

QUESTION TIME

British Monarchs, Peerages and Titles

There are particular ways of addressing the Queen and Royal family.

The Queen is always referred to as 'Your Majesty' if talking to her or 'Her Majesty' if talking about her.

Other members of the Royal family (Prince Philip, Prince Charles, Prince William, etc) are addressed as 'Your Royal Highness' if talking to them or 'His/Her Royal Highness' if talking about them.

Nobility and peerages

Titles of nobility or peerages are granted by the Monarch (King or Queen). All British honours, including peerage dignities, spring from the Sovereign, who is considered the fount of honour. The Sovereign, as "the fountain and source of all dignities cannot hold a dignity from himself" (opinion of the House of Lords in the *Buckhurst Peerage Case*), cannot belong to the Peerage.

If neither the Sovereign nor a peer, an individual is a commoner. Members of a peer's family who are not themselves peers (including such members of the Royal Family) are also commoners; the British system thus differs fundamentally from continental European ones, where entire families, rather than individuals, were ennobled.

There are two main types: hereditary peerages and life peerages

Hereditary Peerages

In most hereditary Peerages, the title passes on to a Peer's oldest son, or to his closest male heir if the Peer has no son (the other children are considered commoners). The title becomes extinct if there is no male heir. There are some ancient Peerages that allow the title to be passed to a daughter if the holder leaves no male descendant. The last hereditary peerage was granted in 1964.

Life peerages

Life peerages are created each year and hold the rank for their own lives only; the titles do not pass on to their children. Both men and women may be granted life peerages, and the titles given to them are baron and baroness.

Ranks

Below are the five ranks of peers, in order of seniority (Duke is the highest hereditary rank below that of prince.)

Duke/Duchess

The highest rank below royalty is that of Duke/Duchess. The wife of a Duke is a Duchess. In the rare case where a Duchess holds the title in her own right, her husband would not automatically share the title. A Duke or Duchess is called "Your Grace" by servants and the lower orders. Friends and social acquaintances might call them "Duke" or "Duchess," or by whatever name the individuals involved favor. The family surname is most likely to be the same as the title's name.

Sons and daughters of a duke are known by the honorary title of "Lord Firstname" or "Lady Firstname." The eldest son will frequently hold some lesser title given by tradition in the family to the heir. The degree of that title would depend upon the titles available to the family -- it would not necessarily be the degree immediately beneath the rank of Duke.

Marquis/Marquess

For Regency set (1811-1820) books, either spelling might be considered correct, but "Marquess" appeared in common use only after the Regency. The English pronunciation is "Markwiss." The wife of a Marquis is a Marchioness (pronounced "Marshuness"). Servants and lower classes would call this couple "your lordship" or "your ladyship." Fellow aristocrats would call the Marquis by his title's name, i.e., Georgette's Heyer's Marquis of Vidal, is known as Vidal. In addition to the formal use of their title, this couple might be referred to as Lord or Lady Vidal.

Children of a Marquis are known by the honorifics "Lord Firstname" and "Lady Firstname."

Earl/Countess

In Saxon times, the Earl was the highest ranking nobility short of royalty, but the Normans added their new-fangled titles over the years.

In England, there are but four earldoms where the title name is the same as the family surname -- Earl Spencer, the brother of the late Princess of Wales, being a well-known example. The remaining earls are Earl of Whatever. The wife of an earl is a countess.

Servants and the lower classes would refer to the couple as "my lord/lady" or "your lordship/ladyship." The Earl's friends will likely use his title's name, i.e., Georgette's Heyer's Earl of Worth, is known as Worth.

All daughters of an Earl are entitled to the honorific "Lady Firstname," but only the first-born son is called "Lord Firstname." The remaining sons are "Honorable Firstname Surname," but the "Honorable" title is used only in written correspondence.

Viscount/Viscountess

Another newish title adopted from the French. The wife of a viscount (pronounced "Vie-count") is a Viscountess. A viscount is not viscount of anything -- the title name is the family surname.

Servants or the lower classes would refer to the couple as "my lord/lady" or "your lordship/ladyship." The Viscount's friends will likely use his surname, i.e., Georgette's Heyer's Viscount Stanton (Freddie's father), is known as Stanton. In addition to the formal use of their title, this couple might be referred to as Lord or Lady Stanton.

Children of Viscounts are "Honorable," an address used only in writing.

Baron/Baroness

A baron's wife is a baroness, and is referred to as Lady Surname. Servants and lesser folk would refer to the couple as "my lord/lady" or "your lordship/ladyship."

Children of barons are not entitled to honorifics. They are Mister or Miss Surname.

Title	Self	Wife	Son	Daughter
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Duke	Duke of +title	Duchess of +title	Lord +first	Lady +first
Marquis	Lord +title	Lady +title	Lord +first	Lady +first
Earl	Lord +title	Lady +title	Hon.	Lady +first
Viscount	Lord +title	Lady +title	Hon.	Hon.
Baron	Lord +title	Lady +title	Hon.	Hon.
Baronet	Sir +first	Lady +surname	Mr.	Miss
Knight	Sir +first	Lady +surname	Mr.	Miss

Notice that the honorific "Lady" is actually used in *three* different and distinct ways -- with name of title for wives of Barons and up; with surname for wives of Baronets and Knights; and with first name for daughters of Earls and up.

Seated Title - with Land.

Whilst the Life Titles of Lord & Lady or perhaps Earl & Countess are clearly prestigious titles in their own right, Seated Titles are far superior still in as much as they include therewith a named area of land.

Importantly, this means that, were a Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Field, for example, having decided upon the titles

Lord & Lady, to purchase the Land Parcel of Westminster, then, not only would they become Lord & Lady Field but they would legally be entitled to call themselves and be known as -

Lord & Lady Field of Westminster

- thus enjoying all the social and commercial advantages such a prestigious title might clearly bring.