

LETTER INTIMATING THE DEATH OF CLUNY OF THE '45 AT DUNKIRK ON
30TH JANUARY 1764, AND HIS BURIAL IN THE GARDEN OF THE CARMELITES
THERE.

From The Cluny Charter-Chest

Note.—The following letter communicating particulars of the closing scene in the life of the brave and devoted Chief—worn out by his terrible sufferings in the cause of “the hapless Stuart line,” and “sick unto death” of the long and weary exile from his native hills—is very touching, indicating, as it does, his dying solicitude for his wife and daughter, and his anxiety as to the payment of any debts he might be owing at Dunkirk. The letter is addressed to “Archibald Campbell Frazer, Esqre., Craven Street, London,” of the family of Abertarff, and an intimate friend of the Cluny family. The letter was found among the Abertarff papers, and transmitted by the late Mr Fraser of Abertarff to “Old Cluny” (the father of the present Chief), on 12th June 1869, “to remain, where it should be, at Cluny Castle.”

DUNKERQUE, 31st Janry, 1764.

DEAR SIR,—Ever since I wrote you last, your frind Cluny has been gradually declining, till, quite attenuated, he at lenth breathed his last yesterday morning between 8 and 9 o'clock. Some days before his death he sent for Mr Haliburton, Mr Blair, and me, and recommended his Lady and Daughter to our care, begging as his last request that we would send them over to London, as soon as could decently be done after his decease, and that we should, after their departure, dispose of the Houshold furniture in order to pay any debts he may be owing on this side. The lady seems resolved to follow this injunction, and will probably set out in about 14/d. hence, but shall let you know more exactly when once the time is settled. I need not discribe to you how disconsolate both she and her daughter are upon this melancholy occasion. I regret 'tis not in my power to be of such use to them as I could wish, being still confined with my legg, but both Mr Haliburton and Mr Blair are acting the part of reall friends towards them. The Corps is to be burried this evening in a private manner in the Garden of the Carmelites, which the Lady prefers to a Publick buriall attended with the honours of War. Be assured nothing in my power shall be wanting to assist your distressed frinds, and that I am with great Sincerity, Dear Sir, your most obedt. and humb. Servt.,

(Signed) DAVID GREGORIE.

The “continued fatigues and hardships” that Cluny endured in the nine years before leaving Badenoch in 1755 had greatly impaired his health according to what he told his French friend. It evidently continued to decline during the nine years of exile undoubtedly compounded by his dealings with the bureaucracy, the tedium of garrison duty and the depressing poverty that afflicted his family. The hopelessness of the Jacobite cause and his recognition that he had lost the confidence of the Prince must surely have undermined his peace of mind.

By October 1763 his health had deteriorated to the point that he was unable to write letters we are told by Robertson of Strowan who was also an exile in France and had been corresponding with Cluny over the years. Apparently the letter that led him to that conclusion had been written by Lady Cluny or daughter Margaret. Based on Strowan’s reply, that letter also appears to have contained a request from Cluny for advice on the best way to ship goods from Badenoch to Dunkirk—the Prince’s silver plate now seems to be of pressing concern to the stricken man.

During the last ten days of January 1764, Cluny was attended by the Rev. John Maitland, a Scottish Episcopal minister who had served the Jacobite cause and been exiled as a result. In attending to Cluny’s spiritual needs Maitland tells us that Cluny, “in the most solemn manner that a dying person ... could, declared that he never saw the [Prince’s jewels] or knew anything about them: that the plate was safe, and that he had some time ago transmitted orders for the delivery of it.” He asked Maitland to inform the Prince of this thus fulfilling the promise he had made to him in June 1757.

He died at Dunkirk on 30th January 1764, in the presence of his wife and daughter, Mrs. Nicholson, his friend, Captain Lachlan Mackintosh and the Rev. Maitland, at the comparatively early age of fifty-seven. Mr Macpherson aptly quotes the pathetic lines:-

‘Oh! never shall we know again
A heart so stout and true.
The olden times have passed away,
And weary are the new;
The fair white rose has faded
From the garden where it grew,
And no fond tears save those of Heaven
The glorious bed bedew
Of the last old Scottish Cavalier,
All of the olden time!’

In consequence of Cluny’s adherence to the Protestant Faith he was buried in the garden of the Carmelites in the immediate vicinity of the house which he occupied at the time of his death. Notwithstanding repeated efforts, the grave cannot now be traced. The British Vice-Consul at Dunkirk writes on the subject as follows:

“In reply to your letter of the 11th inst., I am desired by the Consul to state that the Carmelite Monastery in the garden of which Cluny Macpherson was buried no longer exists. The building was pulled down many years ago, and there is no record of any monuments which may have been erected in the burial ground adjoining the Monastery. On the other hand, no trace can be found in the Church Registers of the

death of Cluny Macpherson, as at the date mentioned by you, Roman Catholics only were taken heed of for purposes of registration by the clergy.”

Cluny lies in an unknown grave, but his memory survives as that of a true Highlander devoted to the cause which he loved so well. To him, as Mr Macpherson says, may be appropriately applied Sir David Brewster’s touching epitaph on a Scottish Jacobite:

“To Scotland’s King I knelt in homage true,
My heart—my all I gave—my sword I drew...
Chased from my hearth, I reached a foreign shore,
My native mountains to behold no more—
No more to listen to Spey’s silver stream—
No more among its glades to love and dream,
Save when in sleep the restless spirit roams
Where Ruthven crumbles, and where Pattag foams.”

A second letter written by Captain Mackintosh and addressed to Cluny’s brother, Major John Macpherson provides a rich and moving portrait of Cluny’s last days. The location of his grave has been lost.

No sooner had these letters been sent than Cluny’s old comrades, Breakachy and Benchar, arrived on a repeat visit from the year before, probably aware that he was dying. They were too late for Cluny’s last moments but they were present for his interment. Their arrival and subsequent events were reported to the Prince by the Rev. Maitland in February who informed him that both of the newcomers swore that they knew of no jewellery; that the plate was safe in the custody of Cluny’s brother, Lachlan and that they had seen Cluny’s order for it to be sent to the Prince. However, they stated that the custodian would not send the plate unless he had a signed release from the Prince.

Lady Cluny’s sad journey back to Scotland began on 16th February leaving behind a tangled state of financial affairs that are too complicated to discuss here. Her health was a matter of concern and she was not informed that her half- brother, Archibald Campbell Frazer of London, with whom she was to stay with there had become bankrupt. According to a letter by Benchar to Lady Cluny’s full brother, Archibald Fraser of Lovat, the funds for her stay in London and subsequent journey to Edinburgh were substantially aided by a Mr. John McIntosh who he wrote “Shou’d be gratefully Acknowledged by every person concerned in the Lady or her Misfortunated family.” In any event, Lady Cluny and her party stayed in London until 9th March when she left by stagecoach for Edinburgh. There too, Benchar tells us that, she was well taken care of and told not to be concerned with finances. She stayed there until May when travel to the Highlands was easier and took possession of Cluny Mains from her brother-in-law, Captain Lachlan on Whitsun term day, 15th May 1764.