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Gorkana Group

OBITUARIES

The Viscount of Arbuthnott

Laird, airman and churchman;

Born: October 26, 1924;

Died: July 14, 2012.

THE 16th Viscount of Arbuthnott, who has died aged 87, held by genealogy the astonishing record of being one of an unbroken male line living in the same spot for more than 800 years. Ever since Hugh de Swinton was granted the lands of Arbuthnott by King William the Lion around 1188, the family has maintained a home in the same place in the same Kincardineshire glen.

The Arbuthnotts had the wisdom to practise a long family tradition of both improving the land and settling long tenancies on their folk. Thus historically Lord Arbuthnott's corner of the Mearns survived the vicissitudes of civil war to remain largely intact. The legacy of a growing school roll and active local community bear witness to his own efforts in successfully reversing rural depopulation and decline.

The complete Kincardineshire man, Lord Arbuthnott loved his family and his county. His motto *Laus Deo* (Praise Be To God) was adopted with permission of his grandfather Jack when Kincardine County Council gained a coat of arms in 1927.

John Campbell Arbuthnott, 16th viscount and 33rd laird of Arbuthnott, took his name and title from his territory of Aberbothenoth of old – possibly meaning “mouth of a little stream of healing power”. Through ancestor Hugh, Arbuthnott went back to Edulf, the 10th-century first lord of Bamburgh in Northumberland.

Lord Arbuthnott was born in Dubton House near Montrose, and

like his father and grandfather, educated at Fettes. Graduating after the war from Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, in 1949, the lure of learning never left him, and at age 43, the year after succeeding his father, he returned to university to take a post-graduate masters degree, later being appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

In 1942, aged 18, John Arbuthnott volunteered for the Royal Navy, entering the Fleet Air Arm as Naval Airman FX96040 and being sent to the US for flying training. Commissioned and still only 19, he was posted to 849 Squadron aboard the carrier HMS Victorious, piloting Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers in the Near East and Pacific until the Japanese surrender in August 1945 and being decorated for gallantry with the Distinguished Service Cross.

Back from the war he gained a reputation for business ability as a chartered surveyor and land agent. While his talents were taken up initially in Yorkshire, Leicestershire and Midlothian in estate management, his succession to the title in 1966 and the opening up of the North Sea the following year led to appointments with Britoil and the Clydesdale Bank.

Involved with the Church of Scotland from early days – he served Arbuthnott Kirk as elder and treasurer for decades – he was twice appointed Lord High Commissioner of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in 1986 and the following year. This was an appropriate appointment,

given that his distinguished ancestor Robert Arbuthnott, 14th laird, had attended the Reformation Parliament of 1560.

Lord Arbuthnott was the natural choice as first chairman of Kinneff Old Kirk Preservation Trust, begun in 1976 to care for the building in which the Honours of Scotland were so courageously hidden from Cromwell by the local minister and his wife.

To some family opposition that he was far too young, John married Mary, daughter of Cdr Christopher Oxley, when he was just 24. Their diamond anniversary fell in 2009 and throughout their long marriage, they made a loving and close couple, living quietly in the comfortably-sized house at Arbuthnott.

In 1974, he made available land and property in the village of Arbuthnott to Camphill, the organisation assisting those with special needs. Typically, he made the move only after discussing it with local people. [Milltown Community](#) now runs to an extended family household with several workshops for special-needs adults.

An authoritative leader, Lord Arbuthnott with his background and Christian service proved a natural choice as prior (chairman) of the Order of St John, thus rekindling a connection with St John last held by ancestor Robert, 12th laird, in the 15th century.

His service to Scotland was recognised in 1996 when he was made a Knight of the Thistle, Scotland's greatest order of chivalry, and whose numbers at any one time are limited to just 16.

Locally Lord Arbuthnott was appointed chieftain in 1977 at the inaugural Drumtochty Games, with organiser Jim Brown inviting him back to preside once more as chieftain at the 25th games in 2002. The establishment of the nearby centre celebrating the life and work



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of Lewis Grassie Gibbon Centre was a considerable source of pride to him. Lord Arbuthnott and his wife took seriously their headship of the name, and 35 years ago, established the Arbuthnott Family Association, now a flourishing organisation whose activities in 1977 and 1992 saw Arbuthnotts from many lands gathered in Scotland.

Lord Arbuthnott was predeceased by his wife Mary in January 2010, and is survived by his children Keith – who succeeds in the title as 17th Viscount – and Susanna, and grandchildren.

GORDON CASELY

