



# THE Marjoribanks LETTER

FOR AND ABOUT PEOPLE OF THE NAME, IN ALL ITS VARIATIONS – MARCHBANKS, MARCHBANK, MARSHBANKS, AND THE REST

## A VOYAGE INTO THE PAST

**I**t was raining steadily as we drove through the farm fields, down country roads, from our hotel in Stirling to the Perthshire village of Thornhill, a thorn-covered ridge that became the birthplace of Samuel Mandeville Marjoribanks, the founder of the Banks line of the family in America.

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From time to time we passed the remnants of great feudal estates, gifts of a grateful monarch to noble supporters. Blair Drummond, since the 14th century was the ancestral home of the Drummonds, lineal descendants of Mary Queen of Scots and for several generations one of the most influential families in the area. The property is now a 1500-acre Safari Park, offering visitors, among other attractions, a band of performing sea lions!

The main street of the village is lined with tidy stone cottages dating back to the late 17th century. We took refuge from the rain in the Lion and the Unicorn, a public house that is older than the village itself. It was built in 1635 and may be one of the oldest inns in Scotland. We enjoyed a traditional pub lunch with good Scots ales and whiskies in front of a blazing coal fire while Roger, our principal historian, briefed us on the history of the village.

It was organized as a model village in 1696 by Archibald Napier, the laird of Boquhapple, who began parcelling out his lands along the main street. The lots were called *feus*, under the ancient system of land tenure, and were held under perpetual lease at fixed rents. Each *feu* was 65 feet wide and 203 feet deep. The cottages were built close to the road and behind them was enough land to grow potatoes, corn and other crops. Cattle were grazed on two commons, north and south of the village. The south common is still used for that purpose but north common is now a football ground and a children's playground.

The first Marjoribanks to arrive in the Thornhill area was Samuel, the great-great-grandfather of Samuel Mandeville Marjoribanks, later known as Banks. He was born in Dumfriesshire in the early 17th century, probably on Marchbank Farm, as our ancestral lands, *terre de Marjoriebankis*, were later known. This Samuel was a Covenanter, part of an historic movement which opposed the imposition of bishops on the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and resisted control by royal authority. They were persecuted by the King's troops and imprisoned, banished or executed when they attempted to worship freely. In 1679 Samuel fought at the Battle of Bothwell Brig, a few miles from his home, in which a band of Covenanters were outnumbered and routed by government troops. Samuel escaped and, with his wife and two young sons, David and Thomas, made his way to the Thornhill district of Perthshire.

Samuel probably made his living as a farm labourer. He died in 1690 and four years later David, likely with Thomas, his younger brother, was occupying a labourer's cottage on Boighall Farm to the east of the village. Not much is known of David but Thomas married in 1698 and his youngest son Samuel had eleven children. The youngest son John, the father of Samuel Mandeville Marjoribanks, was known in the



*Robert Marjoribanks, the Honorary Secretary, presents to the Chief, for The Family Archives, a beautifully bound volume of all the issues of The Marjoribanks Letter published during his late wife's time as an officer of The Family. The book was assembled as a tribute to Nancy by her friends of long-standing Robert and Tanyss Phillips of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.*

village as "the dyester."

He may have practised this trade at one time or another but there is evidence to suggest that his principal occupation was - lawfully or unlawfully - as a distiller of whisky. There were many small distillers in the village and their product was widely enjoyed. The local industry ended, however, with the changes in the excise laws in 1784 and 1786 which discriminated against small Scottish distillers. Many of them went bankrupt.

John Marjoribanks, whatever his source of income, went bankrupt at the same time, in 1787. Among his listed belongings there is a malted kiln but none of the appurtenances of the dyester's trade. He had borrowed a large sum of money against his property in 1780 - possibly to finance a venture in the whisky business.

In any case, by 1787 he was broke and, perhaps hoping to recoup the family fortunes, he emigrated in the following year to South Carolina, leaving behind his wife and eight children. Not having heard from his father in some time, Samuel, John's eldest son, set out in search of him, arriving in Charleston in 1794 to discover that his father had died. Before returning to Scotland however, Samuel met and married Elizabeth Robinson. Since Elizabeth could not face up to the arduous Atlantic crossing, Samuel - who for convenience had changed his name to Banks - elected to stay in the New World and, with his bride, founded a distinguished branch of the family in America.

