An Etymology of Titles

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We tend to think of dukes and viscounts as having always been in the British nobility. In fact, these titles came into creation at specific dates, often as the result of a king looking to reward a favorite, or for great service either politically or in the military. English nobility grew as a result of the Crown granting a title by "writ of summons" or by "letters patent" that stipulated the degree of the title and how it could devolve upon the title-holder's descendant.

Knowing when a title was created can help to create a character's background and family history and helps with understanding precedent. Two factors go into precedent: the rank of title and the age of the title. The older a title, the more clout it carries. Therefore, a fourteenth marquess takes precedent over a fifth marquess, but not over any duke.

King (pre-conquest): In Old English the word was *cyng* or *cing*. The Saxons who came to Briton used this word for their leaders. This did not denote a hereditary title, merely someone of high status who could be elected to power by the *witenagemot* or *witan*, a council of nobles. After 1066, when William of Normandy brought over his feudal notions, king became an inherited title for the monarch. (William started off as Duke of Normandy and his name is spelled in the Bayeux Tapestry as Willelm.)

The king is addressed as "Your Majesty" the first time and then as "Sir".

Queen (pre-conquest): The Old English is *cwen*, a matching Saxon title for a female ruler or the consort of a king. England differs from much of the continent in that women can inherit the throne and the throne can pass through the female line. In 1135, Stephen inherited the throne through his mother, Adela, sister of Henry I and daughter of William of Normandy. (And then, of course Stephen got into it with his cousin Matilda causing 'The Anarchy'. Matilda managed to control England for a few months, but was never crowned. However, she won out since her son became Henry II.)

The queen is addressed as "Your Majesty" the first time and then as "Ma'am".

Prince/Princess (1200's): The Normans brought Latin and Old French to England. From them, in the early 1200's, comes this title. Until James I (who ruled 1603 to 1625), only the king's eldest son could call himself a prince. After James I, all sons and daughters of the king or queen became a prince or princess. Victoria (who ruled 1837 to 1901) extended the titles of prince and princess to all children of the sons of the ruling monarch (all grandchildren of the monarch through the male line). The Windsors are moving away from this tradition, opting for lesser titles for grandchildren.

The first address is "Your Royal Highness" and after that is either "Sir" or "Ma'am". (A letter in the Royal Archives has the Duke of Norfolk addressing the Prince as "Sir" in a letter of congratulations for Prince George being made Regent dated 18 February 1812.)

Prince of Wales (1338): Edward I conquered most of Wales in 1283, and his son Edward II, was born in Wales at Caernarvon a year later and became the first English 'Prince of Wales.' In 1338, Edward III made his son Duke of Cornwall, and would later confirm him Prince of Wales, starting the tradition of conferring this title on the heir apparent to the crown.

The first use of the title actually dates to a letter in the 1160s to Louis VII of France from Owain of Gwynedd (*Owain Fawr* in Welsh, or Owain the Great), who styled himself Prince of Wales.

Duke/Duchess (1338): This is an ancient title in European countries, coming from the Latin, *dux*, for leader. William of Normandy is usually named Duke of Normandy but an Old English chronicle of 1066 gives him the older Saxon title, naming him "Wyllelm, earl of Normandize". In England, duke remained a foreign title until 1338 when Edward raised his son from Earl of Cornwall to Duke of Cornwall.

Royal Dukes are those sons born to the ruling monarch. George IV's brothers included the Royal Dukes: York (Frederick), Clarence (William), Kent (Edward), Sussex (Augustus), Cambridge (Adolphus), and Cumberland (Ernest). Officially and formally, the titles for such men are styled with the greater title first (as in Prince Edward Augustus, Duke of Kent, and he went on to father Queen Victoria). Informally, it is generally just Duke (as in the Duke of Cumberland, also called Butcher Cumberland by some for his brutality at the Battle of Culloden, and whose valet, Joseph Sellis, caused a scandal in 1810 by cutting his own throat).

The Prince Regent's sister Princess Mary also married her cousin William, Duke of Gloucester, who had inherited that royal title from his father, the younger brother of George III—this is why Gloucester doesn't show up for any of the brothers of the Prince Regent. Royal dukedoms have been recreated over time after becoming extinct due to a lack of heirs.

