

ADVENTURES OF THE  
STUART PAPERS

AN EDITORIAL  
DIARY

WE reported the other day that the Queen has authorised the microfilm publication of the Stuart Papers. While this is of special importance to research historians, the story of how these 60,000 documents from Jacobite archives ended up in Hanoverian care in the Round Tower of Windsor Castle is a tale of hazard and adventure rivalling fiction, and Ion S. Munro tells it for us.

Like an ever-growing avalanche, the Stuart Papers descended in succession from the ousting of James II in 1688 to the death of the Cardinal Duke of York as "Henry IX" in 1807. The Cardinal formally bequeathed his succession claim to the British Throne to his nearest legal heir at the time of his death. Assignment of the Stuart royal archives would be a natural sequence. The nearest legal heir was Charles Ammadeus IV of Savoy, King of Sardinia. In 1807 Europe was in the hurricane of the Napoleonic War, with Savoy and Sardinia precariously in the Mediterranean maelstrom, threatened by both Bonaparte and Nelson. Charles Ammadeus wisely refrained from any such foolishness as claiming the British Crown. Nothing more was heard of this—and the Stuart Papers were given their first step towards England.

It was long known that the Prince Regent in London and his brother the romantic-loving Duke of Sussex would like to have the papers for Britain. In view of the kindly, part played by the Prince Regent to the aged Cardinal of York, the last of the Royal Stuarts, during the French occupation of Rome and Italy, the Pope had authorised the Abbé James Waters of the English Benedictines in

Rome to treat for their sale with Sir John Coxe Hippisley on behalf of the British Government. The deal was done; the packing cases were consigned to the English Consul at Civita Vecchia; Lord Nelson got orders to collect and carry the Stuart Papers to the Thames.

Before Nelson's ship could set sail for Italy, there was the Battle of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson. The Job was passed on to Admiral Collingwood. But 12 days before a brig of war set out on January, 1806, the French unexpectedly occupied Civita Vecchia. Two attempts to land were repelled; the Consul was captured; carried to Rome and thrown into a dungeon in the Castle Sant'Angelo. He was threatened with death if he did not disclose any property belonging to England or Englishmen. The Consul, Richard Bartram, had early taken precautions. The precious papers had been tipped into the spacious cellars of a wine tavern in Civita Vecchia and concealed beneath heavy butts. The tavern floor was boarded over, tables and chairs set up, and for months the French sailors caroused above the booty they sought. If Consul Bartram was one hero, the Abbé Paul Macpherson, Principal of the Scots College at Rome, was indeed another.

His college in the Via Quattro Fontana was commandeered as stables and barracks by Napoleon's men; he was double-watched; Rome and its deep-water port of Civita Vecchia were seething with troops and agents. Possession of English correspondence or property meant summary execution. The papers lay there hidden for four years, but not forgotten.

Macpherson ran many risks in frustrating hostile designs of police

spies and red tape and was active in getting the papers away to Leghorn. There Macpherson handed them over to an accredited Italian merchant skipper—and smuggler—Angiolo Bonelli. Bonelli was also entrusted by Mons. Cerarini, Executor of the Cardinal Duke's estate, to carry to the Prince Regent the bejewelled Orders of the Garter and the Thistle and the Scottish Coronation ruby, bequeathed by the Cardinal Duke of York to the Prince Consort. These now form part of the Scottish Regalia in Edinburgh Castle. They added greatly to the risks, run by Bonelli.

Travelling on a false passport he evaded the vigilance of Leghorn Customs and political agents and eventually embarked on a Tunisian ship so as better to run the blockade of the pirate ships which then infested the North-African coast. He got to Tunis and, via Malta to the Channel. Believing that the utmost secrecy was necessary throughout, he tried to land on the English shore in a self-made rowing boat; was picked up by a British war vessel and carried to Deal and on to London where his precious cargo was at long last safely delivered to Carlton House. The route may have been long and tortuous but at any rate the intrepid Italian had succeeded where the British naval force of Admiral Collingwood had failed.

Four years later it was discovered that this consignment was by no means the whole of the Stuart Papers. How the second lot reached London is another story in which the principal protagonists are not heroes but shifty rascals.

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By ION S. MUNRO.

Important documentary material relating to the House of Stuart is to be made available to research historians and Institutions by the microfilming of the noted collection of Mr Denys Bower, preserved at Chiddingstone Castle in Kent.

As the largest collection of its kind in private hands it forms a valuable supplement to the Stuart papers and (on the Hanoverian side) the Cumberland papers in the royal archives at Windsor Castle which

are now nearing completion in microfilm.

The Bower accumulation consists of documents and letters signed by the Stuart kings and queens from Mary Queen of Scots to the later exiled monarchs, with material on their hereditary heirs and adherents.

An interesting selection covers the spurious Sobieski Stuarts of the nineteenth century whose claims were accepted by many people of note in Scotland and elsewhere.

Also included are holograph letters of Charles II; the last letter of James, Duke of Monmouth,

pleading for his life, written the day before his execution, to James II; the last letter of Prince Edward written to his father "James III" before he left France for Scotland in 1745; and a letter of Charles Edward as "Charles III" written in 1772 to Louis XVI of France.

The copious notes on the folders, prepared by Mr Bower, describing the documents and their signatories will be of immense help to students and historians, and will be filmed with the documents to which they apply.