Armed with this background, and refreshed by an excellent lunch, we picked up our umbrellas and went out again into the rain. After walking a few minutes to the west on the main street we came to a red

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sandstone building with a commanding tower, built in 1893 to house the Masonic Lodge Blairhoyle No 792. The site was donated by the Drummond family and the building itself was erected by George Crabbie, another local landowner. During World War II it was the headquarters of the Home Guard. Across the road from the lodge is the war memorial, a stone tower surmounted by a masonry cross, dedicated to the dead of the two world wars.

Turning off the main street at the Masonic Lodge and descending a short steep hill, we came to Springfield, the cottage and surrounding lands once occupied by John Marjoribanks, the "dyvester," and the birthplace of his son Samuel. It is virtually unchanged since Samuel's day, except for the addition of a small conservatory at the back. Roger observed that, in its day, it would have been a comfortable workman's home. After her husband's departure, however, Helen and the children were obliged to leave Springfield and she spent the rest of her days in a tiny cottage nearby.

Leaving Springfield, we made our way up the hill again and turned east on the main street, past the Lion and the Unicorn, to Norrieston Parish Church in the Church of Scotland. The site for the church was donated by Gabriel Norrie whose ancestors acquired their lands, known as Norrieston, for service in the court of James I and James II. The first church building to be erected on the site was a "chapel of ease," not a fully accredited church but a facility for those who could not conveniently make their way to the parish church at nearby Kincardine. By 1815, since the chapel had become dilapidated, agitation began for a permanent church.

That ambition was not achieved until 1879 when the chapel of ease was demolished and a new church was designed in the early English ecclesiastic style with a ninety-foot bell tower, a decision that would not have pleased many of the villagers who resented the English influence in church affairs.

Support for the free kirk had always been strong in Thornhill, and might even have been a factor in Samuel's decision to settle there after the Battle of Bothwell Brig. A few years before he arrived, a descendant of Gabriel Norrie, the donor of the church lands, had been killed while trying to defend a Covenanting minister from government troops.

The quarrel was still going in 1830, at the time of the so-called Disruption, when about forty percent of the ministers in the established church resigned to found The Independent Free Church of Scotland, known in the Scots language as The Free Kirk. A Free Kirk was built next to the Norrieston Parish Church to give expression to the rebelling spirits.

The two village churches persisted in friendly competition until they joined forces in 1927 - two years before the general union throughout Scotland of the established church with the free kirk. The two congregations met in the Norrieston Parish Church building and the Free Kirk building was converted to a church hall in 1937.

Many of the stones in the graveyard were installed in the 18th century and have become unreadable. Others were removed at various times. We did find the grave of three Marjoribanks ladies but their connection with the family was unknown. Samuel, the first Marjoribanks in Thornhill, is believed to have been buried there but his stone has long since disappeared.

We did find an elaborate monument to the family of Peter MacLaren of Middleton Farm on the Boquhapple estate. He married Elizabeth Marjoribanks, a cousin of Samuel Mandeville Marjoribanks, and many of their descendants had Marjoribanks as a second name. Among them was Thomas Marjoribanks McLaren, a world-famous architect, born at Middleton in 1863. He went to Colorado around 1898 to be treated for tuberculosis and died in the Colorado Springs in 1928.

There were still other things to see in Thornhill - farms, buildings, churches and graveyards to explore - but considering the sodden state of our clothes, and having paid our respects to the progenitors of the Banks line, we made our way back to Stirling in time to change our socks before dinner.

## GLADSTONE'S HIDE-AWAY TO BE RESTORED

A 150-year-old country house historically associated with the Marjoribanks and the Aberdeens may be converted into a community centre to provide space for teaching arts and crafts and with accommodation for weddings, plays and concerts.

The Dollis Hill estate was originally two farms on the outskirts of London owned by Henry Finch. In 1825 the Finches replaced the smaller of the two farm houses with Dollis Hill House, a new Georgian villa sitting on a hill-top amid 500 acres with long views in every direction. They occupied the house for twenty-five years, but when Henry lost his job at the Royal Mint in 1850, they were forced to move into the older farm house and rented Dollis Hill House to Sir Dudley Marjoribanks, later the first Baron Tweedmouth, as a summer retreat, just five miles from his luxurious town house in Grosvenor Square.

