

# Britain's Relations with France as Documented In SP 78: Secretaries of State: State Papers Foreign, France

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Various source media, State Papers Online

*perhaps this is the earliest  
biography of him in existence*

The Lord Archbishop of St. Andrews.  
His Grace the Lord Arch-Bishop of Glasgow.  
The Marquis of Athol, Lord Privy Seal.  
The Duke of Gordon.  
The Earl of Errol.  
The Earl of Marr.  
The Earl of Caithness.  
The Earl of Linlithgow, Lord Justice General.  
The Earl of Drumfrevling.  
The Earl of Strathmore.  
The Earl of Southwell.  
The Earl of Traquair.  
The Earl of Belcarras.  
The Lord Viscount of Tarbat, Clerk of Register.  
The Lord Strathnaver.  
The Lord Treasurer-Depute.  
The Lord Duffus.  
The Lord Kinaird.  
The Mr. of Balmerino.  
The Lord President of the Session.  
The Lord Advocate.  
The Lord Justice Clerk.  
The Lord Castlhill.  
Lieutenant General Montro.  
The Lord of Niddrie.

To The Queens Most Excellent Majesty  
The Humble Petition of Daniel de Tove

That yo<sup>r</sup> Petitioner w<sup>th</sup> a sincere design to Propogate The Interest of the  
Prover Succession and to animate The people against The Designs of The Pretender  
Always look'd on as an Enemy-to yo<sup>r</sup> Maj<sup>ties</sup> Sacred Person and Government did  
the severall Pamphlets particularly One intituled Reasons against The Hanover  
Succession, what if The Pretender should come, and others  
In all which books Altho' The Titles seem'd to look as if written in Favour of the  
Prover and laudry Expressions, as in all Ironicall writing it Must be, May be  
understood Against the True Design of the whole, and turned to a Meaning quite different  
from the Intention of the Author: yet yo<sup>r</sup> Petitioner Humbly Assures yo<sup>r</sup> Maj<sup>ties</sup> in the  
most plain and honest Manner possible, That his True and Onely Design in all y<sup>e</sup> said books, was by  
an Ironicall Discourse of recommending The Pretender, In the strongest and Most forcible  
manner to expose his designs, and The ruinous consequences of his succeeding thereon.

Whereas We have seen a Proclamation issued out in Name of His most Sacred Majesty  
Declaring, that the Prince of Orange and his Adherents, have designed to Inva-  
de His Majesties Kingdoms; and that now His Majesty hath signified by His Royal Let-  
ter of the Date at Whitehall the fifth day of November Instant, that they are Lan-  
ding in England, and in order thereunto, have Contrived and Framed several Treaso-  
rable Papers and Declarations, hoping thereby to Seduce and Corrupt His Majesties Subjects  
and that several Persons are employed to disperse the same, and since  
of His Majesties Privy C-  
cessary to Admonish all

mercy out of this world life, to one  
of both our more, Mary fall given  
and, which sense god have to dispole  
only right here, by blood and sword  
free said Kingdom of England, France  
minor titles and rights, they sale in  
advice, & some know ledgs by this our  
of peoples being natural, which a  
beginning of the 19 day of this month of  
our said dearest sister is parted from  
charge of all hands & duties of  
and see from, the same time in nature  
to us, as to their only, because  
occur by this our Proclamation  
of, parcel being on our part

There are 180 volumes covering Anglo-French relations in SP 78, the most numerous number for any state in eighteenth-century Europe. That is hardly surprising given the significance of relations with France in the construction of British foreign policy and alliance systems between 1714 and 1782 (when the Southern Secretaryship was abolished and replaced by a new Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs).<sup>[1]</sup> They are mainly 'in-letters' to the Secretary of State for the Southern Department from envoys to France, as well as some despatches from British agents at Marseille, Bordeaux, Lille, Bayonne, and other centres. There are many draft replies by the Secretary of State, and a number of petitions, royal letters, memoranda, and printed papers. The series concludes with miscellaneous supplementary papers, most of which might be more properly catalogued elsewhere.<sup>[2]</sup> The State Papers series SP 78 volume 159, the first of the Eighteenth Century volumes, begins the run with letters from the British ambassador, Matthew Prior in Versailles to Southern Secretary, Viscount Bolingbroke in the last weeks of Queen Anne's life when Britain was attempting to normalise relations with France following the conclusion of the Treaty of Utrecht the previous year. Both men were Tories and were swept out of office after the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty and what would turn out to be a long period of Whig hegemony in August 1714. SP 78 concludes with those to and from David, Viscount Stormont, who was recalled from his embassy to Louis XVI on the outbreak of formal hostilities between Britain and France in 1778 during the American War of Independence.

