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'A Tale of Two Collections': The Stuart Papers and Cumberland Papers at the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle

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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

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Introduction

Situated within the iconic Round Tower at Windsor Castle, the Royal Archives holds an unparalleled collection of documents relating to the history of the British monarchy over the last 250 years, including the personal and official correspondence of sovereigns and their families, from George III onwards. Yet the Royal Archives itself is not as old as you might think, having only recently celebrated its first centenary: in order to explain the history of the archives we need to return to the beginning of the last century, 1901 to be exact.

Originally, historic records had been stored in tin trunks, cupboards and storerooms in various royal residences, with no appointed custodian to care for them. The vast legacy of official and private correspondence generated during the 63-year reign of Queen Victoria, however, highlighted the need for a permanent dedicated repository for the papers of the royal family and the Royal Household. Shortly after Victoria's death, Edward VII appointed Reginald Brett, Viscount Esher, as the first Keeper of the Royal Archives, although a permanent home for the papers still needed to be established. In 1912, following a declaration from George V that 'All the Royal Archives shall be kept in a strong room or rooms in the Round Tower',[1] work began to create a Muniment Room in the top half of Edward III's medieval Great Hall in the Round Tower. In 1914, the first collections were transferred to the Muniment Room: the papers of Queen Victoria, Edward VII, the recently-discovered papers of George III and George IV, as well as archival material previously stored in the Royal Library.

The Royal Archives grew rapidly in the following decades: Queen Mary, who had a keen interest in the history of the royal family, wrote to various relatives encouraging them to deposit their papers in the Round Tower, while other collections have been presented to the Archives as gifts to the Sovereign and some papers have been acquired by purchase. The addition of the papers of George V, Edward VIII, George VI and other members of the royal family, as well as administrative records of the various Household departments during these reigns, meant the Royal Archives quickly outgrew the Muniment Room and spread to other rooms in the Round Tower.[2]

Cumberland Papers

Little is known about where the papers of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, were stored after his death in 1765, although the logical assumption would be that they remained at his home at Cumberland Lodge, situated in Windsor Great Park. It is not entirely clear when these papers first came to the Royal Library, but it is likely to have been sometime around 1835-1840, on the assumption that they were transferred at the same time as the Stuart Papers.[3] In 1914 the Cumberland Papers were one of the first collections to be transferred to the Royal Archives, where they have remained ever since.

Stuart Papers

The story of how the Stuart Papers became the oldest collection in the Royal Archives is complicated and intriguing. After the death of Charles Edward Stuart (grandson of James II and VII) in 1788, his papers and those of his father, James Francis Edward Stuart (the son of James II and VII), that were stored in the Palazzo del Re in Rome, were transferred in part to Charles's daughter Charlotte, Duchess of Albany, and the other

portion retained by her uncle, Henry Benedict Stuart, Cardinal Duke of York. She had spent the last few years caring for her father in Florence and Rome, and died herself in 1789. Under the terms of the Duchess of Albany's will, custodianship of the papers in her possession passed to her confessor, Abbé James Waters. He took the papers from his own library (where they had been placed following the death of her father) and moved them to his house in Rome, despite the fact that the Duchess may have asked him to destroy anything unimportant and send the rest to her uncle, Henry, Cardinal York.[4]

It is not entirely clear how the British Government learnt of the survival of the Stuart Papers, but Walter Seaton,[5] using a letter in his own possession, believed that it may have been through Sir Walter Hamilton, British Ambassador to the Court of Naples. A friend of Abbé Waters, Hamilton appears to have been permitted to view the papers in 1794/5 and, understanding their value, wrote to Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex,[6] informing him of the documents. Hamilton, realising that those papers still in the possession of Cardinal York could not be removed until after his death, and aware of a similar stipulation regarding the papers lodged with the Abbé, believed that he had struck a deal with Waters to the effect that documents from both collections would not be passed onto anyone else without either himself or the Duke of Sussex being alerted. Events, however, intervened.

