

University of Vermont

ScholarWorks @ UVM

---

UVM College of Arts and Sciences College  
Honors Theses

Undergraduate Theses

---

2015

## The Social Realm of 18th Century British Ambassadors to France

Andrew M. Bowen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/castheses>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bowen, Andrew M., "The Social Realm of 18th Century British Ambassadors to France" (2015). *UVM College of Arts and Sciences College Honors Theses*. 15.  
<https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/castheses/15>

This Undergraduate Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Theses at ScholarWorks @ UVM. It has been accepted for inclusion in UVM College of Arts and Sciences College Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UVM. For more information, please contact [donna.omalley@uvm.edu](mailto:donna.omalley@uvm.edu).

# History Thesis

## The Social Realm of 18th Century British Ambassadors to France

By Andrew Bowen

Advisor: Paul Deslandes, Professor of History

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis will seek to explain British actions and relations with France both leading up to and during the American and French Revolutions. This time period is critical to understanding the nature of British-French relations for nearly the next century. Existing literature provides some information on political aspects of relations between Britain and France during this period but ignores the important social and familial aspects of ambassadors lives and policies. By fleshing out the influences of individual ambassadors during this period from their social and political relations with their French counterparts we are able to shed light on any possible changes to British policy vis-a-vis France. These social and personal relations could have changed the course of British and French relations over the next century by occurring in this very formative time for both countries. By trying to show how any such social and familial issues affected diplomatic relations between Britain and France during this very tense time period, some important aspects of the diplomatic relations may be uncovered. Since much of the diplomacy was conducted between a small handful of elites in both countries, any special relationships among these men would have had a tremendous influence on diplomacy and diplomatic relations. During such a tumultuous time in international relations, it would be unwise to overlook any individual influence that may be found that could have either sparked or prevented warfare between these two leading nations of the world.

This thesis will cover the terms of five ambassadors, who are also frequently referred to as diplomats. Each one of these ambassadors have left some sort of state letters or personal correspondence that will be covered in depth. The first three ambassadors, William Henry

Nassau 4th Earl of Rochford (1707-1781), Simon Harcourt 1st Earl Harcourt (1714-1777), and David Murray 2nd Earl of Mansfield and 6th Viscount Stormont (1727-1796), referred to as Lord Rochford (Ambassador to France 1766-1768), Lord Harcourt (Ambassador to France 1768-1772), and Lord Stormont (Ambassador to France 1772-1778) respectively, cover the time after the Seven Years War up until the American Revolution. The last two ambassadors, John Sackville 3rd Duke of Dorset (1745-1799) and George Granville Gower 1st Duke of Sutherland and Earl Gower (1758-1833) referred to as Lord Dorset (Ambassador to France 1783-1789) and Lord Gower (Ambassador to France 1789-1792), cover the time immediately following the conclusion of the American Revolution up until the end of the 1792 which was drawing near the French Revolution. Interestingly enough, Britain did not have a formal ambassador or embassy operating in Paris during the entirety of the Seven Years War (1756-1763) as well as the period of the American Revolution after France had entered the war on the side of the Americans (1778-1782). It is also interesting to note that the British ambassador to France, Lord Gower at the time, was formally recalled in 1792 after the Jacobite uprising in France. It would seem that such periods would be the most desirable to have a sitting ambassador, but this was not the case.

To begin to understand the importance of international relations and the growing dependence of European countries on it at this time, one must have a basic sense of European politics leading up to the time period. The history of British diplomacy largely deals with relations with other European states. During this time, diplomatic contacts with non-European powers became more frequent, but they were generally conducted on an ad-hoc base and much less common than with European states.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, they were often handled by military

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott, H. M, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution* (1990), 12.

personnel or by agents of British commercial companies, particularly in Asia with the East India Company, rather than by diplomats accredited by the crown.<sup>2</sup>

However, in relation to the main powers of Europe, generally the Western powers and specifically in British relations with France during this time, there was an old tradition of diplomatic relations between the great powers.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there was already a well-established system of alliances and commerce throughout Europe.<sup>4</sup> As the century advanced, Great Britain became a much stronger political and economic force throughout the world, expanding its empire into the new world and south Asia. As the empire developed abroad, it came into increased contact with its rival nations of Europe, which gave rise to the need for professional diplomacy with many countries abroad, not just neighbors of Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The empire grew in prominence throughout the world, but swiftly came into conflict with France in the new world. Although the French settlers and their Indian allies had been fighting against British settlers with their own Indian allies for many decades in the New World, this fighting became intense during what is known as the French and Indian War (1756-1763) in North America and the Seven Years War (1756-1763) in Europe. This war pitted the British, Portuguese, and Prussians against an alliance led by France, Spain, Russia, Austria, and Sweden. Despite incurring heavy financial burdens during the war, Britain managed to emerge a victor with lasting consequences for the empire.<sup>6</sup> In North America, France's own empire was

---

<sup>2</sup> Black, Jeremy, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, (Liverpool University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cesa, Marco, *Allies Yet Rivals: International Politics in 18th Century Europe*, (Stanford University Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Cesa, *Allies Yet Rivals*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 5.

effectively ended as it ceded New France to Britain and the remainder of its possessions in North America to Spain. This great victory, official with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, saw Britain become the dominant colonial power in the world. Britain would retain many of its political alliances from the war on into the the following decades.<sup>7</sup> It retained strong alliances with Prussia against the French, and France's bitter defeat would remain in memory for many years.

