



## THE SOBIESKI BROTHERS – GENUINE STUARTS OR NOT?



Written by Tony Grace for the Carnie Group of the Calgary Burns Club, September 2022

Scottish History is a wonderful thing, with many wonderful stories but quite often told by people many years – even centuries – after the events they portray. This had led to considerable “editorial license” and even complete fabrication at times, and it is only years later that any such “inaccuracies” are recognized. As a comment on the many myths – for want of a better word, - that hang around Scotland’s history I quote Hugh Trevor-Roper, the distinguished historian, who believes that the whole history of Scotland has been coloured by these myths, and that myths in Scotland are never driven out by reality or reason, but linger on until another myth has been uncovered or elaborated on, to replace the last one. The story I’m going to tell you tonight is a story that for years answered the question as to who the legitimate heir to Bonnie Prince Charlie was and as such was the true House of Stuart claimant to the throne of England, Scotland and Ireland. To introduce the story, I will briefly go over the undisputed historical facts that lead up to the new information that will unfold as the story continues.

The last male ruling monarch of England, Scotland and Ireland from the House of Stuart was James II of England and the VII of Scotland, who ascended to the throne in 1685 but left the country in 1688 following an unpopular reign that failed largely due to James’ efforts to reintroduce Catholicism to mainstream life. Once gone, the government declared that he had “vacated the throne”, and William, the elector of Hanover and his wife Mary, the older of James two daughters, were invited to become joint monarchs. This event marks the beginning of the Jacobites, as those were the people who refused to recognize the legitimacy of the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, and continued to support the claims of James II as the legitimate King

In exile James II set up his court in France with the blessings of the French King, who gave him the use of the royal chateau of Saint-Germain-en-Laye for the rest of his life. Just prior to his exile, James and his second wife, Mary of Modena, had a son, christened James Francis Edward Stuart, who was raised in Continental Europe as a Catholic, and was known as the Chevalier de St. George. Upon the death of James II in 1701, this son who would have been James III was recognized by the King of France, as well as Spain, the papal States and Modena, as the rightful King of England, Ireland, and Scotland, refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of William and Mary. This move was partly politically motivated not only to annoy William and Mary and the British Government but to suggest they might support another uprising to regain the British throne. As a result, in Britain James became to be referred to as The Old Pretender.

After several attempts to regain the throne, including the uprising in 1715 that promised so much but came to nothing, James gave up and lived in Papal territory in Europe, eventually settling in Rome in 1718 where he remained for the rest of his life under the protection of the Pope. After several attempts at finding himself a wife, James was married in 1719 to Maria Clementina Sobieski who had been born in Silesia, then part of the Holy Roman Empire but currently in Poland. Her father was the eldest son of King John III of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and thus had royal blood in her veins, as of course did her husband James Francis Edward Stuart. In addition, Maria Clementina was one of Europe’s wealthiest heiresses from inheriting vast estates in Poland. However, the marriage turned out to be an unhappy one, and shortly after the birth of their second son they started living separate lives, and although they never divorced, they did continue to share formal duties. They had two sons, Charles Edward Stuart, nicknamed Bonnie Prince Charlie but also known as The Young Pretender, and his younger brother Henry Benedict Stuart who became a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church.

Like his father before him, Prince Charlie, as he is commonly referred to, was brought up in exile, the only difference in his case it was in Rome not France. He was always a Catholic, always convinced himself to be the legitimate heir to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland and

with a strong belief in the divine right of kings. In 1743 James named his son Prince Charlie, the Prince Regent together with the authority to act in his name. This led to Prince Charlie leading the uprising of 1745 in which he and his army reached Derby before turning back and their eventual defeat at Culloden. A harrowing chase across Scotland followed before Charlie was able to escape and return to France.

While in France he had numerous affairs before being forced to leave that country under the terms of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. He lived for eight years in France with his Scottish mistress Clementina Walkinshaw by whom he had a daughter made famous by Robert Burns in his poem **The Bonnie Lass of Albanie**: it was rumoured that she also had a short-lived son. Following an abusive relationship, Clementina left him in 1760 and was secreted in a convent together with her daughter and was supported financially secretly by Prince Charlie's father the Old Pretender. Later in 1772 Charles married Princess Louise of Stolberg-Gedern who left him in 1780 claiming he abused her; they had no issue.

This is where the lesser-known part of the story starts. It was claimed in fact that Bonnie Prince Charlie and his wife Princess Louise did have a son called Thomas who logically would have a claim to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland. Due to a fear of assassination and kidnapping by the Hanoverian authorities, immediately after the birth the son had secretly been taken to England on a ship captained by Admiral John Carter Allen, and who later adopted him and brought him up as a brother to his own son John, together with two sisters. The dates of birth suggest all four were born out of wedlock although John Carter did marry their mother Caroline in 1780 thus legitimizing them all.

In October of 1800, Admiral John Carter Allen died. He was connected to the marquis of Downshire and claimed descent from the Hay Earls of Errol, the hereditary Chief Constables of Scotland. In his will he left GBP2300, divided unequally between the two boys with Thomas, the elder, receiving GBP100 and John, the younger GBP2200. The life of the older boy Thomas is intriguing. Details of his birth are unknown as no birth certificate has ever been found and where he was born is unknown. He joined the Royal Navy and in 1792 married Catherine Matilda Manning, before retiring as a lieutenant in 1798, at which time they apparently moved to France, living in the Versailles area. Prior to this their first son John was born in England, followed by a second son christened Charles Edward in France. The two boys were well educated and were naturally clever as well as good looking and attracted Napoleon at the height of his fame.

