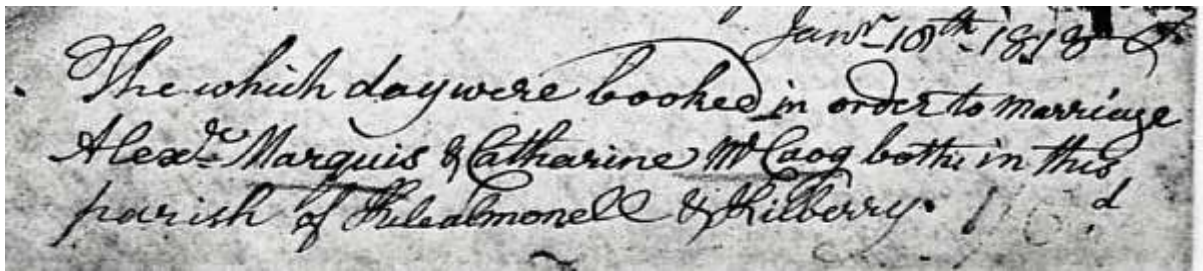


MARQUIS FAMILY OF WIGSTON

My grandfather, Angus George Marquis and my grandmother, Mary Jordan, migrated to Leicester from Glasgow in 1925 and married one year later. They eventually moved to Wigston during the early 1930s to a slum in Manor Street.

Angus George Marquis, born in Tarbert in 1901, oldest son of Dugald Marquis (1851-1914) and his second wife Mary Macleod (1870-1941). The Marquis family of fishermen had lived in Tarbert since the marriage of Alexander Marquis and Catherine McCaog in 1818 (see the full story of the Marquis Clan in my book, *The Marquis Family of Argyll*).



Alexander Marquis and Catherine McCaog's marriage certificate 10/1/1818

Angus clearly decided the life of a fisherman wasn't for him and he moved to Glasgow around 1915 to begin an apprenticeship in the shipyards. A number of his relatives had moved to the Glasgow area, mainly in Dumbarton. Around 1924-25 he met my grandmother, Mary Jane Jordan (1907-1993). Mary came from a very long-established English family in the villages of Ratby and nearby Groby, Leicestershire. Mary's father, Ernest Henry Jordan, was born in Groby and, like many of his contemporaries, worked in the local quarry. Around 1905, he moved his family to work in the Bonawe Quarry (near Oban), where my 'Nana' was born. By the age of 14, Mary was in service in Glasgow and would continue to do domestic work on and off until in her fifties. She was always referred to as 'Queenie', a nickname dating back to her childhood, when her father called her his 'little queen'.

They moved to Leicester when Mary was only eighteen and Angus six years older at twenty-four, so the decision to move south must have been taken not long after they had met in Glasgow. The choice of Leicester was presumably because of Mary's family connections there. They married a year later.



My grandparents during the 1950s

My grandparents' decision to leave Scotland was presumably the same as for the other thousands who left at this time: to escape unemployment and economic hardship. Unfortunately, their journey south failed to improve their financial predicament very much. In fact, the first fifteen years in Leicester were very difficult, especially during the economically depressed 1930s, when periods of unemployment and a series of temporary casual labouring jobs meant severe poverty was the lot of my grandparents, my father and his brothers. Tales of that privation filled my childhood and had a major impact on how I've viewed the world ever since.

According to my father, 'midnight flits' because of unpaid rents were a regular occurrence, by the early 1930s they ended up in Wigston Magna Leicestershire, living in what can only be described as a slum in Manor Street. It was a single-entrance 'two-up two-down' house at the end of a terrace of seven, the front room so damp it could only be used as a part-time playroom. Apparently, their house had its own separate outside toilet, whereas the other six had to share just one – luxury and privilege indeed!

