

The Breach of Promise

Have you heard the one about our noble ancestry – our Ker family being related to the Duke of Roxburghe? Not the story of Louisa’s father being the illegitimate son of the 3rd Duke - that’s another story. The one about a connection to an ancestor which starts a few generations before that.

Seems that over the years, many members of the Ker/Peterson/Uhr family have heard at least one variation and may have even named children and property in honour of it. (See article – [Ducal Namesakes](#))

What if the basis of this story turned out to be true?

The year is 1814, the place is London. On the northern side of the Thames, in the cosmopolitan and bustling area known as Tower Hamlets, Johan and Louisa Uhr are welcoming their second son, Edmund into their extended family, consisting of Edmund’s older brother John James, and his half siblings by Louisa’s first husband Peter Peterson: Mary Louisa, Louisa and Daniel.

Across the river on the southern side of the Thames in Lambeth, Louisa’s father John Ker and his wife Anne (Phillips) - a moderately successful popular novelist, are living in unstable financial circumstances. John now in his early 50’s, is beginning to suffer from failing eyesight, no doubt from his profession a fan painter, just as his late father Andrew had.



John is also a stationer and bookseller, and a man of some education.

For the past 5 years or so, he’s been engaged in intermittent and cordial correspondence with the man who’s now been recognised (1812) as the 5th Duke of Roxburghe. John Ker believes that the Duke (formerly Sir James Innes) has previously promised (and indeed provided) modest financial assistance in recognition that John is a member of the extended Ker family, making a legitimate claim to patronage (as opposed to a claim to the title).

But...the relationship has soured, and in his current financial situation John Ker decides to make a last, somewhat ill-advised attempt to revive it.

“The Breach of Promise”, published in 1814, is a collection of John Ker’s correspondence with Sir James Innes from 1809 onward. There are no grounds for doubting its essential authenticity, though its style and motivation may confound 21st century readers unfamiliar with the patronage system that prevailed in 19th century England (and Australia). On the basis of his connection, however distant, to the extended Ker family in Scotland, John Ker quite reasonably expected and apparently initially received, both modest financial assistance for his family from the Duke to be.

John also requested intervention in the naval career of his son James Ker born 1790 (brother or possibly half brother of Louisa) as James wished to leave his military position.

It seems likely - both from the correspondence in the book, and other external evidence, that this assistance was withdrawn. Partly because of Sir James Innes's recognition as the Duke in 1812 and partly because he at that point had no heir and was unreasonably disturbed when informed that John Ker's son James (then in his early 20s) had unwisely 'talked up' his own genealogy.

John Ker's belief that his former patron had deserted him, then motivated an unwise attempt to shame the now Duke of Roxburghe by publishing the book in 1814. (By 1816 the Duke, then aged 77, had an heir who succeeded as the 6th Duke in 1823).

Only two copies of *The Breach of Promise* are known to be extant in the public library system. One (apparently a private donation) is in the National Library of Scotland. The other is in the National Library of Australia., and was acquired as part of a very large collection. If our extended family ever owned copies either of the work itself, or of the original correspondence, they have long since disappeared, but maybe check your book shelf just in case.

What does survive, is one very tantalizing piece of evidence to substantiate John Ker's claim to be a member of one of the many (often interrelated) branches of the Ker family among the Scottish nobility and gentry.

In the Introduction to "The Breach of Promise" John Ker identifies himself as

"Mr. John Ker of Linton, one of the Roxburgh family, grandson of Andrew Ker, who was a lieutenant...in George the First's reign, whose commission I have in my possession."

That commission, issued in February 1716, is currently located in Fremantle, Western Australia with a family member, and if you're wondering how this could have happened: well, that's another story. (See Article – [The Commission](#))

Here is a public link to the book "Breach of Promise or Mis led Nobleman, by Artful Teachers or Honor Sold for the Sake of a Trifle" available to read at Google Books. (You may need to copy and paste the link into your browser.)

[https://www.google.com.au/books/edition/The_Breach_of_Promise_Or_Mis_led_Noblema/3XPMZVRk3oQC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=inauthor:%22John+Ker+\(Fan-Painter.\)%22&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com.au/books/edition/The_Breach_of_Promise_Or_Mis_led_Noblema/3XPMZVRk3oQC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=inauthor:%22John+Ker+(Fan-Painter.)%22&printsec=frontcover)

Author - Margaret Ker, a member of the extended family by (long) marriage. Her husband Ian's 5th great grandfather James Ker was John Ker's elder brother.

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