

Coping with a title: the indexer and the British aristocracy

David Lee

The names of peers occur frequently in books, and of course in their indexes. The English peerage system is not straightforward; it is so easy to make errors in the treatment of the names of peers and knights and their ladies, causing confusion to readers, that an article warning of pitfalls seems worthwhile.¹ It is sometimes necessary to do research on peers and their titles, and this article gives the necessary clues. Whilst the article is in part general, the particular problems of indexers are covered, such as the form of name, and the order of entries.

Introduction

First, a couple of warnings. This article is concerned with the English peerage, and any statement cannot automatically be applied to practice in other countries. I am no great expert on Scots and Irish peerage, so they will crop up here rarely. Nor is this article concerned with the special problems of indexing royalty. Further, the article expresses one man's views and there can be room for differences in interpretation and treatment, which I shall try to indicate as we go on. Uses may be strong in one period and may dwindle in another—like the 'bart.' abbreviation for baronet, standard in the 19th century, and relegated in the 20th, to be replaced by 'bt', which still holds sway.

Background

There are five degrees of peerage in Britain—dukes, marquesses (or marquises), earls, viscounts, and barons. Their female consorts are duchesses, marchionesses, countesses, viscountesses and baronesses. Some titles can be held in their own right by women through descent, and of course women may themselves be created peers, the practice of Charles II being well-known (witness Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland from 1670 and mother of other created peers); a more recent case, and for very different reasons, being Jane Ewart-Biggs, Baroness Ewart-Biggs, a life peeress from 1981.

The passing of a peerage to and through a woman is governed by the terms of the patent creating the peerage, wherein the conventions usually followed are set aside. Descent is normally by primogeniture, i.e. from first son to first son, and usually only in the case of lack of male heir may a peerage be held by a woman, and only then if the patent allows it. A recent example showing the varieties of descent came with the death of Bernard Marmaduke (Fitzalan-Howard), 16th Duke of Norfolk, who died in 1975. Lacking sons, his dukedom passed to a cousin, Miles Fitzalan-Howard, already Baron

Beaumont. The 16th Duke's barony of Herries, however, was able to pass to a woman, and his eldest daughter, Lady Anne Fitzalan-Howard, duly became Baroness Herries in her own right. At times a peerage may be in abeyance, the final heir not being clear, and there are wonderful cases where claims to ancient peerages have been proved centuries later. It still happens, as in the case of Jean Cherry Drummond, Baroness Strange, whose peerage came out of abeyance only in 1986, for much may seem to be gained by the addition of a title to one's name. The whole area of peerage law is a minefield,² and litigation, in the 19th century particularly, rampant. Titles that have gone, where there are definitely no heirs, are known as extinct, and the indexer may need to know how these can be traced.³

This is not an article on forms of address, which are well covered in the literature,⁴ but it is worth saying that in passing reference peers are known as 'Lord X' and their wives, or peeresses in their own right, as 'Lady X'. Dukes tend not to be thus called. The term 'Lady' has wider applications amongst women than 'Lord' amongst men, for wives of baronets and knights are also called 'Lady X'. 'Lord' can have slightly wider application too, with the forename added, on which see below. Baronets and knights are not peers, though the former are hereditary. Knights are created frequently, usually at the times of honours lists (normally New Year and Queen's Birthday), baronets and hereditary peers only rarely. Their creation is not defunct, as witness the bestowal of a baronetcy upon Denis Thatcher in 1990, and of a viscounty in 1983 on William Whitelaw, which operate in an entirely normal way *vis-à-vis* descendency, though Viscount Whitelaw does not in fact have male heirs. But peerage conditions of this kind are rare, the present fashion being, since the Peerage Act of 1963, to create life peers, whose titles are not hereditary. The rank of these life peerages is baron. Hereditary titles can be renounced by their holders, e.g. Anthony Wedgwood Benn was

