

Acquiring Foreign Titles

Advertisements frequently appear offering titles for sale. Often these appear to be authenticated by mention of International Law Firms, this or that Sovereign House and so on.

For the most part, these are entirely bogus. So here is a brief round-up of the actual situation.

Germany and the Holy Roman Empire : These were titles awarded by the Emperor of the H.R.E. or that of Germany. Some were recognised by various Kingdoms or were ratified by local Parliaments. They were all personal awards but some were tied to the land holdings of the recipients. This does mean that acquisition of the land entitles the new owner to use the accompanying title.

Offers of 'adoption' by a German Prince should be scrupulously avoided. The Margrave of Meissen, who would otherwise be the King of Saxony, has adopted the son of his own daughter as his heir. He can do so, in view of his status as Pretender. Not everyone is happy about this, however. We are. The same situation applies to the grandson of the 'last' Prince van der Leyen. He, also, is not universally recognised ; especially in Germany, where succession rules are extremely rigid. Even 'unequal' marriages can be a bar to succession. This is where the current holder marries someone of inferior rank. There was, for example, some debate as to whether the son of the late Prince of Thurn and Taxis could succeed, since his mother was a mere countess.

We, therefore know of no titles to be acquired within these realms.

Spain : The only 'irregular' succession recognised by the Spanish Ministry of Justice is a claim by a blood-relative of the last holder of a dormant title. And this only applies up to the fourth generation. Certain holders of several titles, sometimes pass one on to a son or other near relative but certainly not to an outsider.

Russia and Eastern Europe : All titles in this area are of a personal nature.

Scandinavia : Much the same applies.

United Kingdom : No English or, for that matter, Irish titles can be passed on, apart from Lordships of the Manor. These are fun but of little standing. In Scotland, until recently, some Baronies or even titles of superior rank could be acquired. The situation here is under judicial review and anyone offered such a holding should be extremely cautious

France and Italy : The situation here is rather different. In Italy many – and in

France almost all – titles resulted from the land being raised to a barony etc. and not the person. The new owner could take the title. One of the sons of King Louis Philippe of France was known as the Duke of Aumale, because the last Guise Duchess sold her duchy to Louis XIV. In Italy, the Prince Boncompagni Ludovisi is also Prince of Piombino, by virtue of the fact that an ancestor bought the principality.

In France, it is often said that titles cannot be sold. This is partially true. Today, a title forms part of one's surname and, to this extent, is protected and cannot be passed on except to a blood-relative. However, there are several parcels of land – now dormant – where, under feudal law, any new owner could restore the rank that goes with it. We give, below, further details on this.

How Titles Came About

In the Middle Ages, the Monarch could not attend to every detail of his realm personally. So the practice arose of appointing governors for his various territories. The early ones were called by the Latin names of *dux* or *comes* (graf in German). These became duc, duque or duke or comte and count, with the passage of time. Governors of more difficult, usually frontier, regions became known as markgrafs, margraves or marquis in French. At first, these were largely military appointments, such as a general serving in one of the trouble-spots of the world. However, provided the son was prepared to swear fealty to his overlord, he was usually confirmed in his position. So the titles gradually became hereditary.

Titled Land in France

While this was going on, and at a later date, the country was split up into *seigneuries*. These were usually sited on a château or a large house and were mainly for administrative purposes. The seigneur collected taxes, executed justice, provided soldiers when need arose and generally became the representative of his liege-lord. The land belonged to him and he benefited from the rents and other income from his fief. He could pass his fief on at will, though descent was normally to his eldest son. Many of these seigneuries, as a reward for exceptional services, were subsequently raised to the rank of barony or county. At first, these titles tended to revert to the monarch, on the death of the beneficiary.


“Plus tard, le roi érigea des terres appartenant déjà à quelque grand seigneur, mais alors celles-ci ne feront pas retour à la couronne en cas d'absence d'héritiers directs.” (Duc de la Force). 'Later the king was to elevate to the rank of county (or barony) a seigneurie already belonging to a great lord; but these did not revert to the king in the absence of direct heirs.' The preambles to the documents awarding a piece of titled land were not always identical and there were different customs in the various regions of what had once been Charlemagne's empire.