This defeat and the corresponding loss of territory and prestige would encourage France to enter the American Revolution against the British within another twenty years.<sup>8</sup> The Seven Years War effectively set the stage for future political tension between France and Britain, which will be discussed at length further on in this thesis. The Seven Years War was such a loss for France that they would seek revenge against Britain for the next twenty years, before finding a good opportunity to formally oppose them by joining the American colonists in war against Britain. For much of the century France and Britain would go back and forth gathering alliances and power to combat one another if they were not officially at war, which they were for much of the century. France often turned to Spain and Sweden for its allies, while Britain often turned to Prussia, Austria, and the United Provinces for support. However up until the height of Napoleon, Britain would remain the dominant power in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

This time period was also one of immense social change in Britain with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, which in turn began the intensification of the class divisions in British society. However, the British aristocracy retained their power and privilege for most of the eighteenth century. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 30.

nineteenth century a “genuinely British ruling group” emerged.<sup>10</sup> Nobles and notables closed ranks and became more homogenous in terms of wealth, marriage patterns, lifestyles, and ambition, thereby rendering themselves more secure in the face of extreme pressure from without.<sup>11</sup> But by itself, this process was not enough to repel accusations that those who dominated Britain were a separate and malign interest in the nation. The governing elite would also work to strengthen its position at home, reconstructing its authority, image and ideas, and devoting far more attention than before to questions of Britishness.<sup>12</sup> In the half-century after the American war, there would emerge in Great Britain a far more consciously and officially constructed patriotism which stressed attachment to the monarchy, the importance of empire, the value of military and naval achievement, and the desirability of strong, stable government by a virtuous, able and authentically British elite.<sup>13</sup>

Another key component of British culture during this time was the system of patronage that emerged amongst the elite. While there are many different forms of patronage, it is the support, encouragement, privilege, or commonly financial aid from one person in the elite class or upper middle class bestowed upon a younger person. This enables the young person, usually trying to develop their own skills, to get an apprenticeship, or generally begin to carve out their own wealth and power living away from home. By receiving this aid, usually in the form of money, it would allow the young person to afford rent in a socially acceptable town house in a nice London neighborhood for example. Since appearances of wealth and status were crucial in

---

<sup>10</sup> Colley, Linda, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (Yale University Press, 2009), 165.

<sup>11</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 165.

<sup>12</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 147.

<sup>13</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 147.

achieving the uppermost ranks of British society during this time, having someone provide funding for your exploits, employment, a title or other position was extremely helpful. Most members of the elite functioned on some form of patronage even if it came from their parents, close relatives, or another form of inheritance.

Nearly as helpful as patronage for a young person aspiring to become a diplomat is the European elites tradition of a 'Grand Tour'. Many members of the wealthy European families would go on a Grand Tour of Europe when they were coming of age. For many of the British elite this consisted of traveling around the other prestigious countries of Europe and spending an amount of time enriching themselves in the local culture and language of whichever country they were visiting at the time. This included, but was not limited to, a stay in France, probably featuring at least some time in Paris, as well as stops in Italy (perhaps Venice, Genoa, Milan, Rome, or Naples), a stop somewhere in Germany, a visit to Spain (and possibly Portugal), a visit to Austria or Hungary, and a stop in the lowlands of either the Netherlands or Belgium.<sup>14</sup> The young elites who were sent on this tour were often accompanied by a guardian, an older sibling, or a parent. The goal was to mature and develop the knowledge of other cultures and hopefully learn a bit of each language as well.<sup>15</sup> Making such a tour of Europe would greatly enhance the knowledge about other countries, including their language and culture, but learning foreign languages was incredibly helpful for the career of a diplomat. This was often the most sought after skill when appointments were made to foreign diplomatic posts, with French as the most often sought after foreign language. Since this thesis deals exclusively with the French post at

---

<sup>14</sup> Black, Jeremy, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1992), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Black, *The British Abroad*, 9.



Paris, the ability to speak French was necessary for the position. The French, more so than some other diplomatic posts around Europe, also preferred to deal with people of rank and title, so commoners had a much harder time being successful in the French court because the French treated them worse than their elite counterparts.

Beginning with the study of British political and social life during this time period, there is significant literature on both topics. Much of this information about British life and the political systems of the time can be gleaned from modern scholars such as Jennifer Mori, Hamish M. Scott, and Jeremy Black. When looking at the educational system of the British elite during the eighteenth century, it is difficult to find recent sources, but there are many available texts. Two of the most important books on the British elite as a social class featured in this thesis come from Philip Jenkins who wrote *The Making of a Ruling Class* in 1983 and J.C. Clark who wrote *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime* in 1985. During the second chapter of the paper, in regards to what the British diplomatic system looked like and how it operated, there is a very extensive study written in 1961 by David Horn called *The British Diplomatic Service: 1689-1789*. In this section, Jeremy Black's book *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800* written in 2001 and Jennifer Mori's recent book *The Culture of Diplomacy: Britain in Europe 1750-1830* written in 2011 were both critical in formulating what ambassadorial training and development looked like. The third chapter, looking at the internal politics of Britain and its foreign policy positions during the period, has an extensive list of available literature. Jeremy Black, a renowned historian, has written extensively on British foreign policy during this time period, as well as key British diplomats, specifically in regards to French relations. In this section lies the most recent scholarship, as multiple historians

have since reinvestigated this time period in British history and especially British and French relations during the crucial revolutions that happened in this time. Another historian who has written extensively on British foreign policy is Hamish Scott, who wrote *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution* in 1990. This section of the thesis will then transfer into how ambassadors successfully used their personal and social relations to affect negotiations and what a successful term as an ambassador looks like. This literature will largely come from the collection of state papers and private correspondence gathered from the few select men who served in the position during this time period. The letters of correspondence should also help delve into the relationships amongst the British gentry at this time. Furthermore, there are a few books written about the culture of British and French diplomacy in general at this time. Lastly, at the end of the thesis I will evaluate any tangible diplomatic successes achieved by any of these men during their terms in office, as there is a plethora of literature on the nature of French and British diplomatic relations during this period, which can be then compared to the memoirs and private correspondence of each person.

