

CASE STUDY TWO



Ancestor Marie-Victoire, the Demoiselle de Thorigny, was Bonnie Prince Charlie's secret granddaughter

Bonnie Prince Charlie's lost grandchildren

How our reader discovered an amazing ancestral link to the exiled heir to the British throne

SOURCES

Fact and legend

Secondary sources can give useful clues, but must be treated with reserve. Mere repetition in various books is no guarantee of accuracy. Writers often base statements on earlier ones, repeating mistakes, which become 'established facts'

By **Count Peter Pininski**



Peter has been researching the Royal Stuarts since the late 1990s. His book, *Bonnie Prince Charlie – A Life*, was published last year.

My family history research mostly involves titled individuals across Europe,

who have been very well documented. But nothing prepared me for the discovery that my father was the descendant of one of Britain's most legendary figures.

My father was a Polish fighter pilot stationed in England during World War II. He was from an aristocratic family, but seldom spoke of the past because of its painful associations – Tito's

communists murdered his father the day after the war ended. Discovering his roots wasn't difficult because Europe's titled families have been well-written about, but it was an immense shock to find my father was the senior descendant of the illegitimate grandchildren of Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Charles Edward Stuart was the rightful heir to the British throne and leader of the Rising of 1745 when he attempted to reclaim it for the Stuarts from the Hanoverian dynasty – the family which succeeded William of Orange who overthrew Prince Charlie's grandfather King James II in 1688.

Since I began my research 15 years ago, my findings have been published in *The Stuarts* (2005-11), *The Stuart Court in Rome* edited by Professor Edward Corp (2003), *The Stuarts' Last Secret* (2002), and the recent *Bonnie Prince Charlie – A Life* (2010).

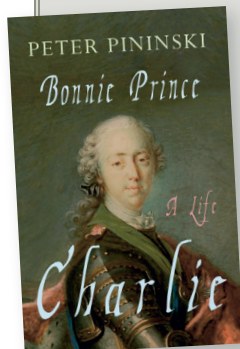
Loyal family

When giving talks on the extraordinary story of the last Stuarts and their descendants I'm invariably asked how I managed to find everything out. In fact, events themselves somehow conspired together to discover the facts.

Families can be mighty odd. My Scottish mother's side are no exception. Any attempt to prise information from her about her Cameron ancestors got nowhere. I gave up trying and instead reached for a book to see what these Camerons were all about.

Bonnie Prince Charlie

The man who tried to reclaim the English throne



Bonnie Prince Charlie or the 'Young Pretender' was Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the rightful heir to the thrones of Great Britain and Ireland as the eldest legitimate grandson of King James II. The King went into exile when his Dutch son-in-law, William of Orange, invaded Britain and overthrew him in 1688. William did this as military leader of the Protestant bloc in Europe, fearing Britain might fall into the French Catholic camp.

James II had only one son, James III (the 'Old Pretender') who married Princess Clementina Sobieska, granddaughter of Poland's King John III who heroically prevented a vast Turkish army from invading Europe in 1683. The exiled Stuarts launched repeated Risings to regain their thrones, but were plagued by bad luck. James III failed with his 1715 Rising which should have succeeded; and in 1745, when no-one thought he had a chance, his charismatic son, Bonnie Prince Charlie, achieved extraordinary success until his defeat at Culloden in April 1746 – the last battle to be fought on British soil. His opponents were William of Orange's successors from the German House of Hanover, regarded as usurpers of the British throne by the Vatican, France and most of Europe. At Culloden the Hanoverians were led by King George II's son, William, whose cruelty afterwards earned him the nickname of 'Butcher Cumberland'.

That was the first time I read anything serious about Bonnie Prince Charlie (1720-1788). I soon learnt that when he first landed in Scotland the Camerons had been the first clan to appear in real force when the prince raised the royal Stuart banner at Glenfinnan, and the most faithful throughout the Rising and beyond – Dr Archibald Cameron was the last person to be hung, drawn and quartered by the Hanoverians, without trial for supporting Charlie. He and the clan chief were brothers of my mother's ancestor.