The British Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, having received word of the existence of the papers, 'authorized Mr Jackson, His Majesty's Minister at the Court of Sardinia, to treat for them, in the name of His Majesty's Government'.[7] But learning that negotiations had progressed further with another individual working on behalf of the Prince of Wales, 'in deference to His Royal Highness, ... countermanded his instructions to Mr Jackson'.[8]

The individual in question was Sir John Coxe Hippisley, a friend of Abbé Waters and the 'unofficial link between the Papal Government of Rome and that of Britain'.[9] He received a letter from Charles James Fox M.P. dated 3 October 1804, which stated the Prince of Wales,

'would be very glad to purchase them [the Stuart Papers] at any reasonable terms... But perhaps one ought to know with more certainty... that the papers are not merely transcripts of from a narrative (not the original letters) which was in the Scotch College at Paris, and which is now in Scotland.'[10]

As a result of Fox's letter, Hippisley began initial investigations on his own account regarding the purchase of the papers, which concluded with Waters agreeing to sell the documents to him, although it is not clear from surviving records exactly how much he paid for them. Soon after the agreement was reached Abbé Waters died, but he had by then managed to deliver the papers personally to the British Consulate at Civita Vecchia, where the acting Consul, Richard Bartram, signed for them.[11]

On 6 September 1805, Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville and First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote to Sir John explaining that Admiral Horatio Nelson, Viscount Nelson, who was already preparing to sail to the Mediterranean, had been commissioned to stop at Civita Vecchia to collect these papers, and that 'The Prince of Wales expresses great anxiety for the safety of the Commission and requests that Lord Nelson will keep it on board his own ship until he returns, unless

he has the opportunity of some safe and sure conveyance to send it home'.[12] After Nelson's death at the Battle of Trafalgar, Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, Baron Collingwood, was tasked with retrieving the papers from the French-held port. Despite several attempts to land at Civita Vecchia in 1806-7 the mission was ultimately unsuccessful, and finally Collingwood was ordered to stand down as it was felt that his continued presence was drawing attention to the port's English residents. At some point in 1806 Richard Bartram had been arrested and imprisoned in Rome on suspicion of holding contraband material (the Stuart papers fell into this category); but prior to his arrest he had managed to conceal the box of papers in his possession.[13] These would remain hidden for the next four years.

In 1810 the Prince of Wales authorised Angiolo Bonelli to undertake the commission to retrieve the papers now concealed at Civita Vecchia. Although it would take him a few years, he successfully completed the task, asking Dr Paul Macpherson, Principal of the Scots College in Rome, to collect the papers on his behalf.[14] Bonelli arrived in London and handed the papers to Sir John on 19 June 1813, and Hippisley then delivered them to the Prince of Wales' residence at Carlton House.

This second tranche of papers belonged to Cardinal York. He bequeathed them to his executor Cardinal Angelo Cesarini,[15] who, after his own death, left them with his executor Monsignor Tarsoni,[16] who seems to have abandoned them. In 1816 the papers were re-discovered by Dr Robert Watson, under the 'care' of an Abbé Lupi, in the Palazzo Monserati in Rome, in appalling conditions. The papers were 'lying in utter confusion in a large room…[and] neither the dilapidations of the rain nor the devastation of the rats, seemed sufficient to rouse the Cardinals executors to any effort for their preservation'.[17] Watson negotiated with Lupi, purchasing the papers and immediately transferring them to his own accommodation. Soon after he received a visit from the Vatican police, sent on the orders of Cardinal Hercule Consalvi, who, after examining the papers, immediately put them 'under the seal and wardship of the State'.[18] Lupi was arrested at the same time for selling what was not his to sell. Watson argued that the papers were rightfully his, having been purchased in good faith, and after some consideration the Cardinal ruled,

> '...that the Papal Government could not suffer these papers to leave Italy except as an offering to the Prince Regent, to whom His Holiness was under the greatest obligations, his sense of which he should be proud of the opportunity of testifying by presenting H.R.H with Papers so interesting to his family, his crown, and his kingdom.'[19]

Seeming to accept the inevitable, Watson explained that as he had been the one to discover the papers he wished to hand over the documents and to receive the monetary reward; the Cardinal was unmoved and refused to pay him, claiming that he had forfeited any payment by his behaviour. Around this time in January 1817, Watson informed the British Consul at Civita Vecchia that he was in possession of Cardinal York's papers and wished to present them to the Prince Regent. In the end, however, it would not be Watson who organised the delivery of the papers to England.[20] This task was undertaken by the Consul-General at Civita Vecchia, and they arrived at Carlton House in January 1818, where they were stored with the first tranche of Stuart material.[21]