The years 1714-82 have been regularly identified by historians as core years of the Second Hundred Years' War (1689-1815) between the two powers, but the

picture is more complicated than first appears. 1714-44 were officially years of peace with Britain and France allied (1716-31) by Southern Secretary of State, James Stanhope and the French Councillor of State, Guillaume Dubois to benefit each other's unstable dynasties, and the arrangement was nurtured into the 1730s by the British Prime Minister, Robert Walpole and French Chief Minister, Cardinal Fleury despite growing opposition at home. Peace was restored in 1748 and endured (officially) until 1756 and the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. Thus, out of 68 years in total, only 17 were years of Anglo-French hostilities when each other's representatives were withdrawn from Paris and London. That is something of an achievement when one considers that the rooted antipathy to the French 'other', that 'sullen hatred of France and an almost morbid suspicion of all her intentions' has been firmly established as the default setting for elite and popular opinion alike in Georgian Britain.<sup>[3]</sup> Arguably, it was in the years after 1756, when the apparently formidable alliance of France and the Habsburg Empire was created in the first Treaty of Versailles (the 'Diplomatic Revolution' of 1756) that anti-French sentiment intensified and continued to do so despite British victory in the Seven Years' War. Britain's inability to gain a foreign ally and the French Foreign Minister, Choiseul's obvious eye on a war of revenge after 1763 saw to that. But his fall in 1770 once again offered possibilities of a renewed alliance with soundings made on both sides in 1772, led by the Southern Secretary, Lord Rochford, previously British envoy to Versailles. It failed because of the cool response of George III, and Gustavus III's French-inspired coup in Sweden in August that year.<sup>[4]</sup> That was the last opportunity before the beginnings of the American revolt in 1775 and the

mutual courting of the thirteen Colonies with the French Bourbons.

The key figure entrusted with the conduct of policy was the ambassador himself, generally a nobleman but invariably one of competence, committed to the Protestant succession, who could both act the courtier and be diligent as an informed, perceptive correspondent with ministers at home. He was in theory, very well paid, receiving £100 weekly and £6,800 for a wide range of expenses.<sup>[65]</sup> Envoys spent money rapidly to maintain a retinue that reflected their master's status, and racked up debts through wages, secret service fees, entertainments, furniture, and plate. They moaned to ministers in their letters about inadequate remuneration and expenses, but few turned down an offer of this embassy. Paris was only three days from England, so that the ambassador could move family and household to Paris with less fuss than would be required for a far-flung position, and that in itself made it an attractive proposition, the most prestigious diplomatic appointment to the most prestigious court in Europe, regarded by some as equivalent to a senior government appointment and a bargaining counter between ministers and claimants.<sup>[66]</sup> Some had held senior positions in the army, like the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Stair (1715-20), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Albemarle (1749-54/5), who replaced the Duke of Cumberland as commander-in-chief of the British Army in Scotland after Culloden. If Albemarle was a peace-maker, so, too, was the experienced John, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford, appointed Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary in 1762 (the latter title signifying that he could negotiate).<sup>[67]</sup> The complexities of diplomacy were not at all beyond these peers. Only in the 1720s was the ambassador a commoner, namely the career diplomats (Sir Robert

Sutton, 1720-1 and the Swiss Sir Luke Schaub, 1721-4; and Horace Walpole, 1724-30.