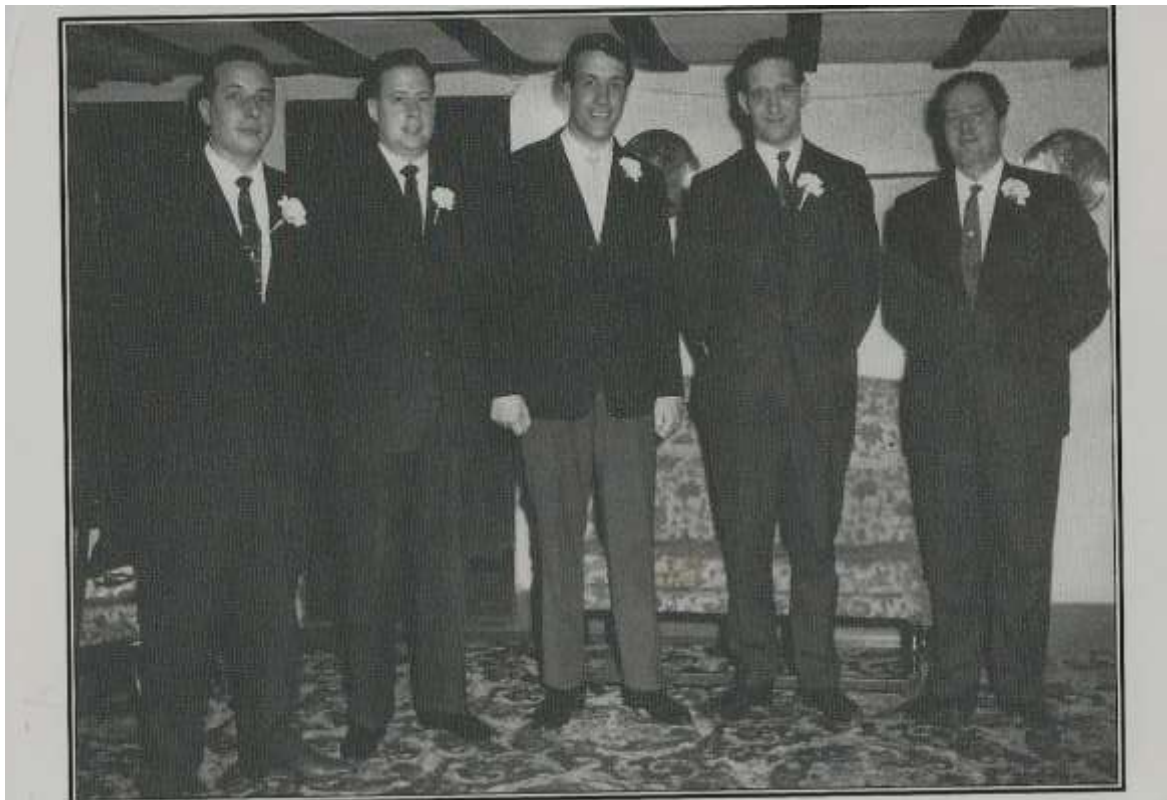
Sometime in the early thirties, my Grandad, undoubtedly desperate and frustrated, attacked the 'means-test' man, when he insisted my grandparents sell the only decent piece of furniture they had: a sideboard given as a wedding present. For this he was prosecuted. Those seeking unemployment-relief at the time were expected to sell anything of value before they received any assistance. To his great pride and joy, that sideboard was still in the living room when he died. Other stories we heard from this time included some of the desperate tricks he would use to try and obtain some 'fags'. My grandmother had a habit of putting separate piles of coins on the mantelpiece for the various weekly bills. In one such tale, Grandad would occasionally surreptitiously swap 'half-crowns' for 'two-bobs', claiming my grandmother had made a mistake. When unemployed, he would receive vouchers to be used in a designated local shop, where they should only have been swapped for food, and he would beg in desperation for the shopkeeper to add five Woodbines to the groceries. There are also stories of him occasionally gambling away desperately needed money when the family was living from hand-to-mouth. One such tale refers to him losing his wages playing 'pitch and toss' in a pub opposite the Granby Halls. There were also sessions with the 'Crown and Anchor' board', another gambling diversion. A childhood image I have of him is where he is sitting earnestly studying the racing pages with a fag-end sticking to his bottom lip.