Despite the wide selection of scholarship on British and French relations, there is still a small amount of literature on the social nature of ambassadorial work other than memoirs, personal correspondence, and state papers. While there are plentiful primary sources from these ambassadors, there is little historical scholarship detailing the personal and social relations of these ambassadors and their French counterparts as elites and professionals. There is also an incredible lack of scholarship about the British elite's secondary and post-secondary education, as well as career paths for the British elite, especially in specific reference to diplomatic positions. Any work done connecting these fields would be incredibly helpful in illustrating more

of the social realm of diplomatic relations. This thesis adds to the existing literature of British-French relations during the period, as well as the documented histories of the individual ambassadors and their accomplishments. This thesis will however add to existing literature by looking into the biographies, state letters, and other correspondence of these ambassadors during their time in office and further illustrating any special influences they may have had on British-French relations during this war-torn era by way of their diplomatic skills, personal relations, or other political influences. Furthermore, since this era of history has usually been dominated by the relationship between Britain and her American colonies, it should add to the existing literature on the nature of British and French relations during an era that has been ignored in formal scholarship. There is very little existing literature on the topic of British and French diplomacy leading up to and following the American Revolutionary War, and only a few scholars have ventured into evaluating the individual diplomatic successes of any of the ambassadors during this time period.

This thesis will be split into three chapters, the first will outline the details of British political and social life during the latter half of the eighteenth century. It will further explore the dynamics of the British elite and how that class formed the basis for the ambassadorial group. It will also cover the political realm including the still existing system of patronage in Britain at the time. This thesis will establish how these British elites became the basis for the ambassadorial class and how their education as elites helped prepare them for a term of service in the British diplomatic service.

The second chapter of this thesis will focus on the nature of the British diplomatic service during this era and how British foreign relations were administered. It will also cover the

structure of the British diplomatic service, including the structure of the ambassadors and their staff, as well as the relationship between ambassadors to the king, other ambassadors, and the secretary of state. It will detail the qualifications for ambassadors during this time, including the education or experience required for the position, the importance of family connections, as well as secondary and post-secondary education within the British elite. Lastly, it will discuss how members of the British elite or common citizens were appointed to the position.

The third chapter of this thesis will focus on British foreign policy issues, with their goals and perspectives in addition to the behaviors of some prominent ambassadors in office. It will also explore how their social relations with their French counterparts had an impact upon foreign policy. Specifically it will delve into the relationships among British elites and how certain ambassadors changed or did not change their diplomatic stance, and why. Lastly, it will cover what a successful career as a diplomat looks like, including any similar jobs and upward or downward movement from this post. It will also evaluate these different ambassadors by comparing any tangible diplomatic successes they may have had during their terms of office by looking at any differences in style, relationships, as well as the problems that occurred around their terms, such as warfare or revolution.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The British Peerage and Elite Culture in the Eighteenth Century

In this chapter I will seek to establish the context of the period socially, culturally, and politically. In that sense, I will cover the social atmosphere of Britain at the time, but more specifically I will be focusing on the gentry and the aristocracy and how they operated within their own social sphere in Britain. I will then move to discuss the culture of the nobility within Britain and what it meant to be a true member of the gentry and how they separated themselves as a class from the rest of the country's citizens. Lastly, I will lay out in depth how the aristocracy and gentry formed the basis for the British diplomatic service during the late

eighteenth century. This chapter will serve to better establish the role of the British elite within the relationship between social status and ambassadorial achievement during this period. The men that came to fill the role of British Ambassador to France during this difficult period in British diplomatic history were all nobles of high birth with excellent social standing, which is why they were chosen for duty.

### **Society and Culture of the British Elite**

First and foremost, the British elite was a class unto itself. It was separated from the rest of society by right of noble birth, ownership of land, and unique social patterns, so if you were fortunate enough to be born into one of these noble families that taught you these social skills, you would grow up in this elite class of society. This class has been called many things other than the nobility; they have also been called the aristocracy, the ruling class, and the gentility. These elites, which were economically separated by the distinction that they possessed 'landed wealth', which was hereditary lands and estates passed down through the family. These estates would provide incomes for the noble family to live on. What truly separated them from the other classes in society however, was their peculiar social traditions and their unique culture that supplied a code of ethics for a noble to base their behavior upon.

The British aristocracy and the gentry created their own isolated social sphere to retain its credibility within the rigidly hierarchical British society of the time. This class by itself, wielding its wealth and political power through Parliament, was able to exercise all the influences it had through the social ties among the aristocracy. These ties were often cultivated at a young age

through school. By the year 1800, over 70 percent of all English peers received their education at just four public schools: Eton, Westminster, Winchester and Harrow. By 1799 over 60 percent of English peers spent some years at a university.<sup>16</sup>

The traditional gentry 'community' had long been firmly established in local traditions, mostly within local justifications for their power and existence by fulfilling their various social obligations to their neighborhoods and local communities. For example, many of the traditional elites would be expected to provide money for infrastructure development like roads and bridges for their neighborhoods or counties. However, in the course of the eighteenth century this old gentry community fragmented, while rapid economic change contributed to widening class divisions. The gentry communities increasingly tended to share the views of ruling groups from elsewhere in Britain and like them, they adopted a new common culture emanating from London.<sup>17</sup> London usually set the tone for the country's fashion, architecture styles, music etc, so the nobles of the time would seek to replicate these movements.

The gentility was also affected by the social and demographic changes of the early eighteenth century. The old and established families were beginning to disappear, and with them went the established practice of patronage for art, culture, and the other ways that the gentility had been known to the world.<sup>18</sup> There was also an influx of new standards in British society, which condemned some of the traditional activities of the gentry as vulgar or barbaric, like

---

<sup>16</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 170.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, P. *The Making of a Ruling Class* (Cambridge, 1983), 193.

<sup>18</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 193.

dueling was seen in the late part of the century. It was no longer good enough to simply say that the gentility served a social purpose by giving to charity and helping the poor.<sup>19</sup>

The main thing that set gentlemen aside from the other groups in society was their ability to practice leisure, as well as their land and property ownership. The genteel class were those who were wealthy enough to have no need to perform manual labor, but income alone was not sufficient to determine nobility status. This status could never be acquired by wealthy merchants or rich middle class families, even if they possessed a minor title such as ‘esquire’. This is important to note, as there is an important distinction from a British landowner from a member of the British aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> The aristocrats had important social skills and obligations. A merchant might also remain in this position despite being on excellent terms with any of the local nobility, or even in partnership with them on a commercial venture.<sup>21</sup> This kept the nobility as a distinct and well established class not just economically, but socially and culturally in the minds of the ‘lower’ classes. In one instance of a duel fought in 1774, this distinction between the classes was solidified to the rest of the town.