Because the Ambassador often returned home on leave or was otherwise absent, the embassy would be run by a *chargé d'affaires* who would assume interim responsibility for communicating with ministers. Horace Walpole spent 21 months away from Paris between 1724 and 1730, when embassy business was discharged by two *chargés*, Stephen Poyntz and Thomas Pelham. There was no ambassador between 1740 and 1744 after the death of James, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Waldegrave, the turbulent opening years of the War of Austrian Succession. The sole British representative then became the *chargé*, Waldegrave's chaplain, the Revd. Anthony Thompson. There was also the occasional practice of sending a working minister plenipotentiary to Paris to assist an envoy judged inexperienced, though there was always the risk that it would create room for divergence between them that the French could exploit.<sup>[68]</sup>

The ambassador's role remained primarily court based, and that presence is reflected in the content of the correspondence, for it was at Versailles that he would have the chance to ingratiate himself with the leading subjects of the host nation (from the king downwards), assess the good-standing of French ministers, develop a personal relationship with courtiers, put himself in the way of tracking Bourbon policy developments, and position himself to distinguish rouse and rumour from reality. Thus Waldegrave offered ministers a full report on his long conversation with Cardinal Fleury in 1739 reassuring them that the octogenarian statesman 'eats as heartily as he did heretofore, and his memories and parts were never better...He treats the Secretaryies of State and other French Minsters as his Clerks, and

leads them a weary life'.<sup>[9]</sup> In a court centred society, it was desirable in principle and practice to nominate as British envoy a man from the higher ranks of the peerage to join an aristocratic elite as an equal.<sup>[10]</sup> It was essential that he and his staff kept their ears to the ground, for French foreign policy was discussed widely at Versailles, and French internal problems and factional strife were inseparable from its construction.<sup>[11]</sup> Diplomats were generally instructed to be wary of French intentions, for as Lord Shelburne observed in relation to Choiseul's ambitions towards Corsica, '...the Professions of Ministers being in all times found dangerous, and not to be relied upon'.<sup>[12]</sup> A change of minister or monarch always increased uncertainty over the direction of French policy. Thus Stormont in 1774 hoped that Louis XV would not die for 'we know the extent of what is, whereas we can scarce conjecture as to what is to follow'.<sup>[13]</sup>

Correspondence to and from embassy officials reflects the diverse functions they were called upon to pursue. Mutual politesse generally smoothed the wheels of diplomacy, represented by the duc de Choiseul's letter to Lord Egremont (7 March 1762) enclosing exact details about the terms of the Bourbon Family Compact (Aug. 1761).<sup>[14]</sup> Such complexities were unavoidable, and are well illustrated in the embassy's involvement in the exchanges after 1763 when the French East India Company was tardy in answering its English equivalent's demand for settling the bill for the maintenance of French prisoners detained in the Seven Years' War.<sup>[15]</sup> Earl Harcourt, the British envoy, was charged with sorting out arrears but he, like the majority of his predecessors, could never forget that looking the part was critically important for an envoy. Similarly, the Earl of Stair as ambassador was always

anxious to display visually and materially the assured (if unlikely) monarchical grandeur of George I. Cultural strategies had an importance in making the right diplomatic impact, as did making the great figure.<sup>[16]</sup> Stair assembled a prestigious and expensive suite when he made his public entry as ambassador to congratulate Louis XV on his accession in 1715. This protection of royal honour was a crucial undertaking during the early Hanoverian era when a diplomatic alliance with the Bourbons had the supreme benefit of reducing, if not eliminating, the prospect of France supporting the Stuart claimant to the British throne. Originally forged by Stanhope and the Regent d'Orléans in 1716, the Anglo-French alliance had grown fragile by the late 1720s with Cardinal Fleury's ill-health and Louis XV's own illness reducing the likelihood of its survival.<sup>[17]</sup> Survive it did into the next decade – just – with Walpole trying to preserve Anglo-French peace in the months before his fall in 1742, when the Austrian Succession conflict had already engulfed Europe.