After this time, the owner of a barony or county could pass it on. Usually this was to his heir but, if he only had daughters, it could be to the husband of one of these. He could even sell his holding. When this happened, the new proprietor took the title.

The attached extract, taken from the Archives, show how the Preud'homme family succeeded to the rank of comte de Fontenoy.

DE PREUD'HOMME. — Voir : DE PREUD'HOMME et CORNÉLY.
 27.667. — (FLANDRES. — Chim. : PREUD'HOMME DE CIESOIN. — Sg. du Pléimont). — (Yse (L'org.) en chertou de sub. cur. de 3 étra de Nam arrachés de sub. — (Fiches Originales 2392. — Annuaire Général Fludoce).

LE PREUD'HOMME DE FONTENOY.
 27.668. — (LORRAINE). — *De gue. aux 3 chevrons d'or et au chef couvé d'az. ch. d'un lion rampant d'or et colleté de gue.*



Cette famille, originaire du Cambésien, est peut-être une branche détachée de la famille de Preud'homme d'Hailly, qui suivra. Chéris indique qu'elle a pour auteur Jacques Le Preud'homme, mort en 1334, allié à Antoinette de Meschin, dame d'Ostrivert, dont il eut Alard, vgr d'Hailly, marié à Cécile de Rely, dame de Preys. Il indique ensuite qu'un fils, nommé Jean, naquit de ce mariage (mais sans mentionner dates ni alliance) et eut pour autre Jean, marié à Anne de Thours et père de Jean, allié à Philippe de Purbis, dame d'Hailly. De là vint Jean Le Preud'homme, anobli en Lorraine en 1516, Receveur Général du Barrois, auquel remonte la filiation rigoureusement prouvée de cette famille, et qui eut pour femme de Neuville : Blaise, Conseiller d'Etat en Lorraine, marié en 1538 à Nicole Coestant, qui lui donna Christophe. Eut, allié en 1573 à Marie de Huretel, il eut Blaise, Conseiller d'Etat en Lorraine, Maître des Requêtes, marié en 1599 à Esther des Comblen. Leur fils Christophe, vgr de Vitrimont, épousa en 1631 Elisabeth Cabot, qui lui donna Guérisseau, Chr. Chambellan du Duc de Lorraine, marié en 1670 à Catherine de Chantenois, dont 2 fils. Le cadet, Pierre-Georges, fut l'auteur de la branche de Vitrimont, qui s'éteignit en 1788 avec Christophe-Léopold, Chambellan de l'Empereur, qui avait été créé par celui-ci Comte de Vitrimont en 1755. L'aîné, Christophe-François, fut Comte de Fontenoy par acquisition de cette terre, Chambellan du Duc de Lorraine, épousa en 1699 Louise de Villiers, qui lui donna : 1^{er} Gabriel-Léopold, qui suit ; — 2^e Blaise-Léopold, Grand Cécis et Grand Hospitaller de Malte ; — 3^e Nicolas-François, Marquis de Norvint par Lettres Patentes de 1755, dit le Comte de Chantenois, allié en 1756 à Françoise de Barbanet de Meisic et père de 2 fils : Charles, Marquis de Meisic et de Fontenoy, père d'une fille et Académicien (1733-1817), dont les 2 fils, Antoine et Paul, moururent sans alliance en 1830 et 1856.

Guérisseau-Léopold, vgr Comte de Fontenoy, (1768-1787), épousa en 1734 Louise-Françoise de La Rochefoucauld, qui lui donna Gui-André (1735-1792), Chr. de St-Louis, reçu cadet gentilhomme du Roi Stanislas, allié en 1774 à Philippina Barbone de Villeneuve de Vagelsbach. Leur fils, Mathieu (1777-1844), Page de Monsieur, Chr. de St-Louis et de la L.H., épousa en 1804 Eugénie de Fresnoyville, dont il eut Joseph, vgr Comte de Fontenoy, Général de Brigade, Commandeur de la L.H., marié en 1835 à Isoure de Sarat, d'où Albert, né en 1839, allié en 1869 à Jeanne Barbier Lalobé de Falcourt, d'at nobilité. Cette famille comparut en Lorraine en 1789. — (Nouveau d'Heuz. 226. — Domais Blans 344. — Chéris 163. — Fiches Originales 2391. — Westminster II et N.S. — Annuaire Général Lorraine. — La Roque et Barbilleroy)

