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# James III and VIII

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Bonnie Prince Charlie Entering the Ballroom at Holyroodhouse before 30 Apr 1892. Royal Collection Trust/ ©Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018



The life story of James III and VIII is mainly contained within the Stuart Papers in the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle. They contain thousands of documents in hundreds of volumes giving details of his political and personal correspondence, of his finances, and of the management of his court. Yet it is important to recognise that the Stuart Papers provide a comprehensive account of the king's life only from the beginning of 1716, when he was 27 years old. They tell us very little about the period from his birth at Whitehall Palace in June 1688 until he reached the age of 25 in 1713, and not much about the next two years from 1713 to the end of 1715. This is because the archives of the exiled Stuarts covering the years 1689 to 1715 were deposited in the Collège des Ecosais in Paris and nearly all destroyed during the French Revolution.<sup>19</sup>

James was brought up at Saint-Germain, near Versailles, to be fluent in both English and French, and competent in Italian (a language he did not perfect until he moved his court to the Papal States in 1717). As a result, he was able to conduct an enormous political and personal correspondence in the three languages, with secretarial assistance, when he reached manhood. However, he never managed to develop legible handwriting, so that the papers which he actually wrote himself tend to be extremely difficult to read. This was a problem which confronted his contemporaries, and can be a major problem for historians using the Stuart Papers today. Fortunately, the drafts of the king's letters have nearly all survived in the handwriting of his secretaries and clerks.

The king's life can be divided into two main parts, separated by an extended period of transition. In the first (1688-1714), during which he mainly lived at Saint-

Germain-en-Laye in France, James had good reason to be confident that he would one day be restored to the thrones of his father. In the second (1719-66), when he mainly lived at Rome, he increasingly doubted and eventually knew that he would never be restored. The turning point came during the five years from the summer of 1714 to the summer of 1719, when James experienced a series of major disappointments and reverses which had a profound effect on his personality.

He had a happy childhood at Saint-Germain, where he was recognised as the Prince of Wales and then, after the death of his father in September 1701, as the legitimate King of England, Scotland and Ireland. Until the age of seven he was brought up by servants selected and controlled by his mother, Queen Mary of Modena, who managed her own household alongside that of her husband the king. He was then given his own household under a Catholic governor (James Drummond, 4th Earl, then 1st Jacobite Duke of Perth) who was chosen by both his parents. From 1701 until his eighteenth birthday in June 1706 the queen acted as his guardian in collaboration with Perth. James was given full royal honours at the French court, which meant that he was treated as superior to the Dauphin and all the other French royal princes, and equal (at least in theory) to Louis XIV. The failure of the Franco-Jacobite attempt to invade Scotland in 1708 was a major disappointment, but it was regarded at the time as merely postponing the eventual Jacobite restoration. Instead of deposing his half-sister Queen Anne during her life-time, James accepted that his restoration would not take place until after her death.

This confident expectation was then shattered by the events of 1714 to 1719. The peaceful accession of the

Elector of Hanover as King George I of Great Britain in 1714, while James was in exile from France in Lorraine, was followed by the death of Louis XIV (1715), the defeat of the Jacobite rising in Scotland (1715-16), and the decision of Philippe de Bourbon, Duc d'Orléans, the new Regent of France, to force James to move his court further away from England to the papal enclave at Avignon (1716-17), and then even across the Alps to the Papal States in Italy. After a short time on the Adriatic coast at Pesaro, and a visit to see Pope Clement XI in Rome, James established his court in the remote and relatively inaccessible city of Urbino. The fourteen months that he spent there (1717-18) were deeply frustrating, and made him feel completely cut off from the world, unable to do anything practical - apart from writing letters - to affect his restoration. And then came the biggest disappointment of all.

At the beginning of 1719, having just moved his court from Urbino to Rome, he travelled to Spain to join a large Spanish fleet which had been fitted out to carry a Spanish and Jacobite army to invade England. With a diversionary force also despatched to Scotland, he believed that the longed-for restoration was in sight. It is important to appreciate just how disappointing it was for James when this carefully planned expedition came to nothing, when all his hopes were completely dashed. Before he could join it, the large fleet was destroyed by a storm in the Atlantic, and the limited attack in Scotland, no longer merely a diversion, was quickly defeated. As a result, James was obliged, against all expectations, to accept that he had no choice but to return to live in Rome, without any immediate prospect that he would ever be restored. He probably did not realise it at the time, but he was destined to remain in the Papal States for the rest of his life.