About the year 1811 "a certain secret" as to their birth was revealed to them, and "*stirred by that startling news, they entered the service of the eagle monarch Napoleon, fighting for him in 1813 at Dresden and at Leipzig*", - and later at Waterloo. It does seem odd and even unimaginable that the grandsons of an English Admiral who had distinguished himself against the French should fight against their grandfather's, and presumably their own, country, but this was their claim, and we have no evidence to disprove it. Once Napoleon was settled in St. Helena the two brothers moved to London where for two years they studied Gaelic under a Donald MacPherson. Both brothers eventually became fluent in that language to the extent they were able to compose both verse and prose in it. In 1822 John published his first book of poems calling himself John Hay Allan. This together with several allusions in the poems to the Hays of Errol suggested that John was trying to demonstrate and confirm a connection with the family of the traditional Chief Constables of Scotland – a link through his father.

Charles Edward had meantime been married to a widow, Mrs. Anne Gardiner and remained in London while his brother travelled extensively in Scotland. By 1822 following the visit to Scotland

by King George IV, both brothers were also there, and suddenly made their appearance to the world. They had Scotized their names by adding Hay and changing the spelling of Allen to Allan. For the next twenty-five years the two flitted through the noble houses of Scotland "*dressed in all the extravagance of which the Highland costume is capable – every kind of tag and rag, false orders and tinsel ornaments*" They were strikingly handsome, and with their courtly manners and personal charm they were able to seduce or persuade, Scotsmen of every kind - aristocrats, antiquaries, romantically inclined ladies, supposedly hard-headed men of affairs. Wherever they went, they moved easily through high society. Whatever they did, they did thoroughly, and with style. They were proficient huntsman, deeply learned in the life and lore of the forest and the chase. They were learned in the arts and human sciences and their talents were extraordinary. Both were skillful draftsmen and painters, woodcarvers, and furniture makers. They could quote Greek and knew Latin well. They were fluent in Gaelic as well as in French and Italian. They would cite Welsh and old Norse and their familiarity with arcane Highland literature and Scottish antiquities was remarkable. When they were not stalking the deer or drawing the eyes of all in the great houses, they were apparently bent over old folios, copying family portraits, old armour or sculptures, collating ancient manuscripts, or taking down Gaelic poetry from the lips of nonagenarian senachies. They became well known and respected all over the Highlands and were at all times dressed in full Highland costume, and generally accepted as the grandsons of Prince Charlie.

As the brothers became older, they gave up any claims to the Hay title, something their father had expressly forbidden them to do, however they more and more openly inferred that their father was not a natural son of Admiral John Carter Allen at all, but suggested he was in fact the natural and legitimate son of Bonnie Prince Charlie. They took the name of Sobieski Stuart and accepted as their due the homage that was paid to those who believed their claims. They never exacted homage from anyone and lived the lives of quiet country gentlemen, and there were a number of houses in which they were received as royal princes, and where everyone rose on their entering the room. Whenever the toast of "the King" was given, the younger brother would raise his glass and look in the direction of his older brother, whilst the latter merely bowed. That they believed in themselves there cannot be the slightest doubt. That they had some secret cannot be doubted either; that towards the close of their lives they believed themselves to be legitimate grandsons of Bonnie Prince Charlie is also certain. But had they all their lives this belief, or had they, by deceiving others so constantly, also deceived themselves? In 1844 what later proved be the contentious *Vestiarium Scoticum* was published by John followed two years later by **The Tales of the Century**, jointly authored by the two brothers.

The last two books mentioned drew attention to the brothers, particularly the **Tales** where the story of their birth as grandsons of Prince Charlie was laid out in public for the first time. It was the beginning of the end of the fairy tale. The **Vestiarium** contained a listing of some seventy-five clans (both Highland and Lowland!), together with their supposed setts, stripes and colours of their tartans. The book was supposedly based on three manuscripts, the originals of which were never produced for any critical examination and seem to have been lost, and although purported copies existed at the time, their authenticity was soon challenged. In **The Tales of the Century** the story of the birth of the son to Prince Charlie and Princess Louise and the disappearance of the child immediately after was outlined. This book appeared some two years after **Vestiarium** and laid out in story form the origins of the claim of the two brothers to be grandsons of the Young Pretender

The result of the publication of the **Tales** led to a literary assault on the authenticity of both books, with the **Vestiarium** being described as a complete forgery and the claims of the brother's

ancestry in the **Tales** were also questioned. The assault appeared in the Quarterly Review and was written jointly by a Professor Skene of Glasgow University and the Rev. Dr. Mackay, editor of the Highland Society's Gaelic Dictionary. It is worth noting that the Quarterly was edited at the time by John Gibson Lockhart, son-in-law to Sir Walter Scott who also drawn into the debate and who also questioned its authenticity as he was not given the opportunity to see the original manuscripts. John Sobieski took it upon himself to respond to the attack in the Quarterly with long explanations about the origins of the **Vestiarium** but was silent on the matter of the royal claims made in the **Tales**, where he apparently consigned his critic's arguments to silent contempt on the assumption that the critic was committed to the interest of a rival contender, but which was incorrect. Once the dust had settled on this debate the claims of the Sobieski Stuarts had clearly come off second best and were permanently discredited. The brothers and their families shortly decamped to Prague where they attempted to reestablish their "court". Nothing is known of their lives there, but some twenty years later they moved back to London, where they became well-known at the British Museum Reading Room to the extent they had a special table permanently reserved for them. Presumably they studied royal genealogy, Jacobite History and Scottish Tartans. John died in 1782 and his brother Thomas two years later.

So there you have it. Were the brothers the legitimate, or otherwise, grandsons of Bonnie Prince Charlie and hence the direct descendants of the Stuart line? There is no conclusive evidence to deny the claim but very strong indications that in fact they weren't. Over time further detailed research has confirmed that the brothers were not genuine royal descendants even though It is unclear as to why and how the whole scheme was started and who was expected to benefit.