In May 1819, the Prince Regent created a Royal Commission to establish the nature of the material contained within the Stuart Papers. A dedicated room

was set aside in St James's Palace for this purpose, and the papers were moved there from Carlton House. A list provided by Abbé Waters to Sir John Hippisley greatly aided this investigation.[22] Not unsurprisingly, one of the first acts of the commission was to request that the secretary, James Pulman,[23] should merge the two collections and rearrange the documents in chronological order. By 22 June 1820 the commission was able to report on their initial findings, which included an acknowledgement that the papers did not represent the complete workings of the Jacobite Court in exile. Further reports followed, detailing various proposals for these papers, including suggestions concerning publication of some of the material.[24] The commission concluded that the papers should be permanently transferred to the British Museum, although ultimately nothing came of this. In January 1823 the Foreign Secretary, George Canning, was asked to consult the king for his view on this proposal, but there appears to have been no response. On 30 June 1829 another Foreign Secretary, George Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen, announced that the king had decided that the commission should be dissolved, and that the papers should be handed over to Sir Walter Scott, John Gibson Lockhart and Joseph Good, in the belief that they might be able to arrange publication, although shortly afterwards Scott died and very little progress was made in this regard.

Sometime after George IV's death, the papers were removed from St James's Palace first to Buckingham palace, then to the Castle Hotel in Windsor and eventually to Cumberland Lodge. It seems likely that around 1835-1840 they were transferred to the Royal Library, where they were stored along with the Cumberland Papers.[25] In 1914 the Stuart Papers were amongst the first collections to be housed in the newly created Royal Archives, and in the 1920s the main body of material was bound into 541 volumes and stored in the Muniment Room, where they remain to this day — albeit with a few additions to the original collection which were made over subsequent years.

NOTES

[1] Royal Archives (RA) GV/PRIV/AA83/4.

[2] For more detailed information about the Royal Archives see: https://www.royal.uk/royal-archives. Julie Crocker, 'The Royal Archives at Windsor Castle: Into the 21st Century', *Vorstelijk koninklijk keizerlijk: Archieven van vorstenhuizen in Europa*, Jaarboek 16 (2016) 135-156

[3] Oliver Everett, 'The Royal Library at Windsor Castle as Developed by Prince Albert and B.B. Woodward', *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 7th ser., 3 (2002) 58-88, pp. 58, 63.

[4] Alistair and Henrietta Tayler, *The Stuart Papers at Windsor. Being Selections from Hitherto Unprinted Royal Archives, With Introduction and Notes* (London, 1939), p. 9.

[5] Walter Seton, 'The Stuart Papers at Windsor Castle', *Scottish Historical Review*, 18 (1921) 171-80.

[6] The Duke of Sussex was President of the Society of Arts and the Royal Society.

[7] RA SP/M/66/8 (all the Stuart Papers cited here are in the Royal Archives).

[8] RA SP/M/66/8.

[9] Tayler, *Stuart Papers at Windsor*, p. 9.

[10] RA SP/M/66/6.

[11] The collection includes the receipt (RA SP/M/66/42).

[12] RA SP/M/66/15.

[13] RA SP/M/66/49.

[14] An account of Bonelli's adventures can be found in SP/M/66/36.

[15] Henrietta Tayler mentions that Cardinal Cesarini appears to have gifted some of these papers to a niece, who sold them to Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford. They were then bought by Sarah Otway-Cave, Baroness Braye, in 1842 and are now stored in the British Museum.

[16] HMC *Stuart Papers* refers to him as Tassoni, and there is a Tassoni listed amongst the index cards cataloguing the Stuart Papers, so they could be one and the same — Tayler, *Stuart Papers at Windsor*, Addenda.

[17] RA SP/M/66/1.

[18] RA SP/M/66/1.

[19] RA SP/M/66/1.

[20] Watson's involvement with the Stuart papers continued until his suicide in 1838 (more detailed accounts can be found in RA SP/M/66).

[21] Tayler, *Stuart Papers at Windsor*, p. 28.

[22] RA SP/M/64.

[23] His note books can be found in RA SP/M/081-100.

[24] Reports and minutes of the meetings of Stuart Papers Commission can be found RA SP/M/67.

[25] Everett, 'Royal Library at Windsor Castle', p. 77.

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