for example, "Gules (Red)", in

which case field -6a- would be "Foritude (*sic*) and Magnanimity".

The theory that the tinctures (colours, metals and furs) of the arms have such meanings as fortitude and magnanimity is an idle fancy, dating from a period long after the birth of heraldry, which was demolished centuries ago. Incidentally, despite the boasted heraldic expertise at its disposal, the HRC computer persists in describing gold and silver as colours – they are metals.

With the text of the "history" assembled thus, it is obvious why it cannot be claimed as having been "individually researched". If it were so, then it would not be possible for fortitude to be misspelt every time it occurs in a "history". The operation claims to have —

> "the largest and most extensive facility of its kind in the world with a library of original books dating back to the 1600's, along with reproduced manuscripts and documents dating from even earlier centuries. Our library includes reference books relating to people in history, passenger lists of old sailing ships and immigrant lists, all of which are used to do our research and collect information about names and people in history who bore those names. Our archives contain information on millions of names from around the world. Many of our books are written in the language particular to the region of origin that they cover, and we pride ourselves on the fact that our research staff are chosen for both their multi-linguistic abilities and their third level studies in history. Our Family Name Histories are individually researched from the documented sources and they are researched in our own headquarters."

As will be obvious from the example given below, and is evident from the *system* described above, these "histories" are not "individually researched".

> "All research is original ..... and every scrap of historical data can be proved as authentic by producing the source references which we are happy to do upon request."

This is an arrogant claim. As will be seen below, the "histories" often advance contradictory theories that cannot all be authentic and thus cannot all be proved to be so. There is so much nonsense it is quite difficult to choose which "historical scraps" we should question for authenticity. But let us choose one and leave it at that until later — where is the source on which this strange assertion is based: "There is documentation related to many Gordon family members and we mention here

Scottish Gordon by way of example."??? Who was "Scottish Gordon", who were his parents, when was he born, when did he die, and where was he baptised with that odd Christian name? And how "happy" will the researcher be who is asked to respond to this request?

We should now turn to an example of a Taster and look at the "Family Name History" of Jones. Jones is the most common of Welsh surnames, so it should not be too difficult to provide genuine information. This is how it reads —

> Authentic information extracted from the Jones Family Name History.

Well, that is a stretch. "The Jones Family Name History" is what is being constructed by the computer preparatory to being jet-printed on a piece of coloured paper. The "information" (of questionable authenticity) is extracted from the database, not a Jones history.

> The Jones history has been located in the archives of the Research Center and this renowned resource has authenticated the following information:

Nonsense! The "Research Center" is certainly not a "renowned resource" — it is an egregious resource, contemptuously dismissed by professional genealogists.

> Jones is a surname which is found **primarily in Wales**. It should be noted that Jones family members have migrated through history thereby carrying the name to many areas.

That Jones is a surname found primarily in Wales is absolutely true, but the next sentence is pure weasel, because it appears in every "history" to allow escape from complaints that a name might belong somewhere else, somewhere other than where the "history" claims.

> In studying our archives we found that one of the earliest references to the family name Jones dates back in history to the year 1282.

This is interesting. There were no hereditary surnames in Wales until the 16th century (although Jones as a surname was already established at several places in England two centuries earlier than that).

> There is documentation related to many Jones family members and we mention here Christopher Jones by way of example.

It is difficult to challenge this, but one is tempted to speculate about the significance such information as this would have for the buyer. Documents about people named Jones exist, even for Christopher Jones? Wow!

Earlier there was mention of contradictions. We may be content with one example. It is clearly stated that the surname of Jones is found **primarily** in Wales, but a "Family Name History" offered for sale states:

> Jones is a surname which is found **primarily in Ireland**. It should be noted that Jones family members have migrated through history thereby carrying the name to many areas.

And again:

> Jones is a surname which is found **primarily in Scotland**. It should be noted that Jones family members have migrated through history thereby carrying the name to many areas.

And yet again:

> Jones is a surname which is found **primarily in African-american**. It should be noted that Jones family members have migrated through history thereby carrying the name to many areas.

African-american? What source authenticated that? But then, what source could have originated the Smiths **primarily** in **Austria, Denmark, England, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Prussia** and **Scotland**?