“When, in 1774, two squires were to fight a duel at Swansea, the suggestion that a wealthy local apothecary should serve as a ‘second’ was rejected because he was not a gentleman; and an attempt by the portreeve to prevent the conflict was accompanied by many bows and obsequious apologies for interfering in the affairs of the gentry.”<sup>22</sup>

This sort of elite honor code that may have seemed strange to the commoners was an important part of the European nobility at the time. Lord Dorset wrote about the change in the French Foreign Affairs Minister, whom he had never previously met, but still thought it important to

---

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 193.

<sup>20</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 165.

<sup>21</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 197.



comment upon what he had heard of his reputation as a Lord in a letter written the 15th of February 1787:

“His Majesty has thought proper to appoint Le Comte de Montmorin the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and yesterday he enter’d upon the functions of the Office. Le Comte de Montmorin, late Ambassador to the Court of Spain, is Governor of Brittany. I have not the slightest personal acquaintance with this Nobleman and therefore cannot inform your Lordship how far his manner and address may be agreeable: he is however generally allowed to possess abilities and the strictest principles of integrity and honor.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite the growth of the aristocracy as a class, especially after Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger’s (1759-1806) peerage creations, it seems that social mobility in the eighteenth century took place within a class, not between them. Mobility was seen as an experience of the lower and middle classes within their own ranks. This is gracefully displayed by a letter written by Lord Dorset two days after the storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789. He wrote:

“Thus, My Lord, the greatest Revolution that we know anything of has been effected with, comparatively speaking, if the magnitude of the event is considered, the loss of very few lives: from this moment we may consider France as a free Country; the King a very limited Monarch, and the Nobility as reduced to a level with the rest of the Nation.”<sup>24</sup>

Even after the nobility had been ‘reduced’, it was still only at a ‘level with the rest of the Nation’. This speaks to how the elite at the time felt about their place in society. This established social class limited the mobility of the other classes into it. Not until near the close of the ancien regime does the book of etiquette appear as a detailed practical guide to good manners for those initially ignorant of them.<sup>25</sup> Each of the Lord ambassadors featured in this paper were all firmly established in the upper class. While some, like Rochford, were less wealthy than Lord Gower,

---

<sup>23</sup> Browning, Oscar, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90: Selected and Edited From the Foreign Office Correspondence*. (London, Offices of the Society, 1909), 174.

<sup>24</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 243.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, J. C, *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), 105.

neither had to worry about being forced out of the upper classes. In addition, both men retained their seats in the House of Lords, which was as much a symbol of status as an actual tool for wielding political power.

The key to higher status was landed wealth, which was the essential investment made by any businessman who sought social acceptance. Linda Colley wrote of the importance of land ownership writing: “Land-ownership still provided the best and most reliable means of admission to power at the top as it did to social status. Whereas fewer than sixty mercantile MP’s were elected to the House of Commons at each general election between 1714 and 1770, members of the landed elite made up over 75 percent of the Commons’ membership as late as 1867.”<sup>26</sup> By owning land, it was then possible to enter the landed society, although the aristocracy was still a smaller group that remained conscious of the social difference which separated them from the other landed families with similar wealth. Landed income was the essential prerequisite for a member of the aristocracy, often seen in the legal ability to hunt which was a privilege officially given to the English gentlemen.<sup>27</sup> Hunting, just one part of aristocratic leisure, was another part of displaying wealth and status. Linda Colley wrote of the practice by these elites writing: “The very scenery of Great Britain was now reorganized and re-envisioned in keeping with the leisure priorities of men of land and substance. Hedges were torn down, ditches filled, gates and bridges built, tenants’ privacy invaded, all in pursuit of the unfortunate, uneatable fox.”<sup>28</sup> Hunting enabled a gentleman to flaunt his leisure without seeming to be ‘idle’. It distinguished him from the poor and laboring classes, as well as the urban and

---

<sup>26</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 174.

mercantile classes, without compromising his value to society. Colley further wrote: “Foxes were vermin. By hunting them to the death, and thereby safeguarding the smallholder’s chickens or lambs, elite males proclaimed their social utility, while at the same time enjoying themselves enormously.”<sup>29</sup>

The acquired wealth from estates had to be used to maintain the particular style of life which characterized a gentleman. Excessive spending was required so that one’s possessions were seen to be extravagant or else you could be socially condemned for failing to live up to the social obligations. This practice arose from what has been seen as the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century. The expansion of foreign tourism was but part not only of a general growth in tourism that was particularly marked in Britain, but also of a more widespread consumerism that was general throughout both the social elite and the middling orders.<sup>30</sup> The facets of this consumer revolution were numerous. There was an increase in the consumption of necessities, such as foodstuffs, but more obviously of non-essentials such as luxury furniture.<sup>31</sup> This consumerism, and the ability of the aristocracy to enjoy it, was another way in which they could separate themselves from the rest of society.

Rochford’s family, the Nassaus, were never great landowners, nor very rich by eighteenth century standards, but they were peers on a good gentry income.<sup>32</sup> Rochford often complained of his difficulty in maintaining the expensive post at Paris. Paris, being notoriously the most expensive of all diplomatic appointments in eighteenth century Europe, and Rochford was not a

---

<sup>29</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 174.