Viscount Stansgate between 1960 and 1963, but he prefers to be the more honourable Tony Benn. The usual reason for this renunciation is to allow the holder to pursue a political career in the House of Commons. The reverse procedure is of course more common, the granting of a life peerage to allow a politician to continue his debating career and influence in the House of Lords, as in the case of Jim Callaghan, now Lord Callaghan of Cardiff. In the case of Alexander (Douglas-Home), Lord Home, he disclaimed his earldom for political reasons, and indeed rose to the top of the political tree. When he retired, however, as commoner Prime Minister, he was granted a new peerage, a life peerage, as Lord Home of the Hirsell. Incidentally, the place-name element usually has no great importance, and is not obligatory, but has to be used if there could be confusion between two lords of the same name. The baronies of Willoughby de Broke and Willoughby de Eresby are both medieval in origin and are quite separate. Whilst the Cardiff of Lord Callaghan's title is often mentioned, it is not as necessary to do so as it is in Lord Wilson's case, for we have two life peers of this name, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx and Lord Wilson of Langside.

Some amusing things are done with names of peerages, well-known examples including the late Lord George-Brown (the hyphen is important), his birth names remaining George Brown. Some do like to use their own names, whereby their political fame may be seen as continuous (usefully for indexers); others make a clean start as Lord Aylestone (Herbert Bowden) or Lord Glenamara (Edward Short).

Form of name

The following comments on treatment of peers' names in indexes apply to the fullest entry. In short indexes the whole procedure may be an irritating pedantry; in a serious book at least medium fullness is required. To make up an example, let us take James Stephen Smith, 2nd Earl of Harrow. In normal usage the number will be dropped, James Stephen Smith, Earl of Harrow, and indeed he is likely to be known as Lord Harrow; not, incidentally, as Lord of Harrow, which is a favourite error. All dukes do have the 'of', most marquesses do (in fact only three Marquesses do not), some earls have it, but almost no viscounts (or to be exact two Scottish viscounts) and no barons. Or, to call the roll the other way round, no dukes have surnames as titles, just two marquesses do, a few earls, and many viscounts and barons (including life peers) do. In practice 'Lord Brown' or 'Brown, John, Lord Smith' are likely to be barons.

Baronets are also numbered, as although they are not peers, they have a hereditary honour. The forename is always given, without the abbreviation used here: 'Sir John Hay later 6th Baronet Hay', as I saw recently.

A word is perhaps needed here about 'Lord John', or

'Lady Jane' as in 'Lord John Russell', for these cause more problems to those unfamiliar with British practice than any other aspect. They are not the titles of peers; they are the courtesy titles of the sons and daughters of peers, or to be more accurate, the sons and daughters of dukes and marquesses (and in the cases of the girls, of earls). The offspring of other peers are known as the Honourable (Hon.) so and so, and I doubt if this is required in indexes, any more than that popular term 'Dowager' Lady X, where that appellation is just a function of her condition. It is wrong, according to traditional practice, to call a life peer, or any other peer Lord (Christian name) (title), as in 'Lord Asa Briggs', though it is now quite a common practice, despite being picked up by courteous reviewers like Anthony Powell.⁵ I suspect that some of these life peers do not discourage the practice, which enables them to continue the potency of their old name, but I would recommend the indexer to avoid it, and keep it for the younger sons/daughters of the right degree of peer.

Courtesy titles cause a further problem to indexers and others. It has been the habit of centuries for the eldest son (rarely I think the daughter) to use the most senior of his father's secondary titles. The Duke of Wellington is also the Marquess of Douro, the Earl of Mornington, Viscount Wellington, Baron Douro (amongst other titles) and his eldest son or heir is known as Lord Douro, and *his* heir the Earl of Mornington. If the older man is reasonably long-lived and his son has an active public life, the younger man's title will become enshrined in common parlance, his courtesy title not debarring him from pursuing a parliamentary career *pro tem*. There is that old story of Lord Ashley fighting for liberalization in Victorian England, and continuing the fight after his succession in 1851 as 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. Some resentment against this new man Shaftesbury treading on Ashley's patch is said (probably apocryphally) to have been felt. But no indexer should be so unknowing; only one man is involved. Debrett's Peerage incidentally includes an index of currently used courtesy titles, and some holders are certainly to be found under them in *Who's Who*.