Note: The Duke Rothesay was created in 1398 by Robert III of Scotland for his heir. With the unification of Scotland and England in 1707 it became a title held by the heir to the English and Scottish throne. The heir apparent uses this title when in Scotland. To show how complicated all of this can become, the British monarch also holds the Duchy of Lancaster, which is a County Palatine, which means when in Lancaster, the King is hailed as "The King, The Duke of Lancaster" (or The Queen, The Duke of Lancaster….even when the monarch is a queen, she is not called duchess in this case). In the Channel islands, the monarch (king or queen) is addressed as "Duke of Normandy". These are merely a customary form of address. Tradition complicates everything.

A Royal Duke is addressed like a prince, and so first address is "Your Royal Highness" and after it is "Sir". His duchess is likewise "Your Royal Highness" and then "Ma'am."

A duke may be addressed as "Your Grace", "Duke", or "My Lord Duke" (an older and more formal form of address). It is never "my lord" unless the person doing the address doesn't know better). A duchess is addressed as "Your Grace" or "Duchess".

A duke's eldest son may use one of his father's secondary, lesser titles as a courtesy. A grandson may take one of the third and even lesser titles as a courtesy (dukes always have lesser titles). This does not entitle the son or grandson to sit in the House of Lords, nor does it grant any

rights of a peer, such as freedom from arrest for debt. However, powerful families have a habit of avoiding prosecution for anything less than treason or murder.

The eldest son's wife takes on his title becoming Lady LesserTitle (informally, she would be styled Surname Lesser Title—it is never Lady Surname).

Younger sons and daughters of a duke are known as Lord Firstname Surname and Lady Firstname Surname. That title is kept for the life of that person. A lady who marries a younger son takes his title and so becomes Lady FirstnameHusband SurnameHusband.

If the daughter of a duke marries, she generally takes on her husband's form of address, but if she wishes she can still style herself as Lady Firstname.

Marquess/Marchioness (1385): In 1385, Richard II created Robert de Vere, the Earl of Oxford and the Marquess of Dublin, thereby bringing the title into existence as a degree between duke and earl. The term comes from the Old French, *marchis*, for warden of the marches. The title wasn't adopted into the Scottish peerage until the 15th century.

NOTE: Generally in England and Ireland, the spelling is marquess. In Scotland, the French spelling of marquis is sometimes used. However, this all has to do with when and how the title was created, so you do get oddities, such as Edmund, Marquis Beaufort who lived 1406 to 1455 (not to be confused with the Duke of Beaufort, a title created in 1682—and which is the only English title to reference a property that is not in England…there we go again with oddities).

He is addressed as "My Lord" or "Lord LesserTitle" or the older form of "My Lord Marquess". His wife is addressed as "My Lady" or "Lady LesserTitle."

As with a duke, the eldest son of a marquess takes on one of his father's secondary, lesser title if one exists (and it usually does), as a courtesy. He is not a peer in his own right and so cannot sit in the House of Lords and has no rights of a peer. His wife takes on his title becoming Lady LesserTitle (informally, she would be styled Firstname, Lesser Title—it is never Lady Surname).

Younger sons and all daughters are called Lord Firstname Surname and Lady Firstname Surname. This is also a courtesy, and so they use their given and family name. Again, they are not part of the peerage in their own right (all that belongs to the current holder of the main title). The same rules apply here to marriages of younger sons and daughters as with dukes.

NOTE: Anne Boleyn was made the Marquess of Pembroke in 1532 by Henry VIII, creating this title and making this the first English hereditary peerage granted to a woman in her own right, rather than a title that passes through the female line. (It is styled "Marchioness" in the patent.) The English title Marquess of Winchester, created in 1551, is the earliest still extant, so is Premier Marquess of England. Many Scottish titles have been granted with remainder to pass through the female line, so that titles can devolve to the eldest daughter. This is also true for some of the ancient English baronies created by "writ of summons". For titles that pass through the female line see: https://debretts.com/peerage/titles-in-the-female-line/

Earl/Countess (1017 or pre-conquest): The Old English word for someone who holds property is *eon*, as opposed to *ceonl*, someone without property. Earldoms are perhaps the oldest English title, dating back several hundred years before the Conquest.