In 1881 Dudley, whose heart was more often in the highlands, turned the Dollis Hill House over to the Earl of Aberdeen who, four years earlier, had married Dudley's sister, Ishbel Marjoribanks.

The Aberdeens and their children enjoyed the house for sixteen years. For the public-spirited Ishbel, however, it was not just a quiet place to escape the urban heat and smoke. Every year several hundred residents of the Working Girls Homes came to enjoy music and games. During the hay harvest, workers from the surrounding farms gathered every Sunday in the Hollis House barn to sing hymns and hear an uplifting talk.

Perhaps the most important public service Dollis Hill House provided, however, was as a refuge for Prime Minister Gladstone, the Aberdeens' good friend and political hero. He and his wife were frequent weekend visitors and, following his defeats at the polls, or his occasional resignations over matters of policy, he would accept the Aberdeens' invitation to stay at Dollis Hill House to recover his strength and to heal his political wounds.

He was not always successful in securing his privacy. When he found that crowds were beginning to gather at the local church to cheer him on Sunday mornings he was obliged to find a more secluded place of worship.

It was while dining at Dollis Hill House that Mr. Gladstone offered Lord Aberdeen the post of Governor General of Canada and he and Ishbel moved out in 1897 to take up residence at Rideau Hall in Ottawa.

The Willesden Urban District Council bought the house and ninety-six acres of Mr. Finch's land for £51,304 in 1899 to create a public park. In spite of vigorous political opposition, the Council decided to name the park for Mr. Gladstone who had died the year before. Lord Aberdeen opened it officially in May 1901.

Following the departure of the Aberdeens, the Council rented the house to Hugh Gilzean-Reid, a wealthy newspaper publisher. One of Mr. Gilzean-Reid's guests in the summer of 1900 was Mark Twain, who said that he had never seen any place that was so satisfactorily situated "with its noble trees and stretch of country and everything that went to make life delightful and all within a biscuit's throw of the metropolis of the world."

Mr. Gilzean-Reid moved out in 1906 and three years later the Council converted the ground floor to public tea rooms. During World War I the house served as a convalescent hospital and, on one occasion in World War II, as a meeting place for Churchill's war cabinet. In 1995 and 1996 the house was badly damaged by fire and is now uninhabitable and derelict.

In July 2002 a Dollis Hill House charitable trust was set up with the objective of raising more than £2 million to preserve and restore the house and grounds for the benefit of the people of the Borough of Brent and to provide facilities for their recreation and education.

The Chief reports that the collection of the various spellings of the Marjoribanks name now amounts to 829. It was begun by his grandfather, Rev. Thomas Marjoribanks of that ilk, in 1919 and maintained by his heirs.

With the help of the Chief's brother John, the list has been brought up to date and entered into a computer in alphabetical order so that duplicates will be easy to identify.

Thomas's collection at the time of his death amounted to 350. It now consists of 829 envelopes, telegrams, postcards and labels bound into five volumes. A few years ago it was recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as the most misspelled name in the world and we are not likely to have been overtaken.

As you might guess, there are many instances in which the recipient has acquired an unearned military rank: Major Banks, of course, Major Barks, Major Binks, Major Brank and even a Major Bogside. Some of the more bizarre spellings were received by John Marjoribanks of Gavinton in Berwickshire who served as an economic ~~development officer in many parts of the world and corresponded with many people whose mother tongue was not English:~~ Chainjoinbanks, Joringbanks, Majjorbanner, Majjoubanks, and even Match Box. His wife has the distinction of having been addressed as Mrs. Margabananas as well as Mrs. Mashe Bancis.

The late Sir James Marjoribanks, a diplomat and world traveller, came in for his share of distortions: Ammarjoribanks, Hozinbanks, Hurchbank, Macjoeibanks, Majojitouts. His wife got one missive addressed to Majoritencck.

William Logan Marjoribanks of that ilk, the Chief's father, contributed one of the more euphonious mistakes: Margeli Pankis as well as Marjiclunks and Mirshspankis.