DE PREUD'HOMME D'HAILLY.
 27.669. — (PICARDIE et FLANDRES. — Originaire du Cambésien). — *De sin. à l'aigle éployé d'or beupé et rambré de gue.*
 Cette famille, dont la filiation remonte selon Westminster à 1261, a formé de nombreuses branches. Toutefois les renseignements la concernant, qui figurent au Cabinet des Titres, étant contradictoires sur de nombreux points, il ne nous est pas possible de rapporter ici la généalogie complète



It was very rare for anyone to be awarded the personal rank of baron, count or even marquis. Nearly always, the sovereigns rewarded their subjects by raising the lands to the appropriate rank.

This is what Dom Ambroise Pelletier, one of the greatest experts on the whole subject, says:

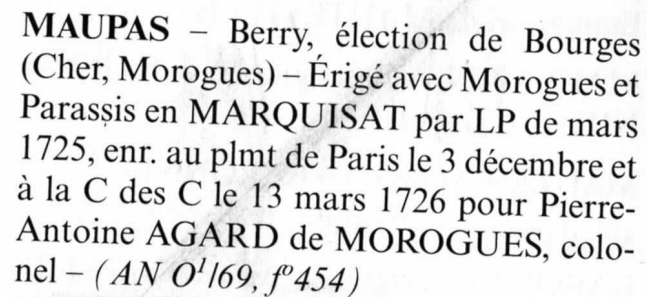
“Les titres de baron, comte ou marquis s'obtenaient de trois manières : 1) par lettres-patentes conféraient ces dignités ; 2) par érection de terres en baronnies, comtés ou marquisats ; 3) enfin, par acquisition de seigneuries ayant l'une ou l'autre de ces qualités ».

The title of baron, count or marquis were obtained in three ways: 1) By Letters-Patent conferring these dignities; 2) by the elevation of land into baronies, counties or marquisates; 3) by the acquisition of seigneuries having one or other of these qualities.

I. Within the French territories and before the Revolution, *ad personam* titles were extremely rare - but they did exist.

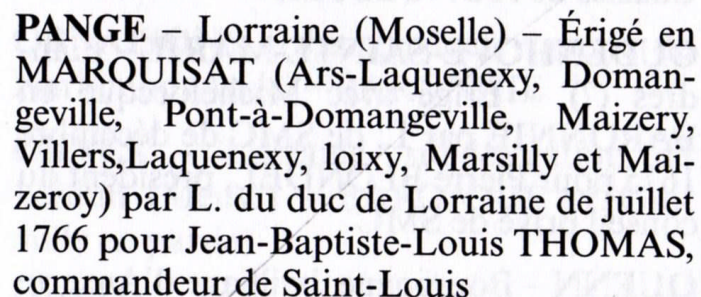
2. By far the most usual form of acquiring a title was to have one's property elevated to the rank of barony or county etc. This enabled the owner to carry the accompanying style. There is a case for saying that, should the property be lost, sold or whatever, the title should be forfeit. This did happen, though not very often. Otherwise, descent proceeded from father to son (or grandson). Here are two straightforward cases, where the land is still in the ownership of the same family.

The marquis de Maupas still lives at the Château de Maupas, Maupas



MAUPAS – Berry, élection de Bourges (Cher, Morogues) – Érigé avec Morogues et Parassis en **MARQUISAT** par LP de mars 1725, enr. au plmt de Paris le 3 décembre et à la C des C le 13 mars 1726 pour Pierre-Antoine AGARD de MOROGUES, colonel – (*AN O¹169, f^o454*)

The marquis de Pange at the Château de Pange, Pange



PANGE – Lorraine (Moselle) – Érigé en **MARQUISAT** (Ars-Laquenexy, Domangeville, Pont-à-Domangeville, Maizery, Villers, Laquenexy, loixy, Marsilly et Maizeroy) par L. du duc de Lorraine de juillet 1766 pour Jean-Baptiste-Louis THOMAS, commandeur de Saint-Louis

3. There were, however, some cases which fall into the third paragraph of Dom Pelletier's treatise.

Attached is the first page of Letters-Patent, raising the seigneurie of Fontenoy to a county. It is old and not very easy to read.