After William came along, earl became equal to the Norman "count." That didn't catch on, but "countess" did for the earl's wife. The oldest Saxon earldoms either went extinct or were forfeit for not bowing to William…it took him years to subdue all of England. The oldest earldom is the Earl of Arundel a title held by the Duke of Norfolk since 1660.

As with duke and marquess, an earl's eldest son takes on one of his father's lesser titles, if one exists, as a courtesy title, and is styled by that title. Again, he is not a peer, cannot sit in the House of Lords, and has no rights of a peer. His wife is Lady LesserTitle.

All daughters are style Lady Firstname Surname—such as Lady Elizabeth Dabney—and may retain that title if they marry beneath them. A lady gets to choose how she wishes to be called.

Younger sons are mere Honorables, but that title is never mentioned in any verbal address, it is only in written address (unless of course, the person doesn't know better).

Viscount/Viscountess (1440): This comes from the Latin *vice comes* and French *vicomte*, meaning deputy of a count. In 1440, Henry VI first granted the title to make John, Baron Beaumont, into Viscount Beaumont. However, the word had already been in use for almost a hundred years for an assistant to an earl, specifically for high sheriffs.

There are no courtesy titles here. The children of viscounts are only known as "Honorables" and as noted, this styling used only in formal writing and never in speech.

The eldest sons of Scottish viscounts are sometimes called "The Master of Placename".

NOTE: The earliest use of "laird" dates to 1379, and is thought to come from the Middle English *laverd*, which comes from Old English *hlafweard* meaning "warden of loaves". Laird was applied to the owner of a large, long-established estate and is not a title granted. The equivalent would be the use of "squire" in England (gentry rather than aristocracy).

Baron/Baroness (late 1300's): The word comes from the Latin for *baro*, meaning a man who was not a vassal or servant. From the time of Henry III (who ruled 1216 – 1272), the King's barons were summoned to the Great Council. These were men who "were summoned by a writ to Parliament" or men of importance, usually with military standing.

NOTE: It was the Great Barons who forced King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215, primarily to set out their rights. Of course, John went back on everything as soon as he could. It was William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, Marshall to the King acting as protector for nine-year-old Henry III who put it back in place. Richard II (who ruled 1377- 1400) started to created Barons by letters patent. (William was known as Earl Marshall and this became a hereditary royal office, and has been held by the dukes of Norfolk since 1672—the Howard family, even though staunch Catholics, have long held power and influence in England.)

Barons are styled “Lord Title” (not as “Baron Title” a format used only for formal documents), and may be addressed as “My Lord” or “Lord Title”. A wife is styled “Lady Title” and addressed as “My Lady” or “Lady Title” or “Madam”.

NOTE: Since the Act of Union 1800, Irish peers have had the right to stand for election to the House of Commons. If elected, that man loses gains the privileges of Parliament, but loses the privilege of peerage for the duration of service there.

NOTE: Exceptions to any title being granted away from the eldest male is always something the Crown can choose to grant. This can be done with a “special remainder” which is a clause attached to the patent creating the title that allows for someone other than the “heir-male or heir of the body” to inherit, such as passing the title on through a daughter, or to another relative, deviating from the usual rule of eldest male succession. This might be used to prevent an old title from becoming extinct, and usually is something that shows great favor being given to a family. (A good example is that of Lord Nelson who died without any issue. The Barony of Nelson passed by a special remainder to Lord Nelson's brother, The Reverend William Nelson, who was also created Earl Nelson in recognition of his brother’s sacrifices and service.)

Lord of Parliament (Scotland 1100s): Scotland had this additional title. The creation of new titles such as this ceased with the Acts of Union 1707. From then until 1963, Scottish peers, were represented in the House of Lords by a limited number of elected Scottish peers.

A lord is addressed as “Lord Title” or “My Lord” and his wife or a female holder of the title is addressed as “Lady Title” or “My Lady”.