Choice of name

In a biographical or historical work one person may appear under several names in the text. It is quite common for a man to appear first under his given names and surname; he may then acquire a knighthood, and possibly titles one after another, different in degree, and possibly name, through his successful life. Authors are probably wise to use the correct name used at that part of the narrative, and if they have a different policy they should tell us in the prelims. It is the indexer who has to make a choice, and comes up against the problem. It would be very nice for the indexer in making this choice if an easy standardization presented itself. The old

Anglo-American code of 1908⁶ caused librarians to choose the family name in all cases as the main component, so that Shaftesbury would have appeared under A for Ashley-Cooper, Anthony, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. This is hardly the term under which the man/woman in the street would expect to find him. There are cases where the patronymic is the best answer. 'Disraeli, Benjamin' may well be preferred to 'Beaconsfield', but many peers, whilst not disappearing so hastily as Frederic Leighton (who died the very day after his baronage creation was signed in 1896) do not shine forth under their newly-acquired title. The indexer would sensibly choose the most likely to be recognized, and if space permits make a cross-reference from the other, as the Anglo-American code enjoined. If there is a great deal of space, a second entry with page numbers is helpful.

Peers' family names are, incidentally, found in *Who's who*, which has entry under the title (with reference from family name). The published peerages too have the surname given prominently under the current holder of the title. There is also a family name index in the published peerages, so you can see for instance that the Fitzroy surname is borne by the peers Duke of Grafton and Viscount Daventry. It must never be assumed that the family surname has not changed, as the Marlborough example below shows.

There is an area where an answer based on indexer's common-sense may not be the best. If there are many members of a family dealt with in the book (or journal or database), some with titles, others with courtesy titles and others with surnames and forenames alone, the temptation to standardize on use of the patronymic only (and refer from titles) is strong, and probably should not be resisted.

Ladies

As mentioned earlier, the term 'Lady' is widely used and masks a variety of possibilities; Lady X may be the wife of a peer, of a baronet, of a knight, or, with a forename, the daughter of a duke, marquess or earl. A woman may hold a title in her own right, rather than as the adjunct of her husband, if the terms of the peerage allow it, and the title will be in the feminine form. It is unusual to add the number in sequence, though it certainly will be counted in the whole sequence; she will be in place between the 3rd and 5th Marquesses. It is, of course, wrong to number the ladies who are (merely) wives. A male peer may take to himself more than one wife (though still only one at a time), and it is wrong to think of the wife of the 3rd Earl as the 3rd Countess. She may or may not be, and counting is just not done.

A curious feature which the indexer will come across in historical works is the referring to a lady by her maiden name, e.g. Mary Smith, wife of George Best, esquire. This does not usually mean that her full name is Mary

Smith Best, but that she was Mary Best, née Mary Smith. Lady Anne Clifford is one of the best-known examples of this naming practice, and I saw portraits of 'Lady Catherine Bruce' (really the Countess of Dysart) the other week at Ham House. Lady Anne Clifford was, after that name which she rightly had as daughter of the Earl of Cumberland, Countess of Pembroke, and then Countess of Thanet, marrying (rather unhappily) an Earl of each place.

I can see why these ladies are so called, giving them a status to suit their personality, but it isn't really 'correct', in pedantic terms. Confusion certainly must be avoided, and if you have to use these famous names, enshrined as they sometimes are, do, but don't encourage the practice, I would say. I prefer to give the lady, even if a medieval heiress with title, her husband's name, with reiteration from time to time of her own special status.

It is always important to stick to the usage of the time. I personally may like the addition of the maiden name to the husband's name, as with the Dutch, but it has not been British practice, and any extensive use of this in a book should be flagged by the writer and picked up by his/her indexer, in a note heading the index.

One final point on ladies' titles. The term 'Dame' is the equivalent of 'Sir' for men. A lady granted what is in effect a knighthood is called Dame X, as in 'Dame Diana Reader-Harris'. Again, as with knights we must have the forename, so not 'Dame Sutherland', but 'Dame Joan Sutherland'. At least this reduces the great number of ladies who are entitled to be 'Lady X'.