<sup>30</sup> Black, *The British Abroad*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Black, *The British Abroad*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Rice, Geoffrey W. *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford (1717–81), British Diplomat and Statesman*, Archives (British Records Association, London), v.20 (October 1992). Page 23

wealthy man, especially amongst the ridiculously wealthy Princes of the Blood and great French aristocrats at Versailles, who thought nothing of losing thousands of livres in an evening of card games.<sup>33</sup> Rochford's salary and allowances at Paris amounted to £7,795 per year, which was a substantial sum in this time period, and was about four times his starting salary as ambassador to Turin, and twice his annual income from his Essex estates. Even Lord Dorset, ambassador in Paris from 1783 to 1787, who was without question the wealthiest of all ambassadors covered in this paper, sought to raise the issue of pay with Parliament. He wrote about the "insufficiency of my salary to keep up the dignity of my place" in a letter to the Secretary of State in 1787.<sup>34</sup> Rochford, being very influential in establishing a formal information gathering network for the British ambassador in Paris, also commented on the expenses of acquiring copies of official French papers in a letter in 1768 saying "my private purse will not allow me to defray expenses of that kind".<sup>35</sup> Lord Stormont did not have such troubles, as he inherited to both the Mansfield and Stormont lines of the Murray family, luckily inheriting two titles and two fortunes. Lord Gower also did not have this problem. The Gower family owned extensive lands throughout England, and he married the heiress to the Sutherland fortune, and is estimated to be the wealthiest man of the nineteenth century, passing even Nathan Rothschild.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the expenses, Paris had many attractions for Rochford and other members of the gentry, especially the music, opera, gambling halls, and theatre that he was so interested in.

Linda Colley wrote about some of these aristocratic pleasures saying:

---

<sup>33</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 300.

<sup>35</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 188.

<sup>36</sup> "Leveson-Gower, George Granville (1758-1833)". *Dictionary of National Biography*. London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1885–1900.

“Beyond the walls of Westminster, rich commoners and peers alike played Russian and real roulette, duelling and gambling to an unprecedented degree, as if choosing to put their lives and fortunes at risk in these ways was somehow preferable to facing those strains and dangers that threatened to engulf them against their will.”<sup>37</sup>

At this time in France, there was a huge social gulf between popular and elite culture. Popular entertainments often consisted of acrobats, jugglers, fairgrounds, singers, players, and freak shows, while the elite entertainment was the opera and the theatre. As the British ambassador he had a public position to maintain, which included being seen at the opera and the theatre.<sup>38</sup> Lord Dorset commented on the gambling rage in Paris enjoyed by the commoners and nobles alike in a letter written July 20th 1786:

“I was assured yesterday by a person employed in one of the most capital mercantile houses in Paris that the contagion of public gaming was becoming so universal that he no longer knew whom to trust to. Individuals were one day possessed of immense fortunes and the next reduced to insolvency, and that very often to the ruin of many honest and industrious families. People of the highest rank, depending upon the means of better information, are also deeply concerned in these speculations, and contribute much to the detriment of trade and credit.”<sup>39</sup>

Wealth and power were also measured by the size of a house, the number of servants and hearths within the house, as well as the ownership of large quantities of gold and silver plate.<sup>40</sup> A gentleman's rank could immediately be perceived from the quality of his house and clothing, and this perception of status was maintained right through death with incredibly costly funerals and monuments.<sup>41</sup> Rochford's Paris residence was on the Boulevard St. Germain, the main artery of the 'Left Bank' in eighteenth century Paris. A well renowned salon owner in Paris at the time,

---

<sup>37</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 181.

<sup>39</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 198.

<sup>41</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 199.

who was frequented by the elites of Paris and the diplomatic corps of the city, such as the Swedish and Sardinian ambassadors, thought that Rochford was an experienced diplomat who moved easily in high society, however she thought little of his conversation as he had no interest in philosophy or intellectual debate. Nonetheless, his choice of residence and its location reflected his good taste and social status.<sup>42</sup> The nobles of France often hosted the English ambassadors while they were posted in Paris, and this was a great way for them to gather intelligence and gossip about the activity of the nation. Dorset wrote about his interactions with the French nobles in a letter written October 25th 1785, saying: “The language constantly held to me by people of high rank, and such as I may conclude are speaking the sentiments of those who are at the head of affairs induces me to think that a still closer union between the two Countries is cordially desired.”<sup>43</sup> Lord Dorset also liked to frequently travel through Paris by carriage, something that only the nobility or very wealthy commoners could enjoy. He comments on his displeasure over his carriage breaking down in Paris on his way to visit the King of France in a letter written November 9th, 1786: “It was my wish and intention to reach this place in time to attend His Majesty’s Levée in the forenoon of that day, but I was unfortunately prevented by the breaking of my carriage in the streets of Paris on my way hither.”<sup>44</sup>

This wealth could especially be seen within the old established families of Europe, and family names were very important in determining status. The Rochford earldom of 1695 was a creation of William III, one of four new peerages to reward his closest supporters in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Thus the earls of Rochford held lands on both sides of the North Sea. Lord

---

<sup>42</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 182-185.

<sup>43</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 155.

Rochford was actually born William Henry Nassau, and Nassau was an illustrious name among European ruling families, even for an illegitimate offshoot. It was among the oldest in Europe, taking its name from one of the most beautiful Rhineland provinces of Germany.<sup>45</sup> This would certainly help him in his negotiations in France, especially since the French ministers only valued the opinion of English lords whom they deemed their social and political equals.

While a gentleman was marked by his style of living and the number and quality of his material possessions, his status demanded a certain allegiance to a code of duties and obligations. For instance, besides the upkeep of local roads and bridges, one had to demonstrate a firm independence within a society based on clientage and patronage.<sup>46</sup> For the greater families, the capital was their home for at least part of each year, and furnishings for the home were very important in depicting status. By patronizing locals, you could not only maintain good relations with your socially inferior neighbors, but you could also flaunt your wealth and power to your visitors, which maintained the image of nobility. This was mostly seen within the country house, but many of the more prominent and powerful families were expected to maintain a London residence as well. For a few months of each year deprivation of metropolitan life was a source of misery for the wealthiest families.<sup>47</sup> ‘People of fashion’ did not want to be left in the countryside, confined to the society of the lower classes. Apart from actual residence, there were many other means of contact with London, for instance through newspapers and correspondence with friends residing there.<sup>48</sup> Another recurring theme in the history of the gentry was the overwhelming

---

<sup>45</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 199.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 244.