Children are styled with “the Honorable” in writing, while the heir apparent is styled “The Master of Title” and the heiress apparent or presumptive is styled “The Mistress of Title”. This use may continue after the death of the peer parent.

<u>We now move out of the peerage.</u>

Baronet/Lady (1611): This comes from the Latin for lesser baron. Historically, the term was applied to gentlemen summoned by Edward III (1327 – 1377) to the House of Lords (barons by writ, not by tenure). It was also used to indicate barons of small holdings. As noted, he is not a peer and does not hold a seat in the House of Lords.

The original term was Knight Baronet. The title did not come into formal existence until 1611. At that time, James I needed cash to hang onto Ulster. So James created a hereditary title, baronet, and The Red Hand of Ulster became their badge.

Baronets of Scotland were created from 1625 until 1707, and Irish baronets were created until 1800, when Acts of Union were passed respectively.

A baronet is known as “Sir Surname” (the Sir replaces Mr). His wife is known as “Lady Surname” (instead of Mrs), or may be addressed as “Madam”. She is never Lady Firstname Surname since that is reserved for daughters of a duke, marquess, or an earl.

NOTE: There is no formal method of adoption in the Regency era, and no child informally taken into the family is entitled to any degree of title or courtesy title. Titles may only be inherited as outlined in the creation of that title, and this is through blood. However, Scottish law permits peerages to be inherited by or through a person who was not legitimate at birth, but was subsequently legitimized by their parents marrying after the child's birth. Before 1939 Scottish law allowed 'Irregular marriages' (marriage by 'habit and repute')—it was still better to have marriage lines in case one party decided to deny the marriage.

Knight/Dame (pre-1150): The word comes to us from the Old English *cnihht* or in Old French *cnihta* and the usage for a military man comes before it becomes a title. After the Conquest, the word shows up to denote a man who has earned the title by serving at court and training for the right to bear military arms. By 1386, we have Chaucer's "verray parfit gentil knyght." It then becomes an award from the monarch for merit or services. Knights are not peers. The title is awarded to an individual so cannot be inherited.

A knight is known as "Sir" and his wife is "Lady" or "Dame." The formal honor of "Dame of the British Empire" was created in 1917. Clergy given a knighthood are not knighted with a sword and do not use "Sir" as an address—it is considered unsuitable for a man of God.

Listed by precedence, the British Orders of Knighthood include:
— Knights of the Order of the Garter (1349)
— Knights of the Thistle (1678) – exclusive to Scottish nobles
— Knights of St. Patrick (1788) – exclusive to Irish nobles
— Knights of the Bath (1399, revived in 1715)- first order conferred on commoners
— Knights of the Star of India (1861)
— Knights of St. Michael and St. George (1818)
— Knights of the Indian Empire (1877)
— Knights of the Royal Victorian Order (1896)
— Knights of the British Empire (1917-1918)
— Knights Bachelor – a knight who is not a member of any particular knighthood

Edward III founded the "Poor Knights of the Order of the Garter." It was a set group of 26 veterans of military service. Since Charles I the number has been fixed at 13 for the Royal Foundation and 5 for the Lower (now abolished), and a Governor. These men are military officers who are given, along with their title, apartments in Windsor Castle and small pensions. They are therefore known as Knights of Windsor. From 1797 to 1892, these Knights of Windsor included naval officers. William IV officially made their title, Military Knights of Windsor.

NOTE: For those confused by the inconsistent "of" that is sometimes included in a title and sometimes not, this preposition indicates a title that takes its name from a territory, not that land is granted with the title. The preposition is omitted in titles that originated with the family name, such as Baron Beaumont. All existing dukedoms are territorial titles, and the preposition "of" is never used for viscounts (except for 4 viscounts created in modern times—there we go again with exceptions). The granting of a title might include land and monies, or someone might just get a title. For example the Duke of Wellington was granted the titles Baron Douro of Wellesley in the County of Somerset (1809), Viscount Wellington of Talavera, and of Wellington in the County of Somerset (1809), Earl of Wellington (1812), Marquess of Wellington (1812), Marquess Douro (1814), and Duke of Wellington (1814). However, Parliament bought Stratfield

Saye House for him in 1817. Aspey House in London had been bought by Richard Wellesley, Marquess Wellesley, in 1807 who then sold it to the Duke in 1817.

