

Dukes of Portland

By Hugh Watson (Part 2)

Why all the interest in the Dukes of Portland? In 1983 my wife and I and three children bought a house in Grange Terrace Kilmarnock. On receipt of a plan of Grange Terrace from my solicitor, I discovered that the 6th Duke of Portland had feued 9 plots of land to build 9 houses on the west side of Grange Terrace in Kilmarnock. In 1920 the east side had already been built up including by people such as the architect William Railton who laid out John Finnie Street having designed and built his house in Grange Terrace in 1860. The Feu plan for Grange Terrace contained such details that any minerals found in my land were still the property of the Dukes of Portland and his successors, you had to be a good neighbour and you could not run a business from your house or make any alterations without agreement with the Duke's Factor.

The origin of the Dukes of Portland is also fascinating. When William of Orange landed at Brixham in Devon to claim the throne of Great Britain a Hans Willem Bentinck was a member of his party. He was already a favourite of the prince having nursed him successfully through smallpox. Hans was a diplomat and a soldier. He fought as a commander at the Battle of the Boyne. For his support William made him a peer in the English Peerage honouring him firstly with the title Baron of Cirencester, the Viscount of Woodstock and finally Earl of Portland - an extinct title which was revived for him. William gave him Bulstrode Park in Buckinghamshire and estates amounting to 135,000 acres of land in Ireland, and other estates in England. Because of jealousy in the royal court he had to turn down an estate in North Wales. Although he fell out with the King, William requested his old favourite's presence on his death bed. The first Bentinck to land in England did not achieve the title of Duke. That title came with the Hanoverian succession of George I when the 2nd Earl of Portland was raised by King George I in 1716 to the title of 1st Duke of Portland.

The 1st Duke of Portland also was given a title for his son - Marquis of Titchfield below duke but higher than earl. When William of Orange became joint ruler of Britain with Mary his wife he not only brought a clearer way forward for the protestant religion but the possibility of adopting the Dutch financial system which seemed to be taken on in a measured way with the Bank of England founded 1694 and also imported the Dutch system of a national public debt funded through a Stock Exchange founded in Britain shortly after the Bank. It was the Stock Exchange which brought on one of the earlier Stock Market's Crashes called the South Sea Bubble. People got caught up in investing in South America which was still much controlled by Spain and Portugal and these investments proved to be poor and with a high level of the funds invested in these poor funds the eventual collapse slowed down development for future projects in London and other parts of Britain. The 1st Duke of Portland was unfortunately heavily involved in such investments and when the Bubble Burst and he lost heavily but was offered the governorship of Jamaica which was not a much sought after post. He arrived as Jamaican Governor at the age of 40 in 1820 and left in a coffin at the age of 46 in 1826.

Meanwhile his son inherited the title at the age of 17 becoming the 2nd Duke of Portland in 1826. He married aged 34 Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, heiress of the Earl of Oxford and thus restored the Portland fortunes. She converted the Portland ancestral home Bulstrode Park into a menagerie and aviary where she had many botanical specimens. King George and his wife and their 16 children visited regularly as the collection was "fit for a King". She had a superb ceramics collection topped by the Portland Vase. The 2nd Duke died at age 53 with his son succeeding him aged 24.

The 3rd Duke of Portland started his long political career in 1761 when he was Marquis of Titchfield and died in 1809 some say because of stress of politics added to by two members of his government fighting a duel - George Canning the Foreign Secretary and Castlereagh the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in 1809¹. A poster on display at Welbeck Abbey in Spring 2018 states that the 3rd Duke was extravagant and left debts of £500,000 to his heir.

His eldest son and heir the Marquis of Titchfield did much to rescue the Portland accounts by marrying Henrietta Scott who was backed along with others by the powerful family of Dundas. To give you some idea of the Scott wealth available. The Isle of May was a small part of the Balcomie Estate situated off the east coast in the Firth of Forth. The Northern Lighthouse Board paid the 4th Duke of Portland £60000 in 1814 (about £6 million today) for the Isle of May so the lighthouse could be replaced by a Robert Stevenson design.