Despite the Stuart Pretender 'James III's' residence in Rome (1719-66), Paris remained a centre of Jacobite intrigue, with exiles coming and going and trying to obtain notice at Versailles. The British embassy thus functioned as a centre for clandestine activities, with officials sending on to London the unsolicited incoming information that they gathered from these sources. The policy priority was always to stymie any attempts by Jacobites to have French military and naval resources (however slight) put at their disposal. Irrespective of Jacobitism, British security concerns verged on the obsessive regarding the movements of the French navy, with surveillance of the main ports at Brest and Toulon a regular occurrence, especially when hostilities appeared imminent, and the number of ships in

harbour could be an indicator of intent.<sup>[18]</sup> There were often flashpoints. While British negotiators had succeeded in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) in having the French agree to close the port of Dunkirk to privateers and dismantle its fortifications, implementation was painfully slow, and Whig ministers after 1714 regularly told their French counterparts that better relations depended on the latter exhibiting a serious attempt to get on and demolish the harbour defences.<sup>[19]</sup> Understandably, the Paris embassy was encouraged to gather intelligence, when opportunity offered, inside the French government. In an exceptional coup, Waldegrave obtained ten ciphers from a clerk in the French foreign ministry paying him 100 louis for them.<sup>[20]</sup>

As a common and determining discourse, religion influenced the formation and operation of foreign policy throughout these decades<sup>[21]</sup> and, though the British government could do nothing to overturn the official non-recognition in France of non-Catholic Christians (only cancelled in 1787), it could and did make occasional intercessions on behalf of the considerable Protestant minority, the Huguenots, on the basis of reciprocal parity. Thus, acting at the behest of Queen Caroline, the Duke of Newcastle in 1732 ordered Waldegrave to appeal for clemency on behalf of a Protestant accused of preaching in Languedoc, 'considering the Indulgence w<sup>ch</sup> is shewn here to ye Roman Catholicks in Cases where they have incurred ye penalty of our Laws, it being frequently done at ye request of ye Crown of France it cannot be thought extraordinary'.<sup>[22]</sup> This concern for the protection of vulnerable individuals was exercised principally on behalf of British subjects living or travelling in France, and stepping in where necessary, for instance, to deal

with the possessions of the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sutherland after he died at Montauban in 1751.<sup>[23]</sup> The embassy could be lobbied by those with grievances. In 1732 the British mercantile community in Bordeaux complained about the townspeople requiring them to keep 'watch and ward'. Lord Waldegrave duly made representations to Fleury, and redress was promised and secured.<sup>[24]</sup> That the embassy itself was required to undertake this duty first hand reflected the absence of British consulates in France between the Revolution of 1688 and provision made for them in the Eden Treaty of 1786.<sup>[25]</sup>

The SP 78 series also includes a range of material other than embassy correspondence. There are a large number of intercepted letters, principally those intended for the Marquis de Contades, Commander of Louis XV's forces on the lower Rhine in 1758-59, which throw much light on Bourbon strategy. The papers are sometimes the original despatches, and sometimes copies, transcripts or extracts.<sup>[26]</sup> Other runs include those from the British ambassadors Alexander, Lord Polwarth and Charles, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Whitworth, attending the Congress at Cambrai (1724-25); the British plenipotentiaries Stephen Poyntz and Horatio Walpole at the Congress of Soissons (1728-9); the British commissaries at St Malo regarding prizes taken after the cessation of hostilities at the close of the War of Austrian Succession in 1748; the duc de Belleisle at Windsor as a prisoner of war in 1745, and letters from the British Governors of Barbados and Nova Scotia, and the French Governor of Martinique in 1750.

## NOTES

<sup>[1]</sup> Mark A. Thomson, *The Secretaries of State 1681-1782* (Oxford, 1932). Letters and reports were couriered in greyhound-decorated leather pouches.

<sup>[2]</sup> See also *British Diplomatic Instructions, 1689-1789*, ed. J.F. Chance and L.G. Wickham Legg (7 vols., London, 1922-34).

<sup>[3]</sup> Derek Jarrett, *The Begetters of Revolution: England's involvement with France, 1759-1789* (London, 1973), 219; Jeremy Black, *Natural and Necessary Enemies. Anglo-French relations in the eighteenth century* (London, 1986), 68. See generally G. Newman, *The Rise of English nationalism. A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London, 1987), 74-9; R. and I. Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy. The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (London, 2006), 54-152; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992).

