

Lady Saltoun obituary: clan chief who designed tartan and promoted family values

Matriarch and 21st chief of the Frasers was the only female holder of a lordship to retain a seat in the House of Lords as an elected hereditary peer

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Flora Marjory Fraser, Lady Saltoun of Abernethy, 21st chief of the name and arms of Fraser, was one of a select band of female chiefs

Lady Saltoun, the spry, cheerful hands-on chief who linked her clan through IT, was the only female holder of a lordship to retain a seat in the House of Lords as an elected hereditary peer. Until she was almost 80, she faithfully made a weekly 1,000-mile return journey from the foothills of the Cairngorms to Westminster.

Flora Saltoun took the Lords as seriously as she did her several other roles: as family head, clan chief, businesswoman, software expert, tartan designer and — until 25 years ago — secretary of the Association of Scottish Peers. She packed more into a week than many of her contemporaries undertook in a year, regarding physical age as a matter for the calendar, not the heart.

There were few more personable clan chiefs than Flora Marjory Fraser, Lady Saltoun of Abernethy, 21st chief of the name and arms of Fraser. An attractive mixture of erudition and humour — the embroidered message on a favourite cushion read “Go First Class — Your Heirs Will” — Lady Saltoun led her clan, was active and knowledgeable on the heraldic front, maintained a good website, and successfully ventured into tartan design. She abhorred shockingly bright setts — “tartan in Day-Glo” — steering clansfolk instead toward muted colours, though firm in maintaining tradition that dress tartans should bear red grounds, rather than gaudy whites.

In leading clan Fraser, Lady Saltoun was one of a select band of female chiefs, with contemporary lady chiefs including Elliott of Redheugh, Kincaid of Kincaid, Hunter of Hunterston, MacDougall of MacDougall, Mackinnon of Mackinnon, Mar, and Moffat of that Ilk.

Speaking to Leopard magazine in 2009, she said “I see my role as mother of the clan, the matriarch among Frasers”. This promulgation of family values led her in 1990 to join Lord Teviot (the hereditary peer who once earned a living as a Brighton bus driver) in trying to ensure that the government Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill allowed children born by sperm or egg donation to have the right to be told of their true parentage, though not entitled to inherit any privileges, such as titles and coats of arms.

Her dedication stemmed from her mother Dorothy (née Welby), from whom she gained a passion for family history, while her father instilled a sense of duty from an early age. “I was born to take on this role, and my duty is to be available to clan members. They expect it, and it has been my lifetime commitment”. To this extent, she is the only chief in modern times to have written a history of her clan. The hardcover first edition *Clan Fraser — A History* (1997) sold out, with a softcover reprint in 2005.

Lady Saltoun was 22 generations in descent from Mary Bruce, sister of King

Robert the Bruce, and 28 from 12th-century Gilbert Fraser in East Lothian. In 1933, her father became the 20th Lord Saltoun. Her elder brother Alexander Simon Fraser, Master of Saltoun, died after being taken prisoner-of-war in 1944, making Flora the heir. On the death of her father in 1979, the 21st Saltoun took her seat in the Lords. When two decades later, the House of Lords Act removed 662 hereditary peers, she became one of the few elected to stay, and remained until she stepped down in 2015.



Lady Saltoun with Lord Simon Fraser at the Clan Fraser Gathering that she and her husband staged at Castle Fraser

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When in 1956 she married war hero Captain Alexander Ramsay of Mar, a great-grandson of Queen Victoria, her choice of wedding venue was Fraserburgh, founded in the 16th century by her ancestor, Sir Alexander Fraser, 8th of Philorth. Guests at her wedding included Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Queen Ingrid of Denmark. Such was her love for Fraserburgh that her one regret was having been born in Edinburgh rather than her beloved Broch, as the fishing port is locally known — though she made up for this by living in nearby Cairnbulg Castle for 32 years.

More than three decades ago, she and Sandy Ramsay moved to his lands beyond Braemar, building themselves a pink-harled laird's house at Inverey below the Cairngorms. They proved a well-suited couple, he being a keen kilt wearer, aficionado of the clan system and upholder of tradition, with his working life engaged in land conservation in north-east Scotland.

Together in 1997, they staged a Clan Fraser Gathering at Castle Fraser in Aberdeenshire, which had 30,000 visitors in four days, the largest such gathering ever held in Scotland, attracting Frasers from more than two dozen countries, with Lady Saltoun determined to meet all of them.

Captain Ramsay's death in 2000 left her drive for organisation unabated; at the international clan gathering in Edinburgh in 2009, she personally funded the Clan Fraser Society tent, with three generations on duty including her daughter and heir Kate, the Hon Mrs Nicolson (and Mistress of Saltoun), and grandson Zander, now Master of Saltoun.

Lady Saltoun, chief of clan Fraser, was born on October 18, 1930. She died on September 3, 2024, aged 93.