This operation promotes itself as expert in mediaeval heraldry, yet the pseudo-heraldic decoration on its documents suggests it was designed by someone who once saw a Hollywood Robin Hood movie, half-recalls the shields borne by the soldiers, and was asked to produce something pretty and authentic. The result is truly atrocious. The tinctures are not heraldic, the proportions and positioning of the charges are inaccurate, such rules as the prohibition of placing colour on colour are disregarded, and the general ignorance is such that the word "blazon" (the verbal definition of arms) is used to mean, on one page of the website, a shield.

Here is an example of its expertise in heraldry —

Another company using affiliates to sell its fictions has effectively rewritten English history and much of the continental European history and geography as well. Those who may already have bought the history of their "Distinguished Surnames" might like to scan the comments contributed by an historian —

> The Saxon Chronicle (perhaps more precisely the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, for the work consists of several manuscripts – but this is a relatively minor point) was begun in the 9th century, not in the 10th century as stated, and various additions were made during the next three centuries. The "Chronicle", described throughout the "Distinguished Surname" histories as "painstakingly researched", was in fact a synthesis of oral traditions and those unreliable histories that had survived in the few scriptoria left unpillaged and unburnt by pagan invaders, and as such it contains many errors.
>
> Saxon origins are claimed for almost everyone's surname, but there were no hereditary surnames in England in Saxon times. The arrival in England of Hengist and Horsa was in 449, not 400 – a small point of little significance today, of course, but these operators are selling what they have claimed to be "meticulously researched" history.
>
> The Saxons settled in Essex, Middlesex, Sussex and Wessex, but not, as claimed, in Kent, which was settled by the Jutes. The Jutes were distinct from the Saxons, both in origin and in the artefacts they left. Saxony as it is today (a region of North Germany some way north and east of the Rhine Valley) is confused throughout these histories with the place from which the Saxons came to Britain, Schleswig-Holstein, a very long way indeed from the Rhine Valley.
>
> The "armada" of "White Sails" surfaces in all the "Ancient Histories" I have seen. The passengers aboard the armada may have been "decimated" (which means a loss of 10%) as is claimed, but it ought to be noted that as an armada is a fleet of armed ships (the word being derived from the Latin *armare*), the correct use of the word implies their readiness for warlike action, which was not true.

These "ancient" histories of allegedly distinguished surnames would not, if written by a 12-year-old examination candidate, have earned a mark higher than zero. The grammar and punctuation and style are, in general, appalling. But these are not the work of young students under examination stress: they are compositions written for money. The authors who feed the computers have

access to reference books and all the time necessary to ensure the facts are correct – they cannot be excused.

The absurdities continue endlessly. The Saxons, already mentioned above, are reported in the "Distinguished Surname Claxton" history to be "along the Rhine valley as far north east as Denmark" (rather as the St Louis traffic runs west along Route 66 as far north east as Montreal) – which puts the authors' knowledge of geography on a par with their skills as historians.

The "Distinguished Surname Trowbridge" history asserts that Charles the Simple (King of France who was deposed in 922 and died in 929) granted Northern France to Rollo, *1st Duke of Normandy*, after he had conceded defeat to the Norseman who had landed in France in 940 and besieged Paris - BUT

§ Charles died eleven years before this, and Rollo died around 932 at the age of 82;

§ it was his grandson Richard I (942-996) who was the first Duke of Normandy – not Rollo;

§ the battle to which the statement refers was fought at Chartres – not "outside Paris" as the author of this "history" imagines;

§ it was Rollo who was defeated – not Charles;

§ and the territory ceded to Rollo by Charles (and confirmed in 911, not 940) was roughly equal in area to about 2% of the area of modern France or, to be a little more generous, about 6% of modern Northern France – not 100% of Northern France.

In another of the histories the Romans are reported as leaving England in the second century AD, but their evacuation was not completed until the second decade of the fifth century, and even the order for their withdrawal to Gaul did not arrive until 409.

The Jones history is special. Rarely can anything claiming to be genealogy have been so hilarious. There were, as noted earlier, no hereditary surnames in Wales until the 16th century, yet the authors claim on the basis of the pretended existence of the Jones surname in early mediaeval times that all Welsh families of the name of Jones have an ancient royal origin.

The computerised databank which churns out this nonsense must contain hundreds of errors, and, through the way the material is regurgitated, it is fully capable of generating many thousands more. Unfortunately, the operation is so profitable it is unlikely ever to be closed down voluntarily — it can only be ignored.