Same titles

As with book titles, there is no copyright or permanent uniqueness in personal titles. There are some which are reserved for royals—York and Windsor are two which spring to mind,⁷ and the fecundity of Victoria and her children caused the earmarking of quite a number, unlikely to be re-used for some time, but on the whole, even high-sounding titles have been used and used again, often by totally unconnected families. A man may have a strong yen for a particular title, and battle with the bureaucracy or his sovereign to get it (the Brudenells who were title-mad in the 18th century are a case in point). 'Buckingham' has been used, not all at the same degree, by the Giffard, Grenville, Plantagenet, Sheffield, Stafford and Villiers families, and even then there is 'Buckinghamshire' used by another family, the Hobarts.

In some instances, even medieval ones, a title may have to have a place-name element to distinguish it from its fellows, as with Beauchamp of Hacche. Whilst in many titles today the holder may like the name element to be mentioned, it is only where there is duplication that the indexer need bother with it. There is no absolute need to add the 'of Alamein' part to Viscount Montgomery,

though some indexers and others will doubtless disagree with me, and feel that it is courteous to include it. A presentation point: prefer 'Pitt of Hampstead, David Thomas, Baron', to 'Pitt, David Thomas, Baron, of Hampstead', and absolutely avoid 'Pitt, Baron David Thomas, of Hampstead'. That direct use of the title preceding the forename is a common continental practice, but is not British.

Hyphenated names

It is a common belief, fuelled by novelists and playwrights, that hyphenated surnames—the phrase 'compound surnames' is probably preferable—denote an aristocrat or at least a gentleman.⁸ The practice of double-barrelling grew from the addition of names from a relative whose land was also probably acquired. There is a famous clause in wills which often indicates this, the 'names and arms clause', whereby Smith becomes Brown-Smith, or Smith-Brown, by (say) an uncle's command. Some tricky suits followed in cases where more than one donor existed, or where the recipient disputed the matter.⁹ Often the hyphen shows simply a family devotion to another, often female, line prior to one's own, a wish that that family name may not be lost. No land or money may be involved, simply pride. The newcomer to indexing, faced with a hyphenated surname, wonders what to do with it, whether to enter the first or second part of the compound (assuming that lack of space precludes repetition). Here my own view in indexing seems to differ from that of most other people, including indexers and publishers. I feel that the last element should be seen as the standard, i.e. Brown, P. Smith-. But the codes tend to see the name as Smith-Brown, P., filed under S, and publishers' editors have usually ditched my own choice in favour of this. My argument in favour of last part is partly that not all compound names are hyphenated, and that not all seeming compounds are such. Is Joseph Mordaunt Crook the bearer of a compound surname, or does he just have a slightly fancy middle name? The famous Lord Shaftesbury, and indeed his predecessors back to the first Earl were actually called Ashley Cooper, without the hyphen. It is in a way surprising how many apparent forenames could be surnames—Douglas, Clifford, Percy, Gordon and so on. If you enter always under Brown, Cooper and Crook in these instances, all other problems are solved—but, as I say, I sadly know I'm in a minority here. There are, incidentally, some marvellous compounds for pedants to play with, like Temple-Nugent-Brydges-Chandos-Grenville, which were the surnames, of Richard, Marquess of Chandos and Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. This, incidentally, is an example of a compound ducal title and should be given in full as 'Buckingham and Chandos'. There are plenty of peers who have more than one title at the same level, such as earl, but the senior one would usually be chosen as the dominant one.

Sources

The indexer, though in hot pursuit of accuracy, needs not to hang about, and the following tips may save colleagues some time. For a current peer, use *Who's who*, *Whitaker's Almanack*, *Vacher's Parliamentary Companion*, and various other reference books. For peers of the past as well as the present, and baronets, Debrett¹⁰ or more extensively Burke's Peerage¹¹, are the sources to use, available in most central libraries, but rarely now in branches. The *Dictionary of National Biography* doesn't list all peers, but does have the famous ones, and sometimes the last paragraph or two may deal with descendants. No printed peerage is utterly easy to use. Burke is wonderfully full (though even then not full enough, particularly on women and their descendants), but its subtle indentations can be a trial to the reader of a long entry. The most irritating feature, practised for edition after edition, is that of giving the date of death of a peer long after the main body of his entry, in a little line before the name of his successor. The tendency for forenames to be re-used in noble families is an easy cause for confusion, the same forename even being used amongst siblings. Though this was usually upon the death of one of that name, and the desire to perpetuate a forename. I did recently come across five sibling Johns in one packet of noble children, mostly with another name attached. The ramifications of Burke's Peerage are, however, wonderful and worth mastering. Note the indexes which show under the family names the titles which differ from them.