Restoration of Dormant Lands

What happened if the family just died out?

Up to the time of the Revolution there was always someone to claim the honour – and the rental income – of a seigneurie. However, this income was specifically abolished (and for the Church) in 1789. People moved, families became extinct, the original châteaux were destroyed or merely fell down as a result of neglect. The fact that such and such piece of land was, in fact, a barony slowly faded from people's memories. You can go down to many such villages and the occupants will be surprised to learn of this part of their history.

However, the facts remain. And this means that a member of the original family, however remote, can resurrect his family's honours.

But if the family has vanished, without trace – what happens then? It is up to anyone else to claim and restore the old honours.

To do this, he would need a representative piece of the land. You cannot claim to be the baron of Ménil, say, without having some part of the land in your possession. It need not be the whole seigneurie – some have grown into towns, some have disappeared – any more than the Queen of England owns the whole country.

You would also need a coat-of-arms to be registered in your name. This need not be exactly the same as the original but should show the provenance. You could include, for example, any device you already owned.

Legal Situation

It is not contested that certain parcels of land were raised, under the *Anciens Régimes*, to the rank of barony, viscounty, county or marquisate. These can be referred to as *terres titrés* or *terrains titrés*.

It is equally clear that some of these parcels can still be acquired by purchase, gift etc.

The question then arises as to whether the new owner has the right to the title that went with the land. Titles in France, generally, have been “abolished”, restored, abolished again and then reluctantly recognised, according to the various regimes that have prevailed since the fall of the monarchy and the two empires. It is reasonable to say that the France of today, being a republic, has approached the whole problem with a certain ambivalence. The legal situation seems to boil down to the following:

- a) An existing title of nobility is considered as an accessory to the name of the individual as a *signe de distinction honorifique* (a mark of honorific distinction) that goes with the family name. To this extent it cannot be transferred.
- b) Under the Ancien Régime, the acquirer of a *terrain titre* did, indeed, have the right to the title that went with his new property. If he were not already “noble”, this status could be achieved in time or by reception of *letters de confirmation* from the sovereign or ruling duke. Nobility, though still much cherished by many French families, conferred certain rights. Since these mainly refer to not having to pay taxes, this can now be considered to be defunct.

In summary, therefore, it can be stated that it is possible to acquire titled land and this can be registered by means of due reference in the Deeds of Sale. A French citizen can apply to the *Garde des Sceaux* (Minister of Justice) to have a suitable amendment entered on his *Etat Civil*. This is not always granted and for foreigners it does not really apply. There is and never has been a register of titles in France.

Belgium is not only a monarchy – and a close neighbour of France – but it leans heavily on many French and Holy Roman Empire customs. Indeed, many Belgian provinces have, at various times, been ruled over by sovereigns of states now incorporated into France. The following was produced by Dr Stavaux de Fontenoy, a Doctor of Law and Head of a Department in the European Commission.

LE STATUT EN BELGIQUE ACTUELLEMENT DES TITRES DE NOBLESSE ANCIENS , ANTERIEURS A LA REVOLUTION

Particulièrement des titres d’origines Française.

Current Belgian Law concerning old titles, dating from before the Revolution – particularly titles of French origin.

Titles owing their origin to feudal times (as opposed to those of recent creation) are normally based on a territorial holding, the Sovereign having qualified such a portion of land as a barony, county etc. These titles are termed “real”. Their patrimonial character is regarded as being of the same nature as during the periods of feudal regimes. In this manner, the ancient suzerainty continues and keeps its force. (Rough translation).