It's not surprising in the circumstances that some people changed their name to Marchbanks or just plain Banks.

The Chief is hoping that he can extend the collection to 1,000.

If you have a misspelling to contribute, please send the original envelope, postcard or label to:

Robert Marjoribanks  
Honorary Secretary  
The Marjoribanks Family  
2228 Kipling Street  
Ottawa ON K1H 6T5 Canada

(Include your name and address and the date it was received.)

When we visited the Aberdeens' Coldstream ranch near Vernon, British Columbia, in September 2002, Mr. Ted Osborne, the ranch manager, showed us a small log building which served as an officers' mess for the battle-drill school that was established there during World War II.

One old soldier who has fond memories of the cabin is lieutenant-colonel Barnett J. Danson of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada who served as Canada's Minister of Defence from 1976 to 1979.

In his memoirs, "Not Bad for a Sergeant," Mr. Danson, who is universally known as Barney, recalls that, as a newly commissioned lieutenant, he was posted to the school's staff in the autumn of 1943.

The school, nestled in the mountains of the spectacular Okanagan Valley, was based on the Coldstream Ranch, the former summer home of an earlier governor general, the Earl of Aberdeen. Its purpose was to train men — selected because of their superior ability — in new military techniques of battle drill, with the emphasis on mobility, concentrated firepower and group initiative. The course lasted about a month, and in the training troops simulated battle conditions with live ammunition and explosives. There were a couple of hundred students at any one time.

"My time at Vernon was the happiest of my army career," Colonel Danson says. "The instructors were mostly in their early twenties and many of them, like me, had young brides with them. It was a good time, full of very hard work — and just as hard play. We ate like horses and, when we had the opportunity, drank like fish (using the thirteen-ounce liquor rations of the students who, by the end of each day, were too tired to drink anything stronger than water. I recall especially a party that ended in our completely destroying the interior of a log chalet we had built for an officers' mess, just before an unsuspecting Brigadier [Milton F.] Gregg arrived at the building with a party of VIPs. He wasn't amused but he was not too hard on us; he just told us that any future parties would have to be held in a three-sided log structure we had built for demonstrations of how to clear a house of enemy troops — at least it would have only three walls to knock down."

The log mess, with all four walls intact, is still standing and is used as a meeting place for a local troop of Boy Scouts, none of whom is known for excessive drinking.

## Stirling Castle, Wallace Monument

During our visit to Stirling many of our members took the opportunity to visit Stirling Castle, which dates from the 13th and 14th centuries. Monarchs from James I to James VI, held court there. Mary Queen of Scots spent much of her childhood there and her coronation took place in the chapel.

The Castle was built for defence and can be approached only over a single drawbridge, spanning a deep ditch. Like Edinburgh Castle it sits high on a mass of rock, commanding views for miles in every direction. It stands between the Highlands and the Lowlands and guards what has been throughout history the lowest crossing of the River Forth. Whoever controlled the Castle was well placed to command most of Scotland.

Well within sight of the Castle, the National Wallace

Monument, a 220-foot column, rises from a rocky crag. It is a tribute to Sir William Wallace who is known as Scotland's greatest freedom fighter, who mustered his countrymen to oppose the invasion of Scotland in 1296 by Edward II. After an early victory at Stirling Bridge, Wallace and his force were defeated at the Battle of Falkirk. Wallace himself was betrayed and captured by the English and was hanged, drawn and quartered.

The monument is not nearly as old as the Castle, having been completed in 1869, in the Victorian style. Some of our more athletic kinsmen, climbed the 246 steps to the top of the tower and were rewarded with spectacular views of the countryside. They admitted to stopping at two or three stages in the climb to catch their breath and enjoy historic exhibits.

## Painted World's Plants

The next time you're sight-seeing in London, look for the Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens. Marianne was the daughter of Janet Marjoribanks, the eldest daughter of Sir John Marjoribanks who served as Lord Provost of Edinburgh in 1813 and again in 1814.

Marianne's mother married, first, Robert Shuttleworth, a Lancashire gentleman, and then Frederick North, a magistrate, who was elected seven times as Member of Parliament for Hastings. Marianne was born in 1830. She and her younger sister and their parents lived in luxury at Hastings Lodge (now a convent) with a governess and five other servants.