<sup>[4]</sup> 'A bold, imaginative, but risky policy', as it has been called by Geoffrey W. Rice, 'Nassau van Zuylestein, William Henry van, fourth earl of Rochford (1717-1781)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2008. See also H.M. Scott, *British foreign policy in the Age of the American Revolution* (Oxford, 1990), 181-91; M. Roberts, *British diplomacy and Swedish politics, 1758-1773* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1980); Jeremy Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon: The Fate of a Great Power* (London, 1999), 120-1; B. de Fraguier, 'Le duc d'Aiguillon et l'Angleterre', *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique* 26 (1912), 607-27.

<sup>[5]</sup> D.B. Horn, 'The Cost of the Diplomatic Service, 1747-1752', *English Historical Review* 42 (1928), 606-11.

<sup>[6]</sup> Id., *The British Diplomatic Service 1689-1789* (Oxford, 1989) referred to Paris as 'the nerve centre of British diplomacy' (18).

<sup>[7]</sup> Joan Evans, 'The Embassy of the Fourth Duke of Bedford to Paris 1762-1763', *Archaeological Journal*, cxiii (1957), 137-56. He had been Secretary for the Southern Department, 1748-51.

<sup>[8]</sup> D.B. Horn, *Scottish Diplomats 1689-1789* (London, 1944), 18.

<sup>[9]</sup> Earl Waldegrave to Duke of Newcastle, Jan. 6/17, 1738/9, SP 78/220 f.17.

<sup>[10]</sup> Two ambassadors, Richmond (1765-6) and Harcourt (1768-72), were related to French ducs et pairs: Richmond was duc d'Aubigny, and Harcourt was a kinsman of the ducs d'Harcourt in Normandy.

<sup>[11]</sup> For instance, on the policy of d'Aiguillon during the Triumvirate ministry, 1771-4. See Stormont to Rochford, 2 Feb. 1774, SP 78/291 f. 79.

<sup>[12]</sup> To Lord Rochford, 1 July 1768, SP 78/275 f. 106. Cf. the Secretary of State's (Lord Weymouth) scepticism regarding French assurances about their actions in Corsica. Letter of 13 Dec. 1768 in SP 78/276 f. 206-7.

<sup>[13]</sup> Stormont to Rochford, 4 May 1774, SP 78/292 f. 28.

<sup>[14]</sup> SP 78/333, ff. 7-19.

<sup>[15]</sup> See SP 78/280 ff. 1-26, 9 Jan. 1770.

<sup>[16]</sup> See Helen Jacobsen, *Luxury and Power. The Material World of the Stuart Diplomat, 1660-1714* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>[17]</sup> Newcastle to Horatio Walpole, 14 May 1728, SP 78/189 f. 194.

<sup>[18]</sup> An example would be Albemarle to Bedford, 13 Jan. 1751, SP 78/240 f. 6 with copied private letters. These often anonymous offerings would either be voluntarily made over to the embassy or intercepted.

<sup>[19]</sup> See, for instance, James Stanhope to Matthew Prior, 27 Sept. 1714, SP 78/159 f. 184. Security concerns about Dunkirk never disappeared altogether. See the French memorandum of 10 Oct. 1773 found in SP 78/290 ff. 17-23.

<sup>[20]</sup> B. Williams, 'The Foreign Office of the first two Georges', *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. 181, p. 104. State Papers Confidential (SP107) contains papers detailing British success at postal interception and the deciphering therein has references to British diplomats.

<sup>[21]</sup> Tony Claydon, *Europe and the Making of England 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>[22]</sup> 14 Sept. 1732, SP 78/202 f. 305.

<sup>[23]</sup> Albemarle to Bedford, 13 Jan. 1751, SP 78/240 f. 5.

<sup>[24]</sup> Waldegrave to Charles Delafaye, 18 Dec. 1732, SP 78/201 f. 193.

<sup>[25]</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service*, 254.

<sup>[26]</sup> SP 78/310, 312, 321.

# CITATION

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