

Val Smith

Introduction

In the attics of Achnacarry, hereditary home of the Camerons of Lochiel, are many hidden treasures of Cameron history and one in particular perhaps, deserves to be more widely known and used. It is a copy of the Memoirs of Allan Cameron that he wrote at the king's instructions 'to be sent to Rome from time to time as opportunity served.' They detailed what he had done as the king's agent in the years 1714-1716. Men like Cameron were essential conduits between fellow conspirators in the days when secret information was not easily sent in any other way but their role is touched on only in passing in most of the general histories² In these Memoirs we get an account of the work of such historical agents.

Allan Cameron (d. 2 November 1730) was the third son of Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel and younger brother of John Cameron the 18th of Lochiel. He was a trusted secret agent of James VIII and III and after being attainted after the 1715 rising eventually in 1718 became a gentleman of the Bed Chamber to James (referred to as the Chevalier de St George) in his small and impoverished court in Rome, where he was a useful conduit for other members of the Lochiel family. He continued to act occasionally as a spy during these years. He was a military man and in his earlier years in the Highlands, he had been a Lieutenant in one of the Independent Companies. After the failure of the Jacobite rising in 1715 Allan conducted the retreat of his brother's Clansmen from Perth to the Highlands in the spring of 1716, and then escaped again to France in the company of Lochiel and eventually joined James in Rome.

Context

James's fortunes were in decline in 1714. His long-time protector, Louis XIV had at the Franco-British treaty at Utrecht in 1713³ agreed to give him no further shelter or succour. James had retreated to Lorraine which was technically outside the boundaries of France, although Louis XIV had

¹ I am most grateful to Colonel Sir Donald Hamish Cameron of Lochiel 26th chief for permission to look at the archives at Ardnacharry.

² Cameron does, however, appear in Philip Henry Stanhope, *History of England from the Peace of Utrecht to the Peace of Versailles*, Vol I, ed. Henry Reed (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1849), pp. 325-329.

³ The treaties at Utrecht in 1713 were in fact a series of treaties between various countries rather than a single treaty signed by all.

occupied it until 1697, had permitted its duke Leopold Joseph to return in 1697 and then re-occupied it from 1702-14 although the duke remained there so that the treaty was observed in the letter but not the spirit. After Louis XIV's death James was offered asylum and financial support by pope Clement XI and retreated to Rome. In Lorraine James was to be found at Nancy, Bar le duc, Plombieres les Bain and other cities. On August 1st 1714 Queen Anne died unexpectedly and the issue of the Protestant succession became critical. Various plans to restore James were afoot on the Continent, in Scotland and in England. To have any chance of success these plans had to be co-ordinated. The role of Allan Cameron in all this was crucial. The rising of course failed and James arrived at Peterhead with Cameron too late to influence the course of events. Recorded history has not been kind to the late arrival in Scotland of the Old Pretender. It has been suggested that had arrived before Sheriffmuir the outcome would have been quite different. The Memoirs account of the reasons and the frustrations of each delay offer a different understanding of the delays and show nature having clear part in dictating the outcome of history

The Memoirs

This autobiographical account of Allan Cameron's activities in 1714 and 1715 describes his journeys to and from England, the dangers he ran into carrying out his missions as confidential emissary between King James and the most prominent Jacobites; the Duke of Ormond and the Earl of Mar. These clandestine visits, often in the disguise of sailor, merchant, glazier and on one occasion a Campbell were all recorded by him in what we now know to be The Memoirs of Allan Cameron – Jacobite Agent.

They commence in June 1714 when had orders from the King to come to Lorraine as soon as he could bringing an account of 'how affairs were presently in Britain, the Inclinations of the country and comments from such Loyalists as were proper to be spoke to on his Majesty's affairs at that juncture' Queen Anne death precipitated Alan's departure from Scotland via London. Therefore there being no time to lose, after seeing some of the King's friends in Scotland, on the 20th of August 1714, he set off for London where he sought Henry St. John Bolingbroke and some others of the King's friends before leaving London Wednesday the 1st of September reaching Bar le Duc the following Sunday and finally finding James at Plombieres les Bains. There he received instructions to return to Britain with a letter dated 27 September 1714 at Plombieres from James to his Scottish friends which is summarised in the Memoirs and ends, typically with a demand that full credit be given to the bearer.