Entwined ancestry

By the time I began reading about Bonnie Prince Charlie, I thought I knew everything worth knowing about my Polish paternal side. Not for a moment did it occur to me that my parents' families could have anything in common. But that was something I had to radically rethink when I read that the prince's daughter and heiress, Charlotte Stuart, Duchess of Albany (1753-1789; a title granted to the heir to the Scottish throne), had given birth to three illegitimate children by her French relation, Prince

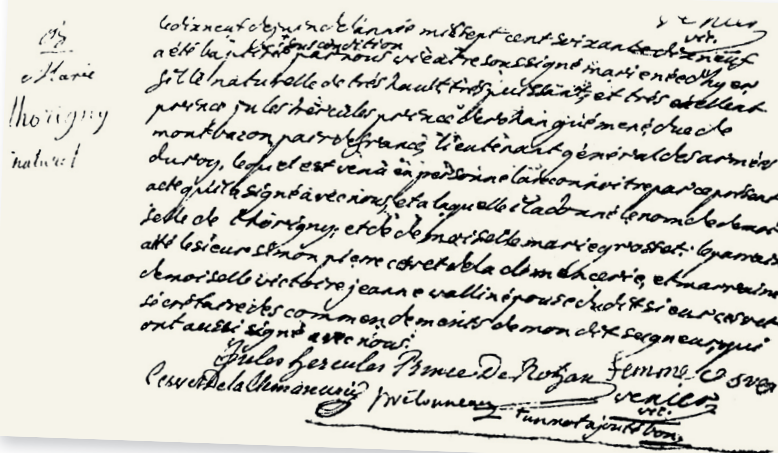
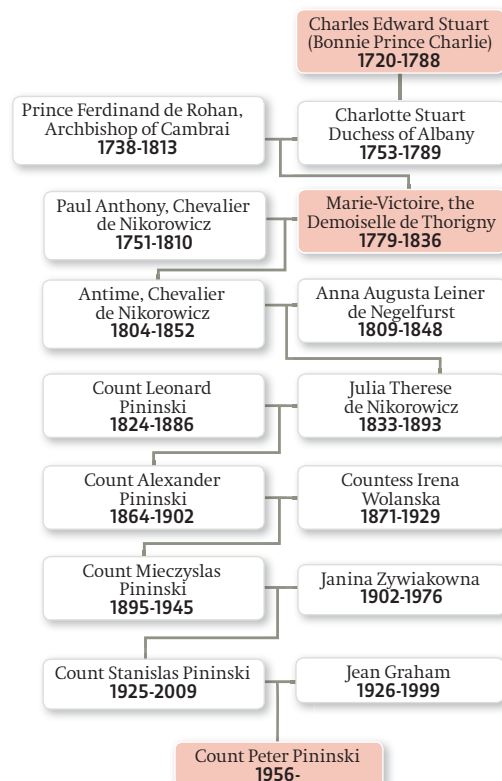
Ferdinand de Rohan. Charlotte had been cruelly forbidden by her father to marry or become a nun and in despair started a secret family with Ferdinand.

Had their secret family been discovered, what remained of the Stuart cause would have been destroyed, as would Rohan's career as an archbishop. Their children were sworn to secrecy about their parentage and often used the name Roehenstart (Rohan and Stuart).

The children's existence was discovered in the 20th century by Stuart experts Henrietta and Alasdair Taylor, and the son's biography was revealed in 1960 by Professor George Sherburn. However, nothing was known about the two daughters except scraps of legend.

On reading this I was struck by the eeriest of sensations, because I knew that my father's ancestress, Marie-Victoire, was the natural daughter of a Prince de Rohan according to family legend and an early-19th century memoir. For generations her origin and identity had been a

THE PININSKI FAMILY TREE



Legitimate Marie-Victoire's 1779 baptism entry, signed by Prince Jules-Hercule de Rohan, who granted her the title of the 'Demoiselle de Thorigny'

mystery; all that had once existed was a beautiful pastel portrait of her in our home, and some letters to her from a Prince de Rohan, which had survived until 1914 at my family's home, the Castle of Grzymalów. Today it's in the Ukraine, but at the time it was in Austro-Hungary.

Though my family remembered these letters remained, they were destroyed at the beginning of WWI when the Russians invaded Austro-Hungary from the East and occupied the castle, ruining everything. Austro-Hungary was also where the exiled Rohans settled after the blood and turmoil of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. They acquired the palace and estate of ▶

FRANCE

Revolution

When the French Revolution erupted in 1789, France's aristocracy, nobility and clergy fled. Huge numbers, including the royal family, escaped to Poland and Austria. A Polish saying recalls that every Polish manor house had a French abbot drinking its cellars dry!