The caveat to everything said here is that there are oddities that crop up—every now and then you have two people with the same title name but of different rank, or you have someone with multiple titles of the same rank and so both are used, or you have a lady who just does not want to give up her higher title even when she re-marries to a lower status, and lineage sometimes has to be sorted out to trace who really does inherit.

NOTE: The College of Arms grants coats of arms with their mottos, keeps track of pedigrees and peerages, and advises the High Court of Chivalry, which is presided over by the Earl Marshal. The High Court has jurisdiction over the matters of who gets what title, but must be petitioned to sort out confusions and conflicting claims. All this means if you want to do something odd, you can probably make it work, but it might need some research to figure out the details.

As with any form of address, familiarity may apply. Someone within the family may address a parent or sibling by a first name, or a male friend may address someone only by the man's title. English families also often have pet names used both in writing and other forms of address. How someone speaks of another person says a lot about ties and opinions of that person.

Remember the notion of a monarch's whim when creating titles—it is the monarch's right to give or take a title. Titles have been created to be inherited through a woman (the dukedom of Marlborough), or for a countess in her own right (Lady Sutherland). As noted, many Scottish peerages and ancient English baronies allow the peerage to pass to the "heirs general" meaning females can inherit. (The earldom of Mansfield was created in 1776 with a remedy to a specific woman, though not a daughter, who became *suo jure* Countess of Mansfield in 1793, and it is noted the circumstances surrounding this patent are complicated—not everyone was at the top of their game when writing these things out.)

Sources:

Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition, Oxford University Press, 1971

Titles and Forms of Address, Black Ltd., 1929 ed.

Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, Wordsworth Reference. 1970

United Kingdom peerage creations 1801 to 2021: a list compiled by David Beamish
http://www.peerages.info/peeragesi.htm

Correct Forms of Address (a very useful online table)
https://www.chinet.com/~laura/html/titles12.html

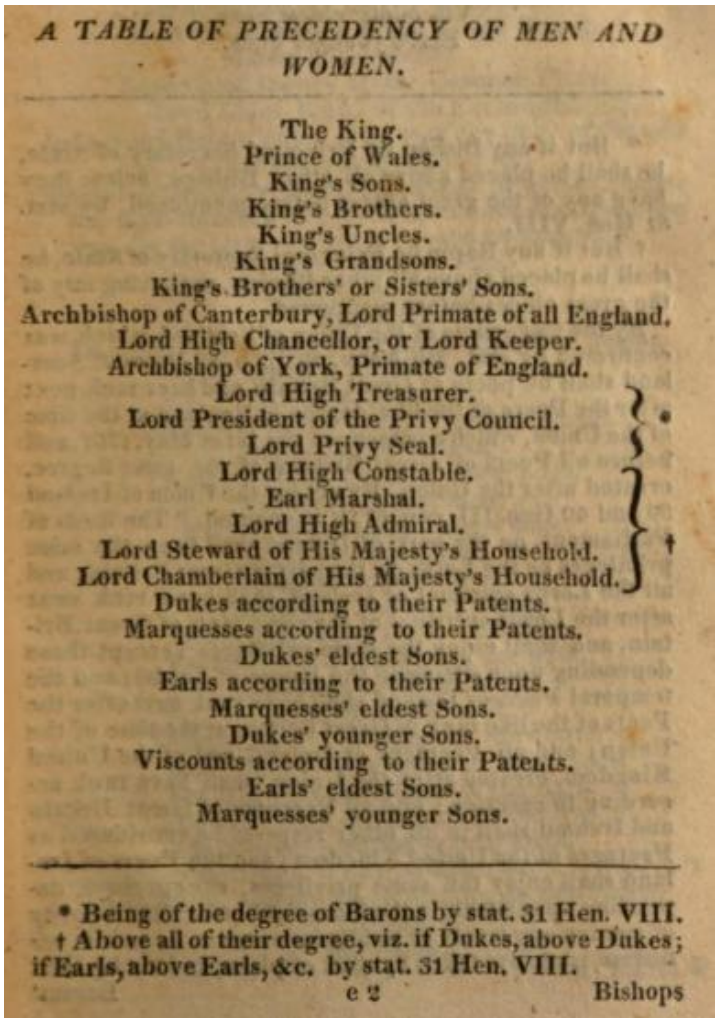
Miscellaneous Information on British peerages in 1818
https://www.napoleon-series.org/research/miscellaneous/Britishpeerage/c_britishpeerage.html