A Footnote

The Baronage magazine has been online for the last twelve years. Although published primarily for readers interested in the art, history and symbolism of heraldry, and in the history, politics, warfare, chivalry, books, cinema and television to which heraldry has thematic links, its editors have been drawn by the large numbers of readers' letters on this subject into the controversies surrounding the adoption of bogus titles. In consequence, until Lord Bradford took over the lead with his **Fake Titles website**, Baronage became the principal Internet source of information on the fraudulent merchants operating in this field, and probably exposed more of them than has any other publication.

However, The Baronage Press and its editorial staff became in consequence the target of unrelenting vilification, the various accusations levelled including racketeering, grand larceny, fraud, tax evasion, forgery, unhealthy sexual appetites, syndicated extortion, drug trafficking, money laundering, and, incredibly, using cookies both to blackmail Baronage readers and to access their bank accounts. To these traditional charges has recently been added that of selling fake titles with the assistance of a fake prince. An examination of the loose alliance of those exploiting the cover the Internet gives mudslingers reveals a bizarre mixture of conmen, thugs, poseurs, blatherskites, humbugs, fantasists and criminals, with a small sprinkling of honest men who don't always remember accurately what they have read and sometimes unthinkingly accept what they find on the Internet. (Of this a recent newspaper editorial noted drily — "*Words get subtly altered at each successive quotation. People start reacting to what they believe has been said rather than to what was actually said. Then others react to the reaction, removing the argument yet further from the original statement*.") The key to understanding Internet defamation is to ask: Who benefits ?

Are you smart enough to win against your children?

Without doubt the very best boardgame for families.

Ancestral Portrait Engravings can be located with the help of The Baronage Press database.

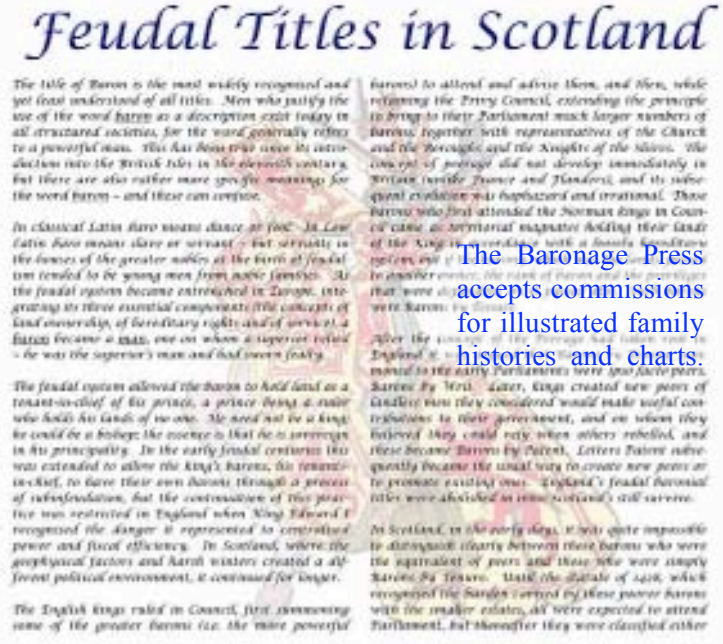
Click here for details.

Before photography, which means before cinema and television were invented, portrait engravings were the only means we had to distribute the images of your ancestors – and of the diplomats and politicians, the distinguished scientists and eminent physicians, and notable musicians, artists, poets and authors. Most of the portraits were engraved from oil paintings, but some were based on sketches from life. For historians they offer valuable insights into the contemporary interpretation of character, but for ancestor hunters they are often the only tangible item they can own of their origins. The Baronage Press has a computerised database listing twenty thousand of these engraved portraits produced between the late 17th and early 20th centuries, and may be able to find your ancestors among them..

Burke's Peerage

The change to modern printing technology made redundant the skilfully chiselled printing blocks Burke's had used for the Peerage and the Landed Gentry directories since the early 19th century. Some were sold to the heads of the families represented in those books, and the remainder are now available for any family members who wish to preserve this unique memento of their history. The blocks may be kept for their original purpose, which was to print the full armorial achievement by which the family is known, or the metal may be removed from the wooden block and then polished, mounted on black linen or velvet, and framed as a picture for display. **Click here for details.**

The block illustrated here (at greatly reduced size) is that of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales.


Feudal Titles in Scotland

The Baronage Press accepts commissions for illustrated family histories and charts.