Like other young ladies of her class, she was expected to demonstrate certain social "accomplishments" and, in her case, she learned both singing and painting. Although she had a beautiful contralto voice, she never manifested much enthusiasm about singing but proved herself a remarkably talented painter.

Both of her parents were dead by 1869 and Marianne had inherited a large fortune. She decided to travel throughout the world, painting plants and flowers. She sold Hastings Lodge in 1871 and, at the age of 41, made her first voyage: to the United States, Canada and Jamaica. During her life she toured more than a dozen countries, sometimes lingering for a year or more to record the local flora. She did not travel like a typical Victorian tourist but often on foot, climbing cliffs, fording streams and sleeping in jungle huts. In thirteen years she had completed more than eight hundred paintings, most of which she gave to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, and provided for the gallery which now bears her name in which to house them. She herself painted the frieze and decorations around the doors. The gallery was opened to the public in June of 1882.

She retired to Alderley, a secluded village in the Cotswolds, where she spent her last years cultivating a garden of her own. She died there on 30 August 1890 and is buried in the Alderley churchyard.

## Kirsty Weds

Kirsty Leslie Marjoribanks of Greenock, Scotland, youngest daughter of the Chief and of his wife Fiona, was married on September 6, 2003 to Graeme Donald Galbraith of the neighbouring town of Gourock.

The ceremony took place at Finnart St. Paul's Church, Greenock and was followed by a reception at the Royal Gourock Yacht Club and a dinner and dance at the Kip Marina, where all of the resident yachts were decorated from stern to stern with flags in honour of the occasion. The bride and groom, both enthusiastic sailors, spent their honeymoon cruising in the the Firth of Clyde.

## "Griselda Marchbanks," - Witch

The family name has cropped up again in the works of J.K. Rowling, the creator of the wildly popular Harry Potter books.

Griselda Marchbanks is a professor at Harry's school, The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and she makes her appearance in the latest volume of Harry's adventures, "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix." She is described as a "tiny stooped witch with a face so lined it looked as though it had been draped in cobwebs." The other fictitious family member in Harry's magical world is "Beaumont Marjoribanks," a wizard in the field of Herbiology whose likeness appears on a Harry Potter trading card.

## Fire Threatened Kelowna

A devastating forest fire this summer threatened the town of Kelowna, British Columbia, site of the 2003 Marjoribanks Gathering. All known Marjoribankses in the area were unhurt and their property undamaged.

A hot dry season provided tinder for dozens of fires throughout the region. On Saturday August 16 a bolt of lightning struck a tree in the Okanagan Mountain Provincial Park on the east side of Okanagan Lake and some 26,000 Kelowna residents were temporarily evacuated from their homes as the fire, driven by shifting 70-kilometre-an-hour winds, reached the town's suburbs. Another 15,000 people in the area were at one time put on evacuation alert, meaning that they should be prepared to leave on an hour's notice. More than 240 houses were destroyed and structural damage was estimated at \$92.5 million. The fire, as it spread, covered 196 square kilometres By mid-September, most of the evacuees had been allowed to return home.

## Letter

Greetings to so many of you who I have not been in recent contact with! I hope that most of you are still on the list; over the years you have all been such good friends.

I have been out of the loop for at least a year and a half — maybe two. My husband's mother and both my parents have had cancer. All horrible situations, and both of our mothers died in March — only two short weeks apart.

I want you to know that my mother (Matril Rachael Greer Miller) treasured the many newsletters she got in the last several years. She read them all and was reading one just before she got so bad at the end. She loved her Marchbanks lineage, and the fact that Daddy descended on one of his lines. Mother was also descended again through her mother's Marchbanks line. That makes me a triple descendant!

If any of you keep records on my line, Mother died 21 March 2003 at her home in Easley, SC, only a couple of miles from the old home where she was born. She was a very special lady and was so proud of the Marchbanks story and would tell it to all her cousins who came to visit while she was ill.

Godspeed,

Dolores Miller Pringle  
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

## The Marjoribanks Letter

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\* Family membership includes parents and their children.

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