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The Cumberland Papers

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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 Cumberland Papers are one of the principal collections among the voluminous holdings of the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle. They are an important source for eighteenth century British, American and European history. Yet their very bulk is intimidating. There are tens of thousands of letters and miscellaneous documents, covering the period 1649-1765, most of which are manuscript letters. Initially they were only accessible for bona fide scholars at the Royal Archives at the Round Tower of Windsor Castle. They were microfilmed in 1968 to make 108 reels of microfilm and became available in Britain at the British Library and at Cambridge University Library. Most of the letters are in English but a minority are in French, especially those from Dutch, French and Austrian correspondents. Access was thus necessarily restricted. Extracts from the Cumberland Papers have been cited by historians of the Jacobite campaign of 1745 and by the biographers of the Duke. A selection concerning the American colonies was published in 1936 by Pargellis. It is now possible to view these papers in their entirety, and to search their catalogue, without having to leave one's computer and thus they are now more accessible than ever before.

The raison d'être of this collection is the man from whom it takes its title. This was the Duke of Cumberland, who was born William Augustus in London on 15 April 1721 and was the third son of George, Prince of Wales (George II from 1727-60) and his wife, Caroline of Ansbach, Princess of Wales. Most of his adult life, from 1741-1757, was spent as a soldier; from 1745 he was Captain General, Britain's most senior military officer. As such he fought in Britain's most significant conflicts in these years, the War of Austrian Succession of 1740- 1748, the Jacobite

campaign of 1745-6 and the opening stages of the Seven Years War of 1756-1763. He died on 31 October 1765, aged but 44 years.

Of these conflicts, the best known to British historians is the Jacobite campaign, when Charles Edward Stuart, popularly known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, tried to overthrow, with predominantly Scottish support, George II and his government. The popular view of Cumberland, who led the British Army to total victory against Charles' forces, is that in his treatment of enemy forces on British soil, he was 'the Butcher', though a minority of historians, including this writer, have defended his reputation.

The collection is a key source for the history of the Jacobite campaign of 1745 because papers making up a substantial part of the collection were written at the time by Cumberland, his associates and his enemies. Unlike the myriad published Jacobite memoirs, which are well known, they were written without the benefit of hindsight and without a view that they would ever be made public. This, then, is history in the raw, without the gloss that comes from hindsight.

For those unacquainted with this treasure trove of historical sources, the following examples should provide illustrations of some of the material contained therein. I have tried to provide representative samples from some of the letters within the Cumberland Papers, which are divided into boxes, each of several hundred documents.

Cumberland Papers Main series, box/volume one is a miscellaneous collection of papers from 1649 to 1744, some of them dealing with Scotland, including orders from the later Stuart monarchs. Others deal with

military aspects of the War of Spanish Succession, such as prisoners taken at Blenheim.

Cumberland Papers Main series, box/volume 2-59 is a roughly chronological series of letters covering Cumberland's career from 1745-1765. This is the major sequence of papers. While on campaign Cumberland wrote on an almost daily basis to senior politicians, soldiers, sailors and others. These include allies such as the Habsburg Feldmarschall Lothar Josef von Königsegg-Rothenfels, Lieutenant-General John Ligonier (later Field Marshal and Viscount Ligonier) and enemies such as Maréchal Maurice de Saxe, as well as British politicians and diplomats. About 10% of these papers are letters written by the Duke or his secretary. Throughout there are documents concerning routes of march, delivery and payment of forage and supplies, and returns of soldiers.

Cumberland's role as Captain General on the Continent 1745-8 and 1756-7 is reflected in these papers. There are several accounts of the battle of Fontenoy in 1745 included here. Part of one deals with casualties:

'The Infantry of the Right Wing has behaved very well and suffered upon this Occasion, the Hanover Troops as well Cavalry as Infantry, have had their share with us, in the Dangers, Fatigues & Loss, it is impossible to regret sufficiently the great Number of Officers as well as Private men, who are missing, most of them are we fear dead. Lieut. Genl. Campbell had his leg shot off & is since dead. General Ponsonby was killed upon the spot. The Lord Albermarle & General Howard, both major generals, & the Brigadiers Churchill and Ingoldby are wounded, General Howard in four places'^[1].