What then was the impact of the sequence of events of 1714 to 1719 on the personality of James III and VIII? How did his disappointments during those years influence his behaviour during the second - Italian - period of his life?

In the first place James felt profoundly grateful to the Scottish Jacobites who had risked their lives and property by taking up arms against the Whig government of George I. He had been brought up at Saint-Germain to believe strongly in religious toleration<sup>[2]</sup>, but most of his servants and courtiers had been English and Catholic. While he was at Urbino he turned against his old servants and increasingly gave his favour to a small group of Scottish Protestants. They included John Hay (brother-in-law of the Earl of Mar, who had led the Jacobite rising), Hay's wife Marjory, and the latter's brother James Murray. The exiled Stuart court remained predominantly Catholic, and even mainly English, but it was now obvious that James was increasingly influenced by his new Scottish Protestant favourites. This development reinforced James's profound commitment to religious toleration. It also manifested itself in his decision to make wearing the insignia of the Scottish Order of the Thistle compatible with those of the English Order of the Garter, so that thenceforth he always wore them together, whereas previously he had only ever worn the Garter. By the time that James moved to Rome at the end of 1718 his court was dominated by the Hays and Murray, and nearly all the old senior servants had returned to Saint-Germain.

James's new favouritism was then reinforced by the events of 1719. Expecting to join the Spanish fleet and sail to England, he travelled to Spain accompanied only by John Hay and three servants, leaving James Murray

in temporary charge of the Jacobite court in Rome. When he discovered that the Spanish fleet had been destroyed, and that the invasion had therefore been cancelled, he and Hay lived together for three months incognito in the small and remote town of Lugo in Galicia, trying to come to terms with the terrible disappointment - and aware that there was now no option but to make a humiliating return to Rome. This extended experience, about which very little is known, drew the two men even closer together, and from this point onwards Hay, and by extension Hay's wife and brother-in-law, could do no wrong in James's eyes.

When James eventually returned to Italy he discovered that Murray had managed the Jacobite court in such an offensive manner that he had alienated virtually all the king's servants and pensioners, Scottish as well as English. Instead of reprimanding, or at least cautioning Murray, James gave his favourite his total support and snubbed anyone who dared to criticise him. Indeed, he made it plain that he now regarded any criticism of one of his favourites as an attempt to undermine his own authority. As the Pope's nephew put it, referring to Hay and Murray, James III and VIII was now 'led by two boys'<sup>[3]</sup>.

With no immediate prospect of a restoration, and now totally dependent on the goodwill of a changeable papacy, James determined to be the absolute master of the one place which remained under his control, namely his court and household within the Palazzo del Re. This determination, occasioned as we might assume by a sense of insecurity, was to have important consequences for his family life, and in particular for his relations with his wife.

While James was at Urbino he had arranged to marry Princess Clementina Sobieska, a grand-daughter of King John III of Poland. Her journey across the Alps to the Papal States had been stopped by the Holy Roman Emperor, who wanted to prevent the marriage, but she had escaped from house arrest at Innsbruck while James was in Spain and been married to him by proxy at Bologna, with Murray standing in for the king. She was only 17 years old at the time. When the 31-year-old James returned to the Papal States the marriage was solemnised at Montefiascone at the beginning of September 1719, after which the king and his new queen moved in to the Palazzo del Re in Rome.

James and Clementina were given full royal honours wherever they went in Rome by the Pope, the cardinals and princes, and the French and Spanish ambassadors. But within the Stuart court itself James was not willing to share any of his authority. With the encouragement and support of Hay and Murray, who regarded Clementina as badly educated and who behaved disrespectfully towards her, he refused to give the queen her own separate household, or even control over her own servants, obliging her to accept the ones he chose for her, notably Hay's Protestant wife Marjory, who was her only senior attendant, and with whom she did not even share a common language. The patronising and even rude behaviour of the Hays and Murray, combined with the fact that they were all Protestant, put an immediate strain on the royal marriage, and made Clementina feel increasingly resentful and discontented. In December 1720, when she gave birth to a boy, Prince Charles, the scene was set for an almost inevitable show-down because James was not even willing to let Clementina appoint and control the servants who were to look after the child.

