

### An incident of 1746

An exciting incident occurred in Broughton after the battle of Culloden.

John Murray owned Broughton House (the predecessor of the property now known as Broughton Place). Born in 1715 and educated at Edinburgh University, he went on a Continental "Grand Tour" in 1737; this included Rome, where he met the exiled James Stuart and his sons. He married Margaret, daughter of Colonel Robert Ferguson of Nithsdale, around 1739 and at the same time he purchased Broughton House. In 1741 Murray was appointed principal Jacobite agent in Scotland. He made frequent visits to Paris to carry messages and in August 1744 he met Prince Charles Edward Stuart ("Bonnie Prince Charlie") there.

Despite doubts from some of the Scottish lords about the wisdom of a rebellion without support from the French, it did take place in 1745 and Murray was appointed as the Prince's Secretary after Charles's arrival in Scotland. It is clear that Murray had taken an active part in preparing for the rebellion. His wife Margaret, an active Jacobite in her own right, is reported to have been a great beauty and in September 1745, when King James the VIII of Scotland was proclaimed at the mercat cross in Edinburgh, she appeared on horseback decorated with white ribbons, and with a drawn sword in her hand. In November a party of Jacobite Highlanders apparently stayed one night at Broughton House, on their march into England. After reaching Derby the rebels returned to Scotland and the rising ended with defeat at Culloden on 16<sup>th</sup> April, a battle which Murray missed because of illness.

In the aftermath of the battle the Government conducted a search for those who had participated in the rising, and in an attempt to escape, Murray made his way south in the hope of reaching his sister's house at Polmood (which is between Broughton and Tweedsmuir). He bought a horse and was given an old coat, waistcoat and breeches, so that he looked like a drover. Upon reaching Carnwath, his horse was starting to fail, but he decided to push on and he proceeded through Biggar to Hartree, where he had been hoping to rest, but finding the family not at home he took an hour's rest on a nearby hillside instead. Upon resuming his journey, he found when he reached Kilbucho that his horse was scarcely able to walk, so he had to stop there, even though he found that the owner of the house, William Dickson, was not at home and only William's wife Margaret (who was Murray's aunt) and their daughter were present. (The house was the one now known as Kilbucho Place, parts of which date back to the 17th century). Murray begged the daughter not to use any ceremony with him, for fear of rousing suspicion among the servants, but her mother called for a glass of wine, when a dram of whisky would have been more suitable. This set the whole family agog and made them guess that he must be one of the rebels. He was then obliged to dine with the ladies and because a servant would wait at the table, he asked to be called by another name and to pass for a companion of one of Mrs Dickson's sons. He begged Miss Dickson not to forget herself when the servant was present, which nevertheless she did once or twice and was reproved by her mother.

We know a little of the conversation at the dinner table, from Murray's own memoirs. Seeing from the looks of the servant while at table that news of his being in the neighbourhood would soon become public knowledge, Murray said that he was proposing to go to London, still in his disguise, in

order to put people off the scent and prevent any search for him nearby. Murray continued that if Mrs Dickson's son had been present, he would have liked to persuade him to go on a trip to London, so that Murray could have passed himself off as his servant. Mrs Dickson said she believed that nothing more could be done after the defeat at Culloden, with which Murray agreed, saying he would not give a halfpenny for any probability that remained at present. He would have liked to spend a night there but he was afraid to do so because of the blunders made before the servants and the fact that nearby Broughton House was occupied by a party of dragoons. He therefore made Miss Dickson send a message to his sister, Mrs Veronica Hunter of Polmood, to let her know that he was coming later that evening, so that they would not be in bed when he arrived. He set out between nine and ten at night and arrived at Polmood in less than two hours. Very tired, he went to bed at two in the morning, but was rudely wakened before five by dragoons at the gate, who entered the property and forced him to go with them. On the way to Edinburgh they told him that his discovery was owing to a servant at Kilbucho, who waited till he saw him mount and immediately went to Broughton and informed the dragoons that he had gone to Polmood.

Following his arrest, which took place on 27 June 1746, Murray was first taken to Edinburgh Castle, where he asked to see his children, aged 4 or 5, and this was permitted. He was then escorted to London, where he was interrogated at length. Turning King's evidence, he named his fellow conspirators, which resulted in at least one of them (Lord Lovat) being executed. No doubt in return for his co-operation, he was given a pardon by the Government on 7 June 1748. However, he was understandably shunned by many of his fellow Scots thereafter, who scornfully referred to him as "Mr Evidence Murray". He became separated from his wife, who had played an active part in the rising. While she was in hiding in Edinburgh, she gave birth to a son on 25 September 1746, who was christened Charles, though the baby died soon afterwards. She spent some time hiding in London the following year and it seems likely that she eventually escaped to Holland (possibly disgusted at her husband's treachery to the Jacobite cause). It appears that Murray himself lived quietly and in obscurity for the rest of his life. He bought a property in Hertfordshire and had a relationship there with a Miss Webb, by whom he had several children – it is unclear whether he married her. In 1764 he sold Broughton House to James Dickson, a wealthy merchant and a Member of Parliament. The building was burned to the ground in 1775 through the carelessness of a servant, and Murray died in 1777.

Sources used in preparing this article: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; *Wikipedia entries for John Murray of Broughton*; *Memoirs of the Life of Sir John Clerk* (1892); Baird, A., *Annals of a Tweeddale Parish* (1924); Catalogue of the National Archives; *Memorials of John Murray of Broughton sometime Secretary to Prince Charles Edward 1740—1747* (1898); Buchan, J. W and Paton, H. *A History of Peeblesshire, vol.III*, 1927. Anna Buchan used this episode in her short story, *The Echo*, published in *Farewell to Priorsford* (1950).

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