Increasingly, Cumberland was hearing of the Jacobite threat in Scotland and was recalled to deal with this. The papers enable the reader to follow the campaign from the moment that Cumberland was recalled from the Continent in October 1745, to leading an army in England, the pursuit of the Jacobites in Scotland in 1746, the battle of Culloden and then to the suppression of Jacobitism in Scotland following the battle.

Part of a letter he wrote to the Duke of Newcastle on 20 December 1745 refers to the clash of arms at Clifton Moor on 18 December 1745:

'I wrote in a very great hurry the night before last to inform of the little affair which hapned that Evening at the Village of Clifton, which tho but trifling of itself, may, I hope, have good consequences, as it has increast that terror & pannick which was amongst the rebels before, to such a degree that we have taken since the affair about seventy of their People. We reckon they had about twenty killd, & a good many wounded, but cannot tell the Number, as they carried them of with them. About ten at night that whole Corps which was at Penrith, & had made their Cannon & Baggage advance during the skirmish, retired with the utmost precipitation, to Carlisle, where they arrived yesterday Morning about ten of the Clock but it was so extremely dark, & the Country was so cover'd between Clifton & Penrith, that had I been sure of their retreat I dared not to have pursued them til day light, & wn that came, our Men & horses were so fatigued with the forced marches we had made through an extreme bad Country & with remaining all night upon the common in very cold & wet weather, that I was forc'd to halt them at Penrith to wait for the foot, of whom the greatest part came in last night & the remainder this morning.'^[2]

There were many communications addressed to Cumberland, offering information and advice, or asking for assistance. One of the latter from the summer of 1746 was a petition from one David Rose, who had been taken in Scotland as a suspected Jacobite:

'Your Petitioner, it would appear, was taken up and committed on suspicion of treasonable practices; as to which charge, he before God declares his Innocence, and is persuaded, in the strictest enquiry his conduct will appear to have been peaceable and unblameable, for evidence whereof he gives in herewith three certificates, one of Mr Fyther, Minister of the established Church at Fearn, another from Mr John Scot, Minister of the Gospel at Lockla, and another from the kirk sessions of the parish of Strathrow, in the neighbourhood of which your petitioner has resided these twenty years.'^[3]

The Cumberland Papers also shed a light on the Jacobites, for the papers of the Jacobite army were captured in the aftermath of Culloden and were filed with Cumberland's papers. The following letter from Charles Steuart of Ardsheal at the recently captured Fort Augustus to Adjutant-General John O'Sullivan on 6 March 1746 reflects on the Jacobites' problems securing a supply of alcohol:

'As this place has been intirely pillaged and plundered of everything and more especially liquors, you ought forthwith to order for the use of the Gentlemen here as much Rum, Brandy, Wine and Sugar as can be conveniently be got. Col. MacLachlan did & should have sent some Brandy. Rum and Sugar which never arrived here, and probably the Prince and all of you are of Opinion that several things were sent here which we never got. I wrote yesterday to Mr Murray & Lochiel and Keppoch has wrote this day to Lord George wch you'll readily see.'^[4]

Towards the end of 1746, Cumberland returned to the Continent to continue his part in the war against the French. While there he was instrumental in negotiating the preliminaries to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, writing to Ligonier on 28 July 1747 that:

'I received by a Messenger yesterday the Kings Pleasure upon the subject of the overture towards a general pacification made to me some time since by the Marshal de Saxe in the name of the French King, through your

Channel. The Answer his Majesty thinks proper to give thereto, is contained in the inclosed Paper. He thinks fit it should pass by your hands to the Marshal of Saxe, the extract from the Earl of Chesterfield's Letter to me of the 10th July OS, the extract of the Letter which follows verbatim directs in what manner the extract of the Letter the Kings Answer is to be communicated by you to the Marshal of Saxe. But as you are not at hand to confer with the Marshal & as your going to Liege or any other place to meet Him might be subject to great inconveniencies in the infancy of such negociaition, I think the best way will be for you to give an account by Letter to the Marshal of Saxe that I have received an answer from London, & the insert in your letter the substance in the sense of the Paper, without keeping to the express words of it, this I would have you do without loss of time & I think it will be fully answering to his Majestys intentions'.^[5]

But perhaps Cumberland's greatest lasting legacy, enjoyed by many tourists who have never heard his name, is his work as Ranger of the Royal Windsor Parks, an office he received in part as a reward for his victory at Culloden. In this, he was the guiding force behind the creation of the huge artificial lake, Virginia Water. Part of a letter to James Glen, Governor of South Carolina, on 25 January 1750 reflects his intense interest in horticulture:

'His Royal Highness the Duke being now a little at leisure & in possession of Windsor Great Park, turns his thoughts a good deal to the study, wch has of late prevaild here not a little...[concerning] Plants & Trees, & is laying out by all the ways he can, to come at a variety of the more usefull & beautyfull ones, for the improvement & adorning that fine spacious piece of ground. A list of hardy plants which may be had in America has been put into His Royal Highness' hands & your name mentioned as a Person whose offices might be of use towards procuring some of them...'^[6]

There are generally fewer letters by Cumberland when he was at Windsor or London as he had no need to write; he could talk to many of those he wished to

communicate with. For this reason, his correspondence between 1749-56 is less plentiful compared to when he was on campaign in 1745-8 and in 1756-7. That said, there are papers dealing with his political role. He was, for example, important as a source of patronage, as may be seen from a letter he wrote to Dr Francis Andrews, Provost of Trinity College Dublin on 31 January 1765:

'Mr Provost Andrews, I have received your letter, relating to the Vice Chancellorship of the University of Dublin. I take this opportunity to acquaint you, that I have appointed Doctor Richard Robinson, archbishop of Armagh, to succeed the late Primate, as my Vice Chancellor. I make no Doubt that the choice I have made will be very agreeable to you and to the other Fellows as well as most conducive to the advantages of the University, which I shall always be very desirous and attentive to promote...'^[7]

The third series is Cumberland Papers Main series, box/volume 60-69, a miscellaneous collection of military and political papers 1666-1765, but also with colonial topics. These include correspondence and reports on such matters as the details of fortifications at home and abroad, lists of officers and medical staff, reports about Gibraltar and suggestions for colonisation in Ohio^[8].

Cumberland Papers Main series, box/volume 70-78 covers Windsor Great Park from 1743-1764. From his appointment as Ranger in 1746 Cumberland was closely involved in managing the estate and it engaged much of his energies in the next two decades. These papers deal with both his household at The Lodge (now the Cumberland Lodge) and the Park itself. There is much here about the staff employed and wages paid, as well as orders for food and drink. There are also lists of trees planted and seeds purchased from abroad, as well as covering the clearing of scrub and the

establishment of Virginia Water. There are even letters about importing lions, buffalo and deer.

Finally, there is a series of papers consisting of military orders. These include court martial records and orders of the day for the army. An example of the former is typical of many such documents:

'Osnaburg April 8 1762 Parole Fabius et Catherine
Countersign Celle Lieutenant General Conway is pleased to confirm the sentence of the General Court Martial of which Colonel Boden is President whereby John Chitham Private soldier in the third Regiment of Foot Guards and Alexander Boyle of the eighth Regiment of Foot tried on suspicion of stealing a piece of cloth. Alexander Boyle found guilty of a breach of the second article of the twentieth section of the articles of war and do a judge him to receive five hundred lashes and to acquit the prisoner John Chitham...'^[9]

Likewise, Orders of the Day:

'Field Officer of the Day tomorrow Major Cosley. Divine Service tomorrow as usual. The weekly returns to be given tomorrow. One serjt, one corpl & 25 men from ye Brigade of Foot Guards to parade the Day at 12 of clock on the coutre & march to the Citadell & mount guard at the Gates at the Bridge. 1 Corpl & 4 men of the same Brigade to parade at the same time, & march to mount guard at the work before the Sally Port in ye Citadell. One Corpl & 7 men of Col. Durours Regt to parade at the same time, & mount guard at the Antwerp Port...'^[10]

The online publication of these papers should bring about a greater appreciation of Cumberland's role in British history, and also offer new insights into the dynamics of war and politics in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, America and Europe. Genealogists will also find them of interest, as will students of horticulture.

NOTES

^[1] RA CP/Main/2/158A.

^[2] RA CP/Main/8/80.

^[3] RA CP/Main/17/111.

^[4] RA CP/Main/11/332.

^[5] RA CP/Main/25/15.

^[6] RA CP/Main/44/9.

^[7] RA CP/Main/57/273.

^[8] Proposal for making a settlement on the Ohio, 10 February 1755. RA CP/Main/61/21.

^[9] RA CP/OB/10/1.

^[10] RA CP/OB/2/1.

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