For several years, Clementina suffered in silence, hoping to please the king, but she concluded that the Hays and Murray had, 'neither honour, nor religion, nor conscience'.<sup>[64]</sup> In March 1725, Clementina gave birth to a second son, Prince Henry, and it was this which provoked the crisis. The king decided that the women who had so far been looking after Prince Charles should now look after Prince Henry instead, and that Charles should thenceforth be entrusted to the care of men. This was provocative, because Charles was only four and a half years old, and James himself had not been entrusted to men until he was seven. However, the specific point which brought about the crisis was James's decision to appoint Murray, whom the queen hated, to be the prince's governor, with strict instructions that Clementina was never to see her son again unless Murray himself was present.<sup>[65]</sup> This was too much, and Clementina suddenly left the court, taking refuge in the convent of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere<sup>[66]</sup>. She stated that she would not return to her husband unless and until he agreed to let her have her own household, and to allow her to appoint, control and dismiss her own servants. As an additional condition, she said she would not return until the king had not only dismissed Murray as her son's governor, but had ordered the Hays to leave the court.

A great deal has been written about this marital breakdown, both at the time and since, and all sorts of theories have been put forward to explain Clementina's decision. What matters for us, however, is to understand James's motivation. He wanted to demonstrate his commitment to religious toleration, but above all he believed that, 'to grant her wishes would be making her the mistress, and ceasing to be the master for the rest of his days'.<sup>[67]</sup> The same

sentiments can be found in Queen Clementina's letters to her father. In November 1725, she wrote that, 'he wanted to be the master of his children and family'; and again, in January 1726: 'wanting to be the Master of his children and household'. It was the one domain over which James still had unquestioned authority, having lost his three kingdoms, and he was determined that he would never lose control of that as well. The irony, however, as Clementina pointed out, was to, 'see the great influence which these people had over the King'.<sup>[68]</sup>

The impasse lasted from November 1725 until June 1727 when a compromise was eventually reached, and Queen Clementina agreed to rejoin her husband. During that time, in October 1726, James went with the two princes to live in Bologna, leaving the Palazzo del Re in Rome empty. Pope Benedict XIII had supported Clementina in her objection to having a Protestant in charge of her son. When, therefore, the queen did rejoin the court she had to travel to Bologna, where she arrived to discover that James was no longer there. Her return coincided with the death of George I, which prompted James to visit Lorraine in a desperate hope of being restored. The peaceful accession of George II, however, put an end to such a hope, and made him realise that he would now probably never himself recover his kingdoms. After a few months at Avignon, where he hoped the French would allow him to remain, he returned to Bologna in January 1728 and was finally reunited with his wife.

The compromise was in reality a victory for the king, although John and Marjory Hay, now Earl and Countess of Inverness, *did* leave the court. Clementina was given her own household, with high ranking Catholic ladies of the bedchamber and gentlemen of the chamber, but her servants were all selected for her by the king. And

James Murray, now Earl of Dunbar, not only remained the governor of Prince Charles but also became the governor of Prince Henry when he too reached the age of four, so that the care and education of both the boys were entrusted to a Protestant. At the beginning of 1729 the royal family returned to Rome and moved back into the Palazzo del Re.

James had succeeded in remaining the absolute master of his court and household, and the next two Popes (Clement XII, 1730-40; Benedict XIV, 1740-58) gave him their complete support. But it was at an important cost. His relations with Clementina never recovered from the episode, so that the couple thenceforth lived separate lives until her early death in January 1735, at only 32 years old. In addition, Prince Charles was seriously perturbed by the quarrel between his parents, so that he hated Lord Dunbar and developed strained relations with his father.

James III and VIII remained in Rome for the rest of his life. At first, he continued to hope that a restoration might still be possible when his two sons grew up. They would reach manhood in the early and mid-1740s, and James pinned his hopes on a renewal of war between Great Britain and France at that time. He was not disappointed. For a time, he even had reason to be optimistic. However, the planned French invasion of England in 1744 had to be cancelled because of a storm in the Channel, while the dramatic successes of Prince Charles in Scotland in 1745 led ultimately to the catastrophic defeat at Culloden in April 1746. It was this battle which finally convinced James that there never would be a Jacobite restoration.

His last years in Rome, from 1747 until his death on the first day of 1766, were increasingly sad, especially when