He finally got a decent job when the War broke out and there was a sudden demand for engineers. While 'rationing' is generally perceived as being part of wartime deprivation that had to be endured, my dad has always maintained that they had never eaten so well. Permanent employment and rationing had greatly improved their standard of living. Grandad worked at Parker's Engineering from then until 1965, when he was forced to retire prematurely aged 64. That year, while on holiday in Aberdeen, he suffered a nasty accident. Getting up in the middle of the night to go to the lavatory while 'still pissed', he fell down the unlit stairs of the boarding house they were lodging at. He would never walk easily again or use his right arm. Today, they would almost certainly have sued the boarding house owners and may have received a substantial payment. He would spend the next nineteen years sitting on a chair next to the television he could barely see, while having to endure the hostile

indifference of my grandmother. Gambling and tricks like those mentioned above, plus years of near penury, had clearly taken a toll on their relationship.

In the first few years after the accident, he would stagger up to the village centre, ostensibly to do some shopping or pay bills – in reality to visit the bookies. My wife once came across him as he left the bookmakers, when a very scared grandfather implored her not to tell my grandmother where he'd really been. An interesting but very hard life, without much good fortune. My generation have been incredibly lucky indeed to have been born in what amounts to, by comparison, a 'golden age'.

Angus and Mary would produce five sons, Alexander, George, Gordon, Reginald and John. My father was Angus George Marquis, named after his father. Apart from the youngest, John, all brothers would spend their working lives in the local hosiery trade (apart for a brief period during the early 1950s when my father and his brother Alex worked on the railways). John Macleod Marquis, born in 1943, escaped a life in hosiery by becoming a successful, journalist, newspaper editor and author; he now lives in Cornwall.



Left to right: Gordon, George, John, Reg and Alex at John's wedding in 1965

My father, George Marquis, started work at Atkinsons hosiery factory in 1942 aged 14. In 1945, he joined the Navy and was on his way on an aircraft carrier to the war against Japan, when the Americans dropped the atomic bomb ending the conflict. So, he ended up on a southern tour of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Australia and New Zealand instead. Having met my mother, Joan Smith (1929-2010) and getting her pregnant with me, they married in 1950 and went to live with my grandparents at 74 Holmden Avenue. We moved to 23 Wiltshire Road, just a few minutes away, two years later. In fact, during the 1950s all dad's brothers lived in newly built council houses within in walking distance of 74 Holmden Avenue. We moved around the corner to another larger council house, 196 Aylestone Lane, in 1959. My parents would eventually have six boys.



My parents wedding at St. Thomas's Church, South Wigston in 1950. Our Gaelic Scottish roots represented by the kilt worn by my uncle John



George Marquis and Joan Marquis (nee Smith) and six sons, 2003



The family of George and Joan Marquis, also in 2003

I left school at the age of fifteen and got a job in Atkinsons where my father had started work 24 years earlier. Eventually I would end up working as a teacher, but that is another convoluted story. Having met Joyce Woods whilst we both worked in the hosiery, we got married in 1969 and have a daughter, Deborah, and now two granddaughters with a great-grandchild on the way in January 2021. Two of my brothers still live in Wigston, I live a few miles away in Thurmaston. I have a brother who lives in Sunderland, one who lives in Adelaide, Australia, and another in Seattle, USA.

The Wigston branch of the Marquis family has come a long way from our fishing roots in Tarbert and even further from our bardic origins in the Gaelic Western Isles.



My family at my oldest granddaughter Gina's wedding, 2019

My uncle John and myself recently had published by the Greater Wigston Historical Society our account of growing up in Wigston, which can be purchased either via their website or the Marquis family's own website: www.marquisfamilyhistory.com

Steve Marquis, 2020