<sup>48</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 244.

importance of the idea of family, which added to the sense of continuity and stability already established by the possession of an ancient house and estate.<sup>49</sup>

The hierarchical class structure, which existed in the broad framework of the family, was also perceived in society at large, and gentlemen were felt to have obligations to social inferiors as well as to poorer kinsmen. A gentleman therefore had a definite social ideology which emphasized duties to kinsmen and social inferiors, but loyalty was also required to the wider community of gentry, expressed in the country.<sup>50</sup> As a diplomat, Rochford felt it was ‘my own duty as a Lord’ to aid his fellow countrymen in whatever way he could. He often interceded on the behalf of British citizens who had gotten into legal trouble in France, frequently over the issue of smuggling.<sup>51</sup> He went out of his way to help these commoners even as an ambassador.

Throughout the early part of the eighteenth century, the Anglican Church was the most influential factor in determining political loyalty. Many of these early political factions were divided along the Catholic and Protestant lines. Threats to the power of the church were seen as socially dangerous throughout, which explains why the eighteenth century gentry were still prepared to fight for it, especially against methodists or other enthusiasts. However, by 1760 for the first time in British history, a large section of the landed nobility had entered a phase that mixed Christian and classical ways of thinking together. Jenkins wrote of these nobles that: “Their ethics were as likely to be drawn from Seneca or Cicero as from St. Paul”.<sup>52</sup> In the eighteenth century, the Court and the city of London were the main influences in spreading the

---

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 201.

<sup>50</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 205.

<sup>51</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 202.

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 212.



values of the elites in language, literature, and forms of entertainment out to the provinces. As the gentry were the political masters of the shires, it was to be expected that they should have come into contact with the court periodically and tried to emulate its manners.<sup>53</sup> However, London's dominance was not remarkable when it is considered that its population was a sizable percentage of the whole of Britain, and it still remained the political, economic, legal, and social capital of the country.<sup>54</sup> Above all, it should not be missed that there was still the ancient attraction of the royal court which emanated not only power and prestige, but many of the social and cultural norms that the rest of the gentry were expected to follow. Learning the skills of the court were absolutely necessary for the highest members of the gentry to be socially and politically successful. In 1783, when peace brought new opportunities for the elites, there were numerous candidates for diplomatic posts, since the reduction of civil offices had made them more valuable. Courtly skills were valued heavily, as it was thought that social skills influenced even the 'most serious transactions'.<sup>55</sup>

Traditional British society at the time looked to a few main ideals: the ideal of a Christian, and the ideal of a gentleman armed with the knowledge of the classics. While some theorists have struggled debating whether or not the two are fully compatible, it seems that they are compatible to a large extent. The Christian ideal in particular validated the model of a homogeneous, hierarchical society in a unitary state.<sup>56</sup> Rank, order, and degree all had their place within the society which fit nicely within the Christian ideals. The ideals of a gentlemen were

---

<sup>53</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 239.

<sup>54</sup> Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class*, 241.

<sup>55</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 39.

<sup>56</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 93.

also considered to revolve around order, degree, and subordination, so a gentleman could reasonably be expected to adhere to both at the same time.<sup>57</sup> Clark commented on this elite ideology saying: “The elite remained convinced of the importance of its own leadership of society both culturally and politically; it elaborated an ideology to justify and defend that state of affairs; the ideology was not effectively challenged on the level of theory; and the elite behaved as if it was true.”<sup>58</sup>

The fact that this isolated social sphere created by the elite retained its credibility within the hierarchical image of society, and the impact of the patriarchal ideologies of order derived from it, obviously reflected the continuing existence of this lofty social hierarchy whose most conspicuous exemplars were the aristocracy and gentry. Despite following certain examples set by the royal family, the elite’s culture tried to claim a hereditary justification for their social independence of the divine-right monarchy, and the strength of the old elite’s hold on society proved to be largely independent of the theoretical and practical strength of the crown.<sup>59</sup> This allowed the elite class a nearly uninhibited social freedom to do whatever they wished, and when questioned by someone of lower social status, they could (and often did) claim that it was just a privilege of being a member of the gentry. This freedom was really only inhibited by other members of the gentry, since status and influence within the gentry class was another way to gain considerable power. This was a bit unique to Britain at the time. The aristocratic culture and ideals had permeated English society, whereas in France the same group had become progressively isolated, and despite the splendor of the French nobility and the ‘sophistication of

---

<sup>57</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 93.

<sup>58</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 104.

<sup>59</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 94-95.

its self-justifications', it was relatively powerless as a body, opposed to the English peerage which had an institutionalized share in the political process via the House of Lords, and an even more important informal share through its stake in the Commons.<sup>60</sup> The cultural tone of eighteenth century England was set by an elite composed of the highest nobility, the wealthiest gentry and their satellites. This small group constituted the structure of norms and values. No level of the social structure escaped the impact of its schemes and modes of behavior.<sup>61</sup>

The great schools of Eton and Westminster were also playing a distinct social role. They prepared their students to take their place within an aristocratic world of virtues by an acquaintance with the established ideals of classical civilization and the practical skills of oratory.<sup>62</sup> They also spent a good deal of time teaching language. More than half of the eighteenth century English peerage attended either Eton or Westminster.<sup>63</sup> Many of these young elites would go on to further schooling at Oxford or Cambridge. Lord Dorset and Lord Gower were both schooled at Westminster. The fourth earl of Rochford was the first of his family to be born and educated in England. Rochford was sent to Eton College from 1725-1732, while his younger brother Richard attended Westminster School. Some parents of the elite preferred to educate their sons at home (if a suitable tutor could be found) rather than expose them to the notorious 'flogging masters' in school. This was the case with George Granville who was born in 1758, as the eldest son of the first Marquess of Stafford. He had bad health in his youth, which drove him into studies and pursuing scientific knowledge, and he was first sent to school at East

---

<sup>60</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 100.

<sup>61</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, 102.

<sup>63</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 33.