his health began to decline during the 1750s. He continued to be given full royal honours wherever he went in Rome, but he never saw Prince Charles again because his elder son refused to return to the city. Prince Henry, by contrast, having been in France from 1745 to 1747, did return to Rome and did live with his father in the Palazzo del Re. But the relations between father and son were not easy. Back in 1732 James III and VIII had made arrangements for Henry to be made a cardinal if ever it became clear that there never would be a restoration. In the year following the battle of Culloden Pope Benedict XIV did as James asked and made his son a cardinal. Henry then moved in to the apartment previously occupied by the queen, his mother. As he grew older, however, Prince Henry, or the Cardinal Duke of York as he was now called, took complete control of his own household, and began to employ people of whom the king strongly disapproved. This resulted in a major disagreement between father and son, with Henry leaving the Stuart court from July to September 1752, just as his mother had done from 1725 to 1727. This time the eventual compromise, whereby Cardinal York returned to the Palazzo del Re, was not a victory for James. As the old king's life drew to a close it was clear that he had not only lost his three kingdoms but had also ceased to exercise absolute control within the Palazzo del Re. In 1764 Cardinal York, who the previous year had been appointed *vice-cancelliere* of the Church, moved out of the Palazzo del Re to occupy the enormous Palazzo della Cancelleria, leaving behind James and his remaining household servants. For the last year of his life, therefore, James regained control of his greatly diminished court.

James III and VIII was often mocked by his political enemies, and has sometimes been treated with little

sympathy by historians, yet he was invariably popular and highly regarded by the people who knew him, whether in France, Lorraine, Avignon or the Papal States. He behaved with discretion, and always remembered that his difficult position necessitated his acting with moderation. He insisted on maintaining his claim to be the legitimate king of England, Scotland and Ireland, but he knew when to compromise and how to avoid pushing his claim too far. The one exception concerned his control over his own court, and his relations with his wife and children, for which he insisted on remaining the absolute master. This brought him, for the only time in his life, into direct confrontation with the pope (Benedict XIII, 1724-30). Yet a later pope (Benedict XIV, 1740-58), looking back on James's behaviour since he arrived in Rome, commented on 'the wisdom and gentle manner' with which James 'has always behaved here': 'In all the years he has been here, he has never caused the slightest difficulty to the government.'<sup>[9]</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>[1]</sup> See the appendix to this essay for a discussion of the limited information about James III's early life in the Stuart Papers.

<sup>[2]</sup> "For my Son, the Prince of Wales", 1692. RA RCIN 100612 f.14

<sup>[3]</sup> Edward Corp, *The Jacobites at Urbino* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 200. The nephew of Pope Clement XI was Cardinal Annibale Albani, whose comment was recorded by Lord Pitsligo.

<sup>[4]</sup> National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk, fond 694, o.12, rkps 358, k.88-89, Clementina to Prince James Sobieski, November 1725 (my translation). I am grateful to Dr Aneta Markuszevska for giving me this reference.

<sup>[5]</sup> Murray had actually been away from the court from February 1721 to September 1725 and was invited back to become the prince's governor.

<sup>[6]</sup> James III and VIII to Clementina, 9 November 1725. RA SP Main/87/64.

<sup>[7]</sup> Edward Corp, *The Stuarts in Italy* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 167. James III's comment was recorded by François Foucquet (my translation).

<sup>[8]</sup> NGAB, fond 694, o.12, rkps 358, k.88-89 and rkps 360, k.182-85, Clementina to Prince James Sobieski, November 1725 and 8/19 January 1726.

<sup>[9]</sup> Corp, *The Stuarts in Italy*, pp. 227-28.

## Appendix: James III and VIII's early life in the Stuart Papers

The Stuart Papers which have survived from the years 1689 to 1715 inform us that James was given the Garter in April 1692<sup>[10]</sup>, and that his formal education was entrusted to two secular priests, Dr John Betham and Dr John Ingleton<sup>[11]</sup>, the first of whom was later accused of inspiring him with Jansenism<sup>[12]</sup>. We have the list of his servants when he was given his own household or family in June 1695<sup>[13]</sup>, and the 'Rules for the Family of our dearest son, the Prince of Wales', which James II and VII established in 1696<sup>[14]</sup> when the Earl of Perth was appointed the prince's governor<sup>[15]</sup>. But we are not told anything else about the boy's life at Saint-Germain during the 1690s, and nothing at all about his relations with his French cousins, whom he met regularly at Versailles and Marly as well as at Saint-Germain.

When his father died in September 1701, and the prince succeeded as King James III and VIII, he was only 13 years old. He was then given a large household of servants by his mother, Mary of Modena<sup>[16]</sup>, who acted as his guardian (not regent as often stated) until he reached his 18th birthday in June 1706. Beyond that the Stuart Papers tell us nothing. They contain no information about his relations with his mother and his younger sister, nor about his learning to ride, his appreciation of music, or about the many portraits for which he sat. In 1706, when he came of age, he gave the

Garter to the Duke of Perth to thank him for his service as governor<sup>[17]</sup>. He also signed an important letter to Pope Clement XI announcing that he had achieved his majority, and emphasising his devotion to the Catholic faith<sup>[18]</sup>. There is nothing in the Stuart Papers, however, to shed light on his continuing relations with his Bourbon cousins, in particular Louis XIV, on his education in constitutional or military matters, or on the development of his belief in religious toleration.