What did the 4th Duke of Portland do for Ayrshire?

- (1) He obtained an Act of Parliament to improve the layout of Kilmarnock putting in two new bridges, (King Street and St Marnock Street) New streets King Street, Portland Street, Wellington Street. The new Town Hall. Later Union Street, Duke Street and lastly John Finnie Street. The body which organised all the work and more needing done was called The Town of Kilmarnock Improvement Trust which existed from 1802 to 1870 m
- (2) He obtained an Act of Parliament to design and build a railway line and bridges from Kilmarnock to Troon.
- (3) He entered into the already flourishing theme of Agricultural improvements by driving progress and in addition built a manufacturing Agricultural Tile Plant (Scotland's first) on the Ducal Estate land at Cessnock.
- (4) He obtained an Act of Parliament to make Troon's Harbour commercial with wet and dry docks and even started shipbuilding.
- (5) He was involved in yacht design racing his yachts against Admiralty yachts in time trials in the Firth of Clyde.

Undoubtedly the 4th Duke not only played a vital part in restoring his family's wealth he made a highly significant contribution to the development of Ayrshire. Eventually the foundations he established ensured the Portlands and the Welbeck estates after him held 5th place in the amount of acreage they held in Ayrshire but number 1 for its value.

The 5th Duke of Portland spent most of his time at the ancestral home at Welbeck Abbey supervising the various grand plans he had in mind to turn it into the '8th Wonder of the World'. He never visited Ayrshire but seemed to take an interest in looking at regular reports from his factors. He also provided a grant for the completion of "Victoria Street" in Kilmarnock after which the name was changed to "Duke Street". He also had called in the plans for "Victoria Street" which he looked at and reputedly straightened it and sent back to the Kilmarnock Town Improvement Trustees with a cheque for £700.

The 6th Duke lived at a time in 1920's when an Act of Parliament enabled landowners to break the entails or tailzies in Scotland clauses enabling estates to be broken up and the succession bypassed. He created Welbeck Estates Limited in which he placed the dukedom's former wealthy estates,

¹ History of Government blog <https://history.blog.gov.uk/2015/09/02/william-cavendish-bentinck-3rd-dukeof-portland/> accessed October 2018

stocks and shares, paintings and all other possessions so his granddaughter Anne could inherit Welbeck Abbey and all the wealth when her father died.

The 7th Duke of Portland provided much information to the nation when he did a deal with the Treasury bequeathing the Portland Papers to the nation in lieu of death duties. So when the 8th Duke of Portland - a distant cousin of the 7th Duke inherited that was all he got as "the cupboard was bare".

The 9th Duke of Portland also inherited the title without the riches and when he died in 1990 as his son had predeceased the title became extinct after 174 years.

The Earl of Portland is a title which lives on and the present holder is one Tim Bentinck, an actor and the voice of David Archer in the long running radio series "The Archers". By this time only the title remains.

What about the Scott inheritance ?

We know that in 1889 this slice of the Dukes of Portland wealth was inherited by the Dowager Lady Howard de Walden as in 1828 she had married Charles Augustus Ellis, the 6th Howard de Walden but her inheritance was due to her father being the 4th Duke of Portland and her brother who became the 5th Duke of Portland subsequently dying without issue and there being no other male contenders the wealth the Kilmarnock Estates and the Marylebone Estates in London went down the Dukes of Portland female line of which she was third in line to inherit.

The modern wing of the Howards de Walden often feature in The Sunday Times Rich List and the present holder is Hazel Czernin who had to contend with the authorities to gain the title and wealth for herself and her three sisters. She has a son and heir Peter Czernin who has achieved some fame as a film producer with successes as "The Best Exotic Golden Marigold Hotel", "In Bruges", "The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society" and "A Very English Scandal". In turn he has sons who will inherit the Lord Howard de Walden wealth. General Scott smiles in his grave.