A useful quick-reference guide to titles and family names, which is often what one quickly needs to know, is provided by Francis Leeson's oddly-titled *A directory of British peerages*.⁷ It has errors, but is cheap and available. The standard work on older peerage is *The Complete Peerage*, often known in historical circles as GEC, after George Edward Cokayne, the main editor.¹² Arranged by title, this doesn't give all the descendants beloved of Burke (which of course are needed not only to allow one to follow noble connections, but may also be required one day to 'prove title', as it were). GEC gives a fairly bare line of each title holder, in chronological order, with quite full details of each person included. GEC follows the practice of putting surnames in parenthesis where confusion with forenames might occur. It is by no means uncommon for a name which is the man's surname to be repeated just before it, such as the politician Charles Newdigate Newdegate, the varied spellings being quite deliberate.

There is a GEC *Complete Baronetage* also.¹³ There have been many other published peerages over the years. Since the good habit began with John Selden's *Titles of Honour* (1672) and Sir William Dugdale's *Baronage* (1675-6) there have always been these guides, often tersely showing coats of arms rather than the details of relatives. Even Debrett was not the originator of his

peerage, taking over John Almon's work in 1781. Their history has been given by French¹⁴, and some substantial and admirable works in their time, such as Collins *Peerage*, and Foster's *Peerage*, were produced, but frankly you will get by with GEC's *Complete Peerage*, Burke and Debrett.

Index entries

Once decisions have been made on what form of the name is to be used for the main entry, which will bear the subheadings, and what forms will be cross-references, decisions based on common sense and space available, the entries must be placed in order. The full forms of entry for a peer, given no space restriction, are:

Bedford, Francis Charles (Russell), 9th Duke of, 10, 16, 17

Russell, Francis Charles, 9th Duke of Bedford, 10, 16, 17

The title form needs further comment. Do we choose numerical or alphabetical entry?:

Marlborough, John (Churchill), 1st Duke of*

Marlborough, Charles (Spencer), 3rd Duke of

Marlborough, George (Spencer), 4th Duke of

Marlborough, John Winston (Spencer-Churchill) 7th Duke of

which is a numerical list; or we could alphabetize them after the title, under Charles, George, John and John Winston, which makes nonsense of the numerical (date) order. Note incidentally that entry under the family name would separate these entries. If we are dealing with a book with a large amount on the family, the main entries will probably be under the family name, but there should be a brief résumé of the actual holders under the title. Most authors cannot resist speaking at some point of 'the third duke' or 'the duke', or even 'His Grace' and the indexer must sort them out clearly for the reader. The more allusive an author is, the more the indexer must beware. There is a practice common at present for a living peer to be referred to by his forename and title *tout court*. The 19th-century formality which would have preferred a man to be alluded to by his title alone, 'Shaftesbury' has very much given way to the 'John Julius Norwich' practice, J.J.N. being John Julius (Cooper), 2nd Earl of Norwich. When Gerry Wellington occurs in Mr Lees-Milne's entertaining books, it is to the architect Gerald (Wellesley), 7th Duke of Wellington that he refers. Bishops and archbishops of the Church of England are also peers in status (barons and dukes) and should be able to be found under personal and episcopal names:

London, Graham Douglas (Leonard), Bishop of, 19, 23, 27

Leonard, Graham Douglas, Bishop of London, 19, 23, 27

*The second duke was in fact a Duchess, Henrietta, by special Act of Parliament.

