

JACOBITISM IN CORNWALL

by James Whetter

Once established we know the strength of Cornishmen's loyalty. They gave Charles I full support in the civil war and the Cornish army was one of his principal assets. We know of the support given to Bishop Trelawny in his struggle with other bishops against James II but, with their temperament and conservative tradition, it seems unlikely there would have been backing for the overthrow of the Stuart monarch among many Cornishmen. That some of the gentry were Roman Catholic, notably the Arundells of Lanherne, meant there was a core, in any case, who would have been loyal to James II on religious grounds.

My attention was first drawn to the subject of Jacobite sympathies in Cornwall by aspects of my family's history. Seemingly out of the blue two called Jacob Whetter, an uncle and a nephew, became established in St. Goran parish

around 1720. It was a christian name unheard of in the family's annals before this time. The main line previous to this lived in nearby St. Stephen in Brannel but unfortunately registers of births, marriages and deaths do not survive for that parish before 1700. It was therefore a little difficult to track down their background. Making use of probate documents, however, it became clear that the two Jacobs were related to William Whetter who flourished at St. Stephens in the late 17th century. Though none in his family were called Jacob there were two called James at this time. It looks very much as if they were so named by pro-Stuart parents, either before or during James II's brief reign or afterwards in the time of William and Anne. However, as adults in Hanoverian years, post-1714, they seem to have adopted the Latin form of the name, Jacobus — a practice perhaps

encouraged by the use of Latin for names in some parish registers at the time. A similar variation in name is noted in some other families in this period. In others, in contrast, the name James was used as a way of showing their support for the Stuart cause.

Light was shed on this interesting facet of Cornish history by a recently published study by Paul Kleber Monod, "Jacobitism and the English people, 1688-1788". He and other writers noted a Jacobite connection with some criminal activities, in particular smuggling.¹ Jacobitism gave criminals a way to legitimize their defiance of the law. South coast smugglers had sound financial reasons for liking the Stuarts because their trade was dependent on the connivance of the French authorities, the allies of King James. Moreover, the conveyance of Jacobite agents across the Channel was a brisk and profitable business. It would follow therefore that Jacobitism may have found support among some Cornish fishing and smuggling communities. In my own parish of St. Goran we find at Gorran Haven James Barnicoat, a millwright, making his will in June 1719 witnessed among others by Jonas Henna and James Philp. His son and heir was likewise called James and, following his death, his probate inventory was valued by Alexander Starlin, mariner, of Gorran and by John Pascoe from neighbouring Mevagissey — a notorious smuggling centre. It is all circumstantial but suggestive. Interestingly in the probate record he is described as

Jacob Barnicoat not James. An investigation into the use of these names in this delicate period would, I think, be fruitful.

The divide resulting from those involved in smuggling and those working to prevent it found reflection in the division between those with Jacobite and those with loyalist sympathies. Among accusers of seditious people were some customs and excise officers. At Marazion a customs searcher provided information against certain local figures but lacking civilian support the case foundered. The distribution of cases involving the use of seditious words recorded by Monod in this period suggests that the level of Jacobite support in Cornwall was much the same as in other parts of the south west. Two individuals were brought before the courts in Cornwall in 1715, one accused specifically of uttering words revealing Jacobite sympathies. In 1716 there were two cases, both involving Jacobite supporters, and in 1745-6 the same number, one specifically Jacobite.² Seditious words often incorporated poetic and literary images. In 1717 Wilmott Mitchell was whipped at Launceston for announcing — "Good news is come to Dover they are all a comeing over: Weell bring him in & crown him king & send the Cuckold to Hanover".³

The exiled Stuarts drew support not only from Roman Catholics but gave employment to people of other religions, including Jews and dissenters. While giving protection to most nonconformists the Toleration

Act of 1689 did not safeguard some of the smaller sects and Jacobite sympathisers were to be found among their members. Edward Nosworthy of Ince Castle, in east Cornwall, probably an Independent or Baptist in religion, was a very hot Whig and member of the Green Ribbon club during the Exclusion crisis. He became a gentleman of the privy chamber to James in 1688 and retained his office in exile. He identified with Lord Melfort's Catholic party, which was more inclined towards toleration than the Anglican followers of Lord Middleton, and in 1695-96 was active as a Jacobite agent. Most Jacobite dissenters, however, were Quakers, who objected to the oaths and doctrinal strictures imposed by the Toleration Act. They may have had links with practising Roman Catholics and both groups, as we know, had support in Cornwall.⁴

The fall of the Tory party from power in 1714-15 encouraged disaffection among High Churchmen and some ministers were prosecuted for uttering seditious words in Cornwall in 1718.⁵ Jacobitism had support

among some Tory gentry and in 1715 the historian Thomas Tonkin's friend, Lord Lansdowne (a scion of the Grenville family) was imprisoned for two years for encouraging rebellion in the west. Writing of her husband Alexander Pendarves of Roskrow, the future Mary Delany, said she wondered how he got away with some of the things he said and considered he was close to being arrested at one stage.⁶ The degree of support for Jacobitism in Cornwall in the early 18th century is a fascinating subject and would make a good project for some young Cornish research student. I would gladly pass on the information I have to anyone who is interested.

NOTES

1. Paul K. Monod, "Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788", 1989 pp. 4, 133.
2. *ibid.* pp.250-51.
3. *ibid.* p.259.
4. *ibid.* pp.154-55.
5. *ibid.* p.148.
6. See my articles on Tonkin and Delany in *An Baner Kernewek*, Nos. 75 and 79.