Perhaps the most interesting section of the memoirs is the account of his and the king's movements in Europe after September 15 1715 when the earl of Mar had raised the Royal standard at Braemar.⁴ At this point Cameron was in Paris waiting for orders from the Duke of Ormond and Bolingbroke. When Ormond has news of Mar's behaviour it was clear to Cameron that the king must embark as soon as possible. Cameron went to Bar, received orders from the king, returned to Paris for further orders from Ormond and Bolingbroke. On 20 October Ormond left for England and Cameron received orders from the king to go to Mar in Scotland by way of Holland. This proved impossible, as John Dalrymple, second earl of Stair, who was managing a spy network to prevent James arriving, had persuaded general Cardigan to issue a memorial insisting that their seaports prevent any Briton without a passport from Cardigan to embark for Britain.⁵ Turned back Cameron went to James who was with Ormond at St Malo with two ships. The initial plan was for James to sail for Scotland around Ireland but when the sea officers found this impracticable in winter the ships set sail to deceive the people into thinking the king had left. The king then went to Dunkirk. Cameron was sent to Bolingbroke in Paris where he got the first news of Sherrifmuir and Preston.

Cameron then went on towards Dunkirk and found James at St Omer and eventually under strict disguise they all embarked on a small ship of 50-60 tons that was cleared for Gothenburg. Surviving a storm they arrived at Peterhead on December 22 and hovered off shore to discover what the local conditions were. When a boat came out to them one of the boatmen gave a remarkable account of the local situation:

I told him then after asking several questions which he answered very distinctly. That we heard in Holland of their getting to Arms in Scotland under my Lord Mar against the Government, and whether they had continued in that desperate way, or if they were dispersed as we heard and gone to their several homes from Perth.

He answered, very far from it, that my Lord Mar was still at Perth with the Army, that all the country was out who had taken Arms, and were in so good a way that they wanted nothing but their King who they expected daily - I told him that we heard the

⁴ The are endless standard accounts of these events.

⁵ Karl W. Schweizer, 'Jacobite Material Among the Scottish Loudoun Papers', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61 (1) (1998), pp. 101-105, indicates more information on this in the Campbell papers.

Highland Clans were all gone home after the Battle that was fought, and that all their affairs were gone wrong, he said not at all, that some of their common men went but that all the Chiefs were still at Perth with my Lord Mar and a great many of their men, and that they expected those men who were gone home after the battle very soon back, with a great many other favourable circumstances as he imagined. I told him as for their King, for anything we could learn in Holland, that he was still in France and no appearance of his coming to them. I aske'd him if Peterhead still belonged to my Lord Marishal, and if a house on the Sea coast then in our view within a little way of Peterhead was not Sir William Keith's he said that it was and it seem'd I knew the country pretty well, I told him I was a Scotsman and had been often on that coast tho' I had my bread amongst the Dutch.

I then inquired how their Army was subsisted and some such questions and his master my Lord Marishal was, he told me he was at Perth with the Army, and that there had been that same day one of the King's officer at Peterhead and over that country raising the King's Taxes for the use of the Army, and that my Lord Salton was carried prisoner to Aberdeen for non complying. I asked if Sir William Keith was at Home or any of his sons, he answered Sir William was at Perth but that his son George was come home to make his Christmas with his mother – I ask'd him if they were not afraid there at Peterhead of the English men of war that they would destroy them being a seaport, he answered very briskly that all the harm they could do them was to carry off some of their fisher boats which two cruisers which past by there lately had done going into the Murray firth, said he they cannot come near our harbour for we have cannon placed there.

As a result of this favourable information James disembarked (with some difficulty) and the events that followed are fairly well known.

Allan Cameron's Character

From his own copious and detailed accounts of his undertakings something of his character emerges, as it does also from references, not always

flattering, made to him by other Jacobites. He is spoken of among other things as being “cunning as a witch” a quality that at any rate stood him in good stead during a visit to London in July 1715 and by an allusion to a second adventure in October of the same year in a letter from Bolingbroke to James: Cameron. he says ‘was seized at Mons, but his address and good fortune delivered him’ While other of James’ agents appear to have been sometimes unnerved by the risks they ran, Allan never held back from any enterprise in spite of his recurrent ill-health, which distressed his master. He was always there when he was wanted and threw himself whole-heartedly into the cause to which he had devoted his life. One cannot help feeling, however, that it was work which suited his nature and which he thoroughly enjoyed despite the hazards and discomforts of his missions.... he is a great scribe, diffuse and not always clear, as James had occasion to note sometimes to his sorrow.

Conclusion

A letter from Allan Cameron to his nephew, Young Lochiel, written on October 3 1729, only a year before his death, which has appeared in various memoirs of the time shows that to the truly faithful any defeat was merely a setback to be overcome. ‘You are to assure yourself and others, that the King has determined to make Scotland happy, and the Clans in particular, when it pleases God to restore him; this is consistent with my certain knowledge.’⁶

⁶ John Home, *The History of the Rebellion in the Year 1745* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1802), pp. 266-270.