There is the added disability for the indexer that there is a latin form of the see's name, abbreviated in common use. 'John Ebor' is the signing name of the present Archbishop of York, and our allusive author is unlikely to be able to abstain from some such esoteric reference. The abbreviated latin form is most commonly found on documents of all ages. Occasionally a peer by birth may also be a man of the cloth, and has two titles. A notable example was Frederick Augustus (Hervey), 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry. Some higher clergy are created peers, a modern example being the Right Reverend Stuart (Blanch), Baron Blanch, a life peer since his retirement from the bishops' bench. Peers frequently have had military titles; indeed their very valiance may have caused their elevation to the peerage. Unless the index is very full and pedantic, these military titles can be omitted; if it must, the form Montgomery of Alamein, Field Marshal Bernard Law (Montgomery), 1st viscount may be used. We also have legal lords, who should be treated as 'normal' peers.

Dates need be added only if there really may be confusion, but it can be helpful during indexing to note a date if it will later aid identification of a title-holder.

Nicknames like 'the wizard earl' cause problems, but will usually be explained by the author when first used. It is for the indexer to note them, and include them as an epithet if the terms are much used by the author: Northumberland, Henry (Percy), 9th earl of, 'the wizard earl'.

All in all, the English peerage, and for all I know, that of other countries too, is full of pedantry, but it is not hard in most cases to get it right. I cannot agree that one should always be totally correct in aristocratic names in an index, as some commentators seem to think,¹⁵ but I do think it is important not to be incorrect. When all is said and done, you would not wish your index to be adversely mentioned in the brickbat column of *The Indexer*. Some indexers do do well—see the index to David Cannadine's recent book *The decline and fall of the British peerage* (1990).

References

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2. Gadd, R. P. *Peerage law*. Bristol: ISCA Publishing Ltd, 1985.
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Pine, L. G. *New extinct peerages 1884–1971*. 1972.
4. *Titles and forms of address*. 19th edition. A. and C. Black, 1990.
Debrett's correct form.

5. Massingberd, Hugh Montgomery- in the *Daily and Sunday Telegraphs* from time to time inveighs against bad practices. His article in *Daily Telegraph*, 16 Jan. 1991 is clear on what to avoid.
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see also Smith, P. Montague- in *Debrett's peerage and baronetage*. 1980 edition.
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Index makers

4 CHARLOTTE YONGE, 1823-1901

The index to Charlotte Yonge's *History of Christian names* (1863, revised 1884) is remarkable in several respects.

It is called Glossary, contains only names, and is placed at the beginning of the book.

It is very long. Its 123 pages are equivalent to 26% of the text, compared with 15% for the extensive index to Gray's *Anatomy*.

It provides much information for each name: gender, language of use, language of origin, meaning, and page reference, e.g.:

Henry, *m.* Eng. Teu. home ruler, 310

There are similar entries for every variant of a name, including diminutives, and forms in the chief European languages. For the purposes of some readers, this index may obviate any need to turn to the text.

But the text is worth reading. Although Miss Yonge's etymology has been shown by later philologists to be sometimes at fault, her book is still, 'the standard work on the subject in English' (E. G. Withycombe in the introduction to *The Oxford dictionary of English Christian names*). Her very wide knowledge of history is displayed in her discussion of the origins of names and of the rise and fall in their use in different places and periods, and also of the effects of the names of famous people on subsequent choice of names. She adduces the popularity at the time she was writing of the name Florence, in honour of Florence Nightingale.

An example of the wealth of interest in the book is the surprising account of the prevalence of the name Hannibal among country people in Cornwall, shown in the parish registers beginning in the late 1500s. This name is thought to have been derived from contact with Phoenician traders who came to Cornwall long ago to buy tin. The index reference is:

Hannibal, *m.* Eng. Phoen. grace of Baal, 40

Another remarkable thing about Miss Yonge's long and learned book, and its index, undoubtedly compiled by herself, is that during the period when she must have been working on it, she produced several other, shorter books. That it was her custom to write at least two books at the same time is shown by the remark she is recorded to have made once at lunch: 'I have had a dreadful morning; I have killed the bishop and Felix.' The bishop was the missionary Coleridge Patterson, whose biography she was writing, and Felix was the leading character in one of her long, delightful novels of Victorian family life.

The remarkable index was the work of a remarkable author.

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