Hill, probably because it was the closest to his father's residence at West Hill. In 1768 he was removed and sent to Westminster, where he would study for five and a half years, however he claimed that he made 'little progress at either place'.<sup>64</sup> Between leaving Westminster and going to college, he spent some time at Auxerre accompanied by his private tutor. He was pressed into studying French extensively by this tutor, and he came to speak it quite well, better than most foreigners. He then entered at Christchurch in May 1775 and continued at Oxford for nearly two more years. There he became close with the future Archbishop of York who was slightly older than he was, and eventually they would become brothers-in-law after the Archbishop married his youngest sister. Granville felt that he had neglected the study of the classics in his earlier schooling, and attempted to learn more of that, but he abandoned Greek entirely and went to college without any knowledge of that language and little hope of learning it. In addition to Latin, he became proficient in English, French, and Italian. His tutor at Christchurch later became the Bishop of Oxford and he would have a lasting friendship with the man.<sup>65</sup>

Life at an English public school was not for the gentle or faint-hearted. Apart from the harsh discipline from these flogging masters, many of the older boys were just as brutal in their behavior. A great debate about the merits and perils of the public schools continued throughout the eighteenth century. While some boys emerged from Eton with a good grasp of the Greek and Latin classics, most looked back on their school days with disdain as wasted time. On the other side of the debate, the public schools were certainly less sheltered than a private education.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Loch, J. *Memoir of George Granville, Late Duke of Sutherland*, (1834), 6.

<sup>65</sup> Loch, *Memoir of George Granville, Late Duke of Sutherland*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 33.

Mixing with boys from different backgrounds, and learning to take the rough with the smooth, introduced boys to something like the real world.

In his memoirs, it is mentioned that while most of Rochford's Eton classmates went on to university at either Oxford or Cambridge, Rochford did not. He was not unintelligent, however he was not academically inclined. At this point in his life, his father wanted to take him to show him his Dutch lands and to meet his Dutch relatives. It is assumed that his Dutch relatives were the ones to pressure Rochford's father to send him to the academy at Geneva to finish his education.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, as a member of an English Protestant family, Geneva was probably the best place in Europe at this time in the eighteenth century for a young Protestant nobleman to learn French without being exposed to the 'snares' of Catholicism.<sup>68</sup> Another interesting bit of information that survived in Rochford's memoirs that probably came from his time at Eton is a set of arithmetic problems. They showed calculation of financial interest over time and an estimate of manpower to calculate how long it would take to complete a project. This sort of education would enable a young nobleman landowner to check their stewards figures from time to time. However, perhaps the most useful outcome of schooling at Eton or Westminster was the network of social contacts that these men would carry throughout their lives. Not all these relationships survived the length of the education, but the shared experiences of their schooling helped to reinforce their other social ties, giving the English peerage of the eighteenth century unusual cohesion and shared values. Unlike the French nobility, which also included females and collateral lines, the English peerage was one of the smallest in Europe, thanks to primogeniture

---

<sup>67</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 35.

<sup>68</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 35.

and entail. This made it possible for each member to know most of the others, if not by sight then perhaps by gossip.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to their social and cultural prominence, another thing that usually set the gentry apart from the lower classes was their political domination of the realm through Parliament. Many were either directly elected in the House of Commons, or had indirect influence in the House of Commons via their patronage of prominent men in their shires, and some had direct political influence within the House of Lords. Rochford, Stormont, Dorset, and Granville were all in the House of Lords although Granville did not reach this post until 1799.<sup>70</sup> Before he reached the House of Lords, in late 1778 Granville was chosen to represent the burgh of Newcastle in Staffordshire as an MP, which was a few months before his becoming of age. In 1780 he was again chosen for the same place in the general election of that year. He would serve for four years before losing in the general election of 1784, but would return to the House of Commons in 1787. He would leave Parliament again in 1798, but was called up to the House of Lords the following year as Baron Gower of Sittenham which was the original barony of his family.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Nobility as Ambassadors:**

Most of the ambassadorial appointments during the late eighteenth century were often untrained nobles whose best educational preparation for such a post occurred either at college,

---

<sup>69</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 34.

<sup>70</sup> Loch, *Memoir of George Granville, Late Duke of Sutherland*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Loch, *Memoir of George Granville, Late Duke of Sutherland*, 7.

during the traditional Grand Tour of Europe, or both. However, it would be wrong to suggest that simply because most aristocratic diplomats had no previous experience, they were therefore mediocre. Several of the most impressive diplomats were hereditary aristocrats, as opposed to ennobled commoners. However, some diplomats, like Lord Dorset who served at Paris in 1783-89, and Lord Harcourt who served from 1768-1772, not only had no diplomatic experience, but also proved themselves less than diligent in ordinary circumstances and inadequate at times of crisis. Aside from rising to one of the two Secretary of State positions, there were few promotion prospects that could not be better obtained by remaining in Britain, and many diplomats complained bitterly that absence from London hindered their careers and the pursuit of other interests. Rochford seemed happy to be ambassador and worked vigorously, as did Stormont, but both of them rose to become a Secretary of State eventually. The choice of envoys was not always easy. Many individuals preferred to pursue careers in Britain. Then, once appointed, diplomats frequently complained about their postings. Many diplomats also complained about the absence or content of their instructions, but, even when they were frequent, fast, and comprehensive, there was considerable room for initiative. Both Rochford and Stormont seemed to enjoy taking initiative as they both did many times, but others like Harcourt was very reluctant to act even when Rochford was urgently pushing him to action.

The shifting nature of court factions made the functions of a diplomat difficult, and when mistakes and misunderstandings arose, the potential damage was made worse by the difficulties of securing different lines of communication (other than post) that could provide a check on diplomatic initiative. Distance and protocol kept most British sovereigns from personal diplomacy, except in matters of royal marriages, which is interesting. George III could become

quite involved, but most of the time it was protocol that the crown let his ministers handle their jobs. This was especially so after 1760, because George III did not leave Britain. Learning on the job could have unfortunate consequences, but it was a feature of the semi-professionalized nature of much British administration in this period.<sup>72</sup> The long term shift away from personal rule by the crown improved the prospect for more regular administrative practices, but it did not ensure them. Actually, in one respect, it made the situation less predictable because ministries were now better able to insist on the dismissal of certain diplomats. The role of diplomats as advocates as well as implementers of policy was such that ministers wished to be certain of the key envoys. Diplomatic posts were not yet clearly administrative, rather than political, in character.<sup>73</sup>

British diplomats received minimal training before taking up their posts. Some had served briefly as attachés to a British embassy; but most did no more than look through their predecessors' dispatches in the Secretary of State's office before heading out. Most made attempts to familiarize themselves with the broad contours of past and present British policy towards their accredited state.<sup>74</sup> This, together with the copies of their predecessors' dispatches which they received on arrival at the foreign court, inevitably reinforced the same thinking which confounded British policy throughout the age of the American Revolution. The preparations and instructions of British diplomats were also deficient in another respect. The formal instructions which they received at the start of their mission were more narrowly conceived and far briefer than those given to French, Austrian, or even Russian ambassadors.<sup>75</sup> They often merely repeated

---

<sup>72</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 8-9.