In France, it is often said that titles were abolished in 1789. This is not quite true. "Fiefs" were abolished. These, in essence, were "leaseholds" granted by an overlord to a vassal – in exchange for a vow of loyalty. In short, all such Title Deeds were dispensed with, much as Henry VIII of England dispossessed the monasteries etc of their lands and rental incomes. In any event, under the Restoration, Louis XVIII promulgated a Charter (1814) and Article 71 states "*La noblesse ancienne reprend ses droits, la noblesse nouvelle conserve les siens.*" That is to say that the old nobility could reclaim its titles – but not its old privileges – while those people granted titles by Napoleon could keep what they had been awarded.

We give, below, some further documentation which may be of interest:

Example taken from the Archives at Bar le Duc

History of the Seigneurie and Barony of Tronville :

1333 AD : Marguerite de Tronville paid faith and homage to the Count of Bar and recognised her duty to protect the Château of her Suzerain.

1431 : Henri, Bastard of Bar, seigneur of Avant-garde and of Boursault, is besieged in his château of Tronville by the Dame of Commercy.

1586 : Duke Charles III of Lorraine and Bar sells the land at Tronville to his Treasurer, Jean Vincent.

During the XVII Century, the King awards his part of the seigneurie of Tronville to the Colliquet family, who had been consellers from father to son at the Cours des Comptes at Bar le Duc. The head of the family was thenceforth known as the Seigneur de Tronville.

1721 : François Viart and his wife, Catherine de Lescale, become owners by purchase of Tronville.

26th October 1721 : The land of Tronville is raised to the rank of a barony. This entitled François Viart to be called Baron de Tronville. He died shortly afterwards.

1732 : The château is constructed.

1735 : A member of the Colliquet family (see above) is created Baron de Tronville.

The only daughter of François and Catherine Viart, Jeanne Thérèse, marries Alexis-Charles heir to the Dutertre (or du Tertre) family. He was a conseller at the Parliament of Metz.

1774 : Their son, Jean-Baptiste du Tertre, Captain-Commander of a regiment of hussards, becomes Baron de Tronville.

16th January 1788 : The rights and possessions of the Barony of Tronville are formally registered by Louis du Tertre (reclaiming the barony).

22nd April 1788 : The same act is undertaken again by Jean-Baptiste du Tertre and his brother, Alexis-Charles du Tertre, conseller at the Parliament of Metz.

1789 : Death of Nicolas-Louis du Tertre. The château is sold on behalf of the nation.

End of the XIX Century : The château is transformed into a presbytery.

LOUIS-ROBERT COLLIGNON, seigneur de Malleloy & de Champigneul, capitaine au régiment de Gerbéviller pour le service de Charles IV, épousa, en 1671, Anne Racle, fille de Jean Racle, conseiller & secrétaire des maisons-couronnes de France, & de Jeanne Cheminot, & en eut Edmond qui suit.

EDMOND COLLIGNON, comte de Malleloy, par création du 19 mai 1714, conseiller d'état & chambellan de S. A. R. Léopold I, épousa Ursule de Gombervaux, fille de Nicolas-François de Gombervaux, seigneur de Véhuville, & de Louise-Françoise Rousselot d'Hédival, dont il a eu Léopold Collignon, comte de Malleloy, chambellan de Léopold I, qui a épousé en 1728. N... de Mahuet, fille de Charles-Ignace, baron de Mahuet, comte de Lupcourt, maître des requêtes de l'hôtel de S. A. R., & de Marie-Nicolas d'Hofflue, dont il a eu un fils & une fille, l'un & l'autre morts sans alliance.

J'ai trouvé un manuscrit qui commence ainsi la généalogie de cette famille.

JEAN COLLIGNON, seigneur de Bichoel, fondateur de la chapelle de S. Claude-lès-Manonville, fit reprise pour la seigneurie dudit Bichoel, & d'autres qu'il avoit dans la châtellenie de la Chaulcée en 1535. & en 1542. il fut confirmé en sa noblesse, par sentence du bailliage de S. Mihiel. Il épousa Louise Longbuisson, dont il eut : 1°. Jean qui suit, & 2°. Agnès de Bichoel, mariée à Pierre de Beauvau.

DU FAY DE CARSIX ET DE MAULEVRIER.

