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Newsletter of the Clan Fleming Scottish Society

THE DOE

CLAN FLEMING TITLES

By Jim Fleming

Over several centuries Flemings of note have held various titles including Baron, Lord and Earl. They have also occupied numerous offices including Bailey, Burgess, knight, Sheriff, Governor and Chamberlain.

Today, the import of many of these words has changed or become obscured, so this article explores their meaning so that the significance of the many august Flemings in the history of Scotland can be appreciated.

Our first chief, Sir Robert Fleming, was employed by Robert the Bruce as a household knight during the 1290s and early 1300s. **Knights** were highly trained elite soldiers who served their liege lord as his own personal troop of bodyguards. In times of conflict a lord could be obliged to provide his knights and their attendants for the king's army.

Household knights were usually younger sons of noble birth who, outranked by older brothers, were not in line to inherit any land and therefore occupied the lowest rank of the nobility. Nevertheless, all knights were entitled to the title "**Sir**" (or Sire), derived from the Old French word Sieur (Lord). Thus, the modern French word monsieur translates literally as "my lord".

In battle, a landholding knight would fight under a banner displaying his personal arms and was known as a **knight banneret**, while one who fought under another's banner (such as a household knight or the heir of a knight banneret) was called a **knight bachelor**. Our 5th chief (David Fleming) was, as a 17-year-old in 1363, employed as a knight bachelor to King David II.

In about 1310, Robert the Bruce (now King Robert I) rewarded Robert Fleming's exemplary service by granting him the feudal baronies of Cumbernauld and Lenzie. Fleming also gained the

barony of Biggar through marriage to the heiress, Marjory of Biggar. Acquisition of these estates meant that he had now moved up a rung in the nobility from a landless knight to the rank of baron.

A **Baron** held his fief (lands and income) directly from the monarch. In Scotland, the title was not hereditary; if the land was ever transferred to a new holder, the title of baron went with it. Therefore, while barons were included in the nobility, they were not members of the peerage.

Soon after Robert's son Malcolm "the Good" Fleming fought in the king's army at Bannockburn in 1314, he was rewarded with the additional baronies of Kirkintilloch, Auchendennan, Poulton and the Isle of Inchcaillock in Loch Lomond. By 1317 he had been appointed Sheriff of Dunbartonshire and Governor of Dumbarton Castle while his younger brother Patrick was appointed Sheriff of Peebleshire (following his marriage to Joan Fraser, heiress of Oliver Castle in that shire). As well as these shires, later Fleming clan chiefs served as sheriffs in Edinburgh and Roxburgh. Their maternal Biggar ancestors had traditionally served as Sheriffs of Lanarkshire.

Both sheriff and governor were occupations, not titles. The term **sheriff** is a contraction of shire **reeve**, where the reeve was responsible to administer a shire on behalf of its owner (who held the rank of Earl). The sheriff's duties were to enforce decisions of shire courts; keep the peace; collect taxes on behalf of the earl and the crown; and oversee the provision of fighting men to support the king in times of war.

After the Norman Conquest, Scotland was dotted with many castles as an important line of defence against Viking raiders and invasions from rival kings. They were an innovation imported from Europe, where each castle was managed by a Castellan, whose duties were not unlike those of a sheriff. In Scotland each castle was managed by a **Governor** and usually the Sheriff was also appointed Governor of the strongest castle in his shire.

In 1332, Malcolm "the Good" Fleming was appointed as **tutor** to the eight-year-old King David II and his Royal Consort. This would



have involved providing him with an education to prepare him for the throne, while also acting as an informal foster-father and protector.

A year later Malcolm was one of the few Scottish nobles who escaped after the disastrous Battle of Halidon Hill, but he nevertheless managed to provide sanctuary to the young king (and his successor, the future King Robert II) in his fortress at Dumbarton Castle; and later guided them to safety in France. In recognition of this sterling service, one of the king's first acts on his return to Scotland in 1341 was to create Malcolm Fleming Earl of Wigtown.

In Scotland an **Earl** was responsible (under the king) for a shire and was therefore equivalent to a European Count and his county. The term earl comes from the Scandinavian word jarl meaning chieftain and reflects the fact that earls were entitled to exercise many regal powers within their shire. Importantly, since earl is a hereditary title, its holder is automatically a member of the peerage. The Fleming clan chief had moved an important rung higher in the Scottish nobility, now outranked only by Marquesses and Dukes.

Unfortunately, this higher status only lasted 30 years before Malcolm's grandson (3rd chief Thomas Fleming) sold the earldom in 1371 and thus reverted the chief of Clan Fleming to a mere baron; no longer a peer.

This comedown was partially redressed in 1451 when the 7th chief (Robert Fleming of Biggar, Lenzie and Cumbernauld) was created a **Lord of Parliament**, affording him the right to take part in sessions of Scotland's Parliament. It was a hereditary title and thus elevated him (and his heirs) once more onto the lowest rung of Scotland's peerage and entitled them to the title Lord Fleming.

In 1606, John 6th Lord Fleming (our 12th chief) was created Earl of Wigtown (the second creation of the title that had been sold in 1371), thus stepping up another rung in the Peerage of Scotland. Three years later he was appointed as a **Lord of the Articles**, a member of the select Parliamentary committee that drafted legislation for consideration by the full Parliament.

Since our clan chief now held two titles (Earl and Lord), he (and later chiefs) adopted the widespread practice of using the secondary title (Lord Fleming) as a courtesy title for his heir apparent. Thus, at any one time, the clan chief was Earl of Wigtown and his heir apparent was known as Lord Fleming. On the death of an earl, the previous Lord Fleming would become earl and the new heir apparent would gain the courtesy title of Lord Fleming.

While the earl continued to use the Wigtown arms (with the addition of an earl's coronet), the family now adopted new arms for the use of his heir apparent. These "Lorde Fleming" arms (pictured from an old armorial book) were clearly based on the arms originally granted to Robert Fleming three hundred years earlier, but with different tinctures (colours). The shield background is or (gold) rather than gules (red) and the chevron and double tressure are gules rather than argent (silver or white).



A little known fact

**Traditionally
the Scots used
the Sporan
to carry their
war kittens
into battle**

THE TRADITIONAL FLEMING WILD HAGGIS HUNT

By Tammy Schakett

On Sunday, March 25 in 1612, John Fleming gathered his family to celebrate the traditional Celtic new year. To honor the new year, John and his siblings decided to have a great wild haggis hunt.

Traditionally, this involved the younger male children waiting to catch the wild haggis that would be flushed from the hills and forests by the adult men.



This is a wild Forest Haggis in its natural Scottish habit. Sadly, the wild haggis is currently on the endangered species list and as a result modern wild haggis hunts are catch and release basis only.

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COVER IMAGE

The rampant and armed Lion of Flanders symbolises the Fleming family's ancient origins.

Illustration, design and artwork: Ian Fleming

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