In 1708, after several years of negotiations with the French ministers, Louis XIV provided James with a fleet and an army with which to invade Scotland. The details of those negotiations, however, are not to be found in the Stuart Papers. All that we get from them is the declaration, 'James VIII to his good people of his ancient kingdom of Scotland', which James issued on 18 February/1 March, shortly before he set sail from Dunkirk<sup>[19]</sup>. It is the same after he returned and joined the French army as a volunteer in Flanders for the campaigns of 1708, 1709 and 1710. We have two letters written from 'the Camp' in 1708 and 1709<sup>[20]</sup>, and some correspondence about his finances when on campaign between the queen-mother and her treasurer and receiver-general, William Dicconson<sup>[21]</sup>. Anyone wanting to research the young James III and VIII, however, is obliged to look elsewhere, notably in the French archives. From June to October 1711, for example, James went on a tour of the French provinces. The Stuart Papers tell us nothing about that tour.

In 1712 James was obliged to leave Saint-Germain under the terms of the peace treaty being negotiated at Utrecht. He went to Lorraine, and in February 1713 established his court at Bar-le-Duc. Although the Stuart Papers from the Lorraine years (1713-15) were virtually all destroyed, there is one notable exception.

The many letters sent to James III and VIII by the Duke of Berwick, starting in October 1712<sup>[22]</sup>, have survived because they were subsequently sent at James's request to Rome. They can all be found in RA SP/Main/2-6, and printed in HMC *Stuart* volume I, where there are also some letters exchanged between Queen Mary and her treasurer and receiver-general, William Dicconson, in 1712-15 and between James and Dicconson in 1714.<sup>[23]</sup>

It is not until March 1715, when the preparations were being made for the Jacobite rising of that year, that we begin to get James's own letters to Berwick<sup>[24]</sup>, as well as his correspondence to and from James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, and Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke.<sup>[25]</sup> The English part of the rising was cancelled, but the king was able to join the Scottish Jacobites when they rose up under the leadership of John Erskine, Earl of Mar. It is at this point that the Stuart Papers begin to provide detailed information on the life of James III and VIII. They contain the king's own recent papers, which he brought back with him from Scotland, as well as those of Mar.<sup>[26]</sup> Unable to return to Lorraine, James moved south to Avignon and then to the Papal States in Italy. Each time he moved, his secretaries and his treasurer took their archives with them, so that they remained at the court and were no longer deposited at the Collège des Ecosais in Paris. As a result, the Stuart Papers contain a great deal of information about James's life and his court from 1716 onwards. Nearly all the papers of 1716-18, RA SP/Main/6-40, have been printed in HMC *Stuart* volumes II to VII. With very few exceptions, the papers of 1719 to 1765 have remained unpublished.

## APPENDIX NOTES

<sup>[10]</sup> *Calendar of the Stuart Papers belonging to His Majesty the King, preserved at Windsor Castle*, F. H. Blackburne Daniell, ed. Vol. 1: 1579-Feb 1716. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1902. 71; RA SP/M/18/39.

<sup>[11]</sup> RA SP/M/7/91.

<sup>[12]</sup> Henri de Thiard, Bishop of Toul, to Madame [De Maintenon?], 16 Dec 1703. HMC *Stuart*, i. 188-93; RA SP/Main/2/24.

<sup>[13]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 102; RA SP/M/18/83.

<sup>[14]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 114-17; RA SP/M/18/155.

<sup>[15]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 119; RA SP/M/18/111.

<sup>[16]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 162-66, 168, 171-72; see RA SP/M/19/1.

<sup>[17]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 205; RA SP/M/19/71.

<sup>[18]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 205; RA SP/M/16/35.

<sup>[19]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 218-21; RA SP/Main/2/47.

<sup>[20]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 227-228; RA SP/M/16/59, and HMC *Stuart*, i. 233-34; RA SP/M/16/65, RA SP/Main/2/54.

<sup>[21]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 227-28, 232-33, 238; RA SP/Main/2/48. 50, 52, 57.

<sup>[22]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 247; RA SP/Main/2/69.

<sup>[23]</sup> Many references in HMC *Stuart*, i. 246-441.

<sup>[24]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 354 onwards; RA SP/Main/4/37.

<sup>[25]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 352 and i. 361 respectively, starting in March and April.

<sup>[26]</sup> HMC *Stuart*, i. 417, starting in September 1715.

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