14944. — (NORMANDIE). — *De gue. à la croix d'argt. cantonnée de 4 molettes d'éperon du mesme.*



(Pièces Originales 1113. Dossiers Bleus 263. Chaix 17. Armorial Général Normandie I.)

Renaud du Fay, sgr de Saint-Thurien, fils d'autre Renaud, épousa en 1367 Jeanne de Bézu, il en eut

Robin du Fay, sgr de Saint-Thurien, dont le petit-fils Pierre du Fay, Eyr, sgr de Saint-Thurien, allié vers 1520 à Jeanne de Bailleul, laissa :

Pierre du Fay de Saint-Thurien, Chr, sgr de Carsix, Vicomte de Pontaudemer, ép. en 1554 Françoise-Madeleine de Par-dieu, dont il eut :

Georges du Fay, Chr, sgr de Carsix, Gentilhomme Ordinaire de la Chambre du Roi, Chr de Saint-Michel, ép. en 1597 Marguerite d'Alègre, Dame de Saint-André, qui lui donna entr'autres :

Pierre du Fay, Chr, Baron de la Mésangère et de Saint-André, Chr de l'Ordre du Roi, Gentilhomme Ordinaire de sa Chambre, auteur d'un rameau éteint au début du xviii^e siècle.

Anne du Fay, Chr, sgr de Carsix, Saint-Léger, maintenu dans sa noblesse en 1668, ép. en 1639 Marie Francini, d'où :

Charles du Fay, Chr, sgr de Carsix de la Houssaye, ép. en 1681 Rose Thuret de Haucourt, de là :

Pierre-Georges du Fay, Chr, sgr de Carsix, ép. en 1726 Cécile Desmots qui lui donna :

Pierre-Philippe du Fay, Chr, sgr de Carsix, ép. en 1752 Elisabeth Desmots, d'où :

Marin-Georges du Fay, Chr, sgr de Carsix, Chr de Malte, ép. en 1784 Marie-Suzanne Dedin d'Irville, qui lui donna :

Pierre Edouard du Fay de Carsix, ép. en 1820 Melle du Merle, d'où :

Georges du Fay de Carsix, dit le Comte de Fay (1828-1906), ép. en 1862 Melle de Chavoy et continua.

Jean de Fay, Eyr, sgr du Taillis et de la Londe, C^{te} au Parl. de Normandie, ép. en 1552, Anne du Monsel, d'où :

Jean du Fay, Chr, Gentilhomme Ordinaire de la Chambre du Roi, Chr de l'Ordre du Saint-Esprit, ép en 1582 Madeleine Jubert, qui lui donna :

Jacques du Fay, Chr, sgr du Taillis, Chr de Saint-Michel, Bailli de Rouen, ép. en 1607 Judith Aux Epaulles, dont il eut :

Oslas du Fay, Chr, ép. en 1623 Suzanne Le Comte, dont il eut :

Louis du Fay, Chr, dit le Marquis de la Haye, C^{te} au Parl. de Normandie, auteur d'un rameau éteint.

Jean du Fay, Chr, sgr du Taillis et de Maulevrier, Maréchal des Camps et Armées du Roi, ép. en 1639

Melle de Flavancourt, d'où :

Jacques de Fay, Chr, Bailli de Rouen, Comte de Maulevrier, par lettres de 1671, fut père de Jacques-Georges du Fay, Page de la Petite Ecurie du Roi, qui laissa un fils unique Jacques du Fay, Comte de Maulevrier, allié à Catherine de Bouquetot.

Georges du Fay, Chr, sgr Taillis, allié à Mlle d'Auxy et auteur d'un rameau éteint avec Nicolas-Emmanuel du Fay du Taillis, Page de la Chambre du Roi en 1735.

Ranks

The ranks of nobility, normally found, are as follows:



Marquis



Count



Viscount



Baron

A marquis is more important than a count and so on, down the line. However, it does not really make that much difference. All marquisates were created by the various sovereigns, in France. There should, therefore, be fairly good documentation. This does not apply to the majority of baronies, whose origins are mostly lost in the mists of time. Viscounties are comparatively rare; counties are a mixture of old and recent creation.

For a signet-ring, engraving etc, it is important to have the correct coronet above the shield.