Also recommended is Jo Beverley's post on titles for common mistakes in fiction--
https://www.jobev.com/title.html

PRECEDENCE

The four tables below come from an 1816 copy of ***The peerage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Ireland v.1: England*** by John Debrett:
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hxgt2g&seq=59

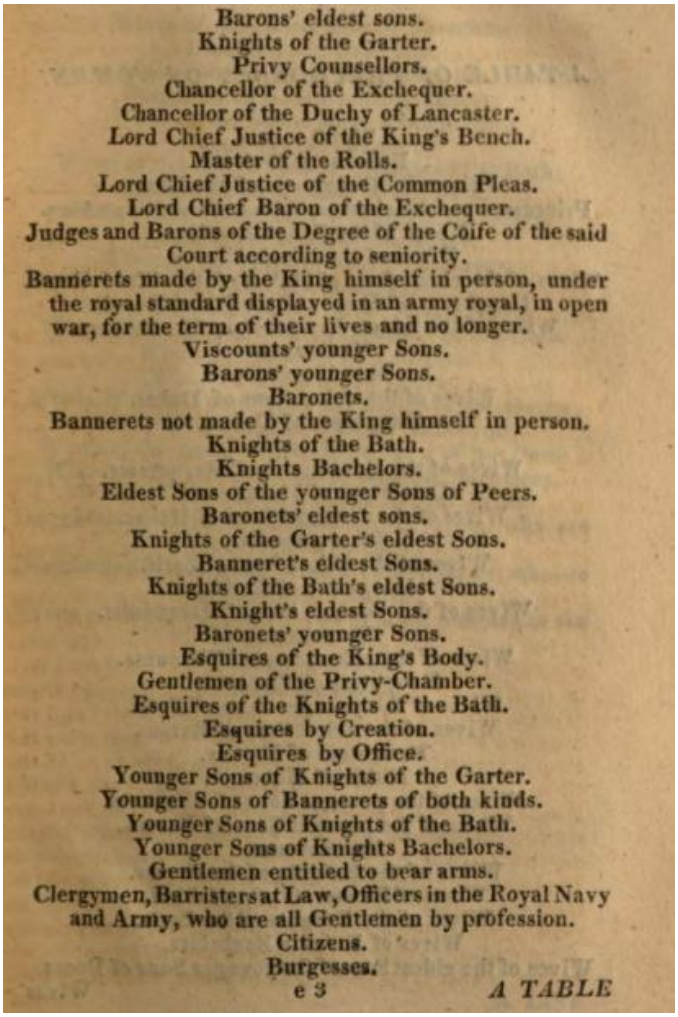
The maids of honor refer to junior attendants of a queen, so junior also to the lady-in-waiting. The bannerts referred to are knight bannerets, meaning a knight who has been given the right to hold the royal banner before a company of troops. Esquire simply means an attendant (such as Esquires of the King's Body). Citizen implies a freeman with the right to vote (land owner), while burgess refences a freeman.



A TABLE OF PRECEDENCY OF MEN AND WOMEN.

The King.
Prince of Wales.
King's Sons.
King's Brothers.
King's Uncles.
King's Grandsons.
King's Brothers' or Sisters' Sons.
Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Primate of all England.
Lord High Chancellor, or Lord Keeper.
Archbishop of York, Primate of England.
Lord High Treasurer. *
Lord President of the Privy Council. *
Lord Privy Seal. *
Lord High Constable. †
Earl Marshal. †
Lord High Admiral. †
Lord Steward of His Majesty's Household. †
Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household. †
Dukes according to their Patents.
Marquesses according to their Patents.
Dukes' eldest Sons.
Earls according to their Patents.
Marquesses' eldest Sons.
Dukes' younger Sons.
Viscounts according to their Patents.
Earls' eldest Sons.
Marquesses' younger Sons.

* Being of the degree of Barons by stat. 31 Hen. VIII.
† Above all of their degree, viz. if Dukes, above Dukes; if Earls, above Earls, &c. by stat. 31 Hen. VIII.



Barons' eldest sons.
Knights of the Garter.
Privy Counsellors.
Chancellor of the Exchequer.
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench.
Master of the Rolls.
Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas.
Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer.
Judges and Barons of the Degree of the Coife of the said Court according to seniority.
Bannerets made by the King himself in person, under the royal standard displayed in an army royal, in open war, for the term of their lives and no longer.
Viscounts' younger Sons.
Barons' younger Sons.
Baronets.
Bannerets not made by the King himself in person.
Knights of the Bath.
Knights Bachelors.
Eldest Sons of the younger Sons of Peers.
Baronets' eldest sons.
Knights of the Garter's eldest Sons.
Banneret's eldest Sons.
Knights of the Bath's eldest Sons.
Knight's eldest Sons.
Baronets' younger Sons.
Esquires of the King's Body.
Gentlemen of the Privy-Chamber.
Esquires of the Knights of the Bath.
Esquires by Creation.
Esquires by Office.
Younger Sons of Knights of the Garter.
Younger Sons of Bannerets of both kinds.
Younger Sons of Knights of the Bath.
Younger Sons of Knights Bachelors.
Gentlemen entitled to bear arms.
Clergymen, Barristers at Law, Officers in the Royal Navy and Army, who are all Gentlemen by profession.
Citizens.
Burgesses.

A TABLE OF PRECEDENCY OF WOMEN.

The Queen.
Princess of Wales.
Princesses Daughters of the King.
Princesses and Duchesses, Wives of the King's Sons.
Wives of the King's Brothers.
Wives of the King's Uncles.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Dukes of the Blood Royal.
Daughters of Dukes of the Blood Royal.
Wives of the King's Brothers' or Sisters' Sons.
Duchesses.
Marchionesses.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Dukes.
Daughters of Dukes.
Countesses.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Marquesses.
Daughters of Marquesses.
Wives of the youngest Sons of Dukes.
Viscountesses.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Earls.
Daughters of Earls.
Wives of the younger sons of Marquesses.
Baronesses.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Viscounts.
Daughters of Viscounts.
Wives of the younger Sons of Earls.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Barons.
Daughters of Barons.
Maids of Honour.
Wives of the younger Sons of Viscounts.
Wives of the younger Sons of Barons.
Baronetesses.
Wives of the Knights of the Garter.
Wives of Bannerets of each kind.
Wives of the Knights of the Bath.
Wives of Knights Bachelors.
Wives of the eldest Sons of the younger Sons of Peers.

Wives

Wives of the eldest Sons of Baronets.
Daughters of Baronets.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Knights of the Garter.
Daughters of Knights of the Garter.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Bannerets.
Daughters of Bannerets.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Knights of the Bath.
Daughters of Knights of the Bath.
Wives of the eldest Sons of Knights Bachelors.
Daughters of Knights Bachelors.
Wives of the younger Sons of Baronets.
Daughters of Knights.
Wives of the Esquires of the King's Body.
Wives of the Esquires of the Knights of the Bath.
Wives of Esquires by Creation.
Wives of Esquires by Office.
Wives of the younger Sons of Knights of the Garter.
Wives of the younger Sons of Bannerets.
Wives of the younger Sons of Knights of the Bath.
Wives of the younger Sons of Knights Bachelors.
Wives of Gentlemen entitled to bear Arms.
Daughters of Esquires entitled to bear Arms, who are Gentlewomen by birth.
Daughters of Gentlemen entitled to bear Arms, who are Gentlewomen by birth.
Wives of Clergymen, Barristers of Law, Officers in the Navy and Army.
Wives of Citizens.
Wives of Burgesses.