<sup>73</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 27.



the instructions given to previous British diplomats and were drawn up in a routine and casual way. British ambassadors seldom, if ever, received the wide-ranging and extensive instructions given to their continental counterparts. Crucially they were usually not told about the broader objectives of British diplomacy or the significance of their own mission within the overall framework of the British diplomatic service policy. The absence of this guidance was a frequent source of complaint from diplomats during this time period.<sup>76</sup> Lord Dorset requests the British foreign ministers public support for him in France in a letter written October 18th 1787 since he feels a little unsupported. He requests the public support so that he can do a better job. He wrote:

“I am happy that your Lordship has convey’d to me the certainty, I might almost say, I entertain’d, that I have not lost the confidence of His Majesty’s Ministers; but I still feel it absolutely necessary that your Lordship should further confirm this assurance in such a manner as will carry conviction to the mind of the French Minister.”<sup>77</sup>

The aristocracy preferred to think that diplomacy was not taught, but was a product of gentility, a ‘consequence’ of breeding. They believed diplomats were the personal representatives of the sovereign, and their readiness for office was seen as a product of their social rank. Their social rank was often closely related to the diplomatic rank of the official appointed. Thus selection was an expression of regard, respect, and reciprocity. For example, when Earl Harcourt was appointed ambassador to Paris in 1768, Lord Rochford, the Secretary of State at the time wrote, “there cannot be the smallest doubt but that his most Christian Majesty (Louis XV) will look upon the nomination of a person of his Lordship’s high rank, distinguished abilities, and amiable disposition, as a fresh proof of the King’s constant desire to preserve a good

---

<sup>76</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 253.

understanding between the two court".<sup>78</sup> In turn, poor relations with his nephew Frederick the Great of Prussia were reflected by the representation of George II at Berlin by a mere secretary in 1745 and 1747, and by nobody from May 1747 until the following April and from long stretches, sometimes as many as five years at a time until 1756.<sup>79</sup> Rank and title still held heavy sway over politics at this time.

Furthermore, aristocrats were particularly worth the government cultivating since English peers all had seats in the House of Lords, while their Scottish counterparts formed an electoral college out of which sixteen Scottish peers were elected.<sup>80</sup> In January 1784, Lord Dorset sent in his proxy vote in the House of Lords to give to "anybody the King approves"; which as a diplomat-peer was his first obligation. However, despite the social skills that gained him access to important events at court, Dorset was less than diligent in sending reports, possibly because his diplomatic laziness was exacerbated by a minor stroke in 1785.<sup>81</sup> The importance of selecting aristocrats as envoys was not restricted to royal courts like France and Spain. Aristocratic envoys were also sent to the Hague and to Venice. Venice was no longer an important post, but status and rank was very important there and it had a reputation as a very enjoyable post that could be expected to attract many aristocrats.<sup>82</sup> Pressure for higher rank came not only from diplomats but also from a sense that only envoys of high rank had an impact abroad. This idea that only

---

<sup>78</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 22.

<sup>80</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 41.

<sup>82</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 41.

aristocratic diplomats could have an impressive impact upon relations seems to be deeply rooted, however its origin is unknown.

Patronage played a major role in appointments, but this was scarcely unusual in British governments of the period, or in any of the continental states for that matter. Most diplomats filed regular and comprehensive reports, so if they tended to concentrate on court and ministerial factions, this was something they shared with other diplomatic services, and recording the sources of power and policy was an understandable thing to do. Lord Dorset wrote a typical dispatch discussing factions at court on October 25th, 1786 writing:

“It is to the Court, my Lord, that you must look for the source of the present evil. The Queen, not only during the latter years of the reign of the late King, but even till after the birth of the Dauphin, by which event the succession seemed in some measure secured, was very far from enjoying that degree of power and influence which she is possessed of at present. But that events decided all the courtiers, and they hastened with precipitation to standard of favor; whilst those who before had constituted Her Majesty’s intimate and circumscribed society, were soon consolidated into a formidable party in the State.”<sup>83</sup>

Most British and continental diplomats devoted little attention to broader social and political developments. They lacked the resources to do so, the information was not readily available, and it was generally believed to be of little significance.<sup>84</sup> Most British diplomats in the period were conscientious reporters and average, rather than brilliant, negotiators. Judging between these two functions is difficult. Most scholarly attention tends to concentrate on diplomats as negotiators, because it was in this function that their perception and ability was most significant (and also apparent to contemporaries) both within and outside their official government structure. However, most of the time, diplomats were reporters, and this role has left

---

<sup>83</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 144.

<sup>84</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 59.

the biggest trace in the archives, although it tends to be underrated by scholars.<sup>85</sup> Lord Dorset wrote a rather typical observation of the French Court as well as one of his conversations with the French Foreign Minister on July 21st 1785 writing:

“I think it my duty, previous to my departure from Paris, to acquaint your Lordship for the information of His Majesty’s Ministers, with what appears to me to be the system that had been adopted by those who compose the Cabinet of Versailles, so far, I mean, as relates to its concerns with Great Britain. In my first conversations with Mons. de Vergennes, which, during my residence here of eighteen months, have been very frequent, that Minister, I must acknowledge, shewed no unwillingness to coincide in any measures that might be proposed for the mutual advantage of the two kingdoms, but his conduct as well as his language have of late taken a very different cast. Of the causes of such a change your Lordship may perhaps not be ignorant, tho’ I confess I am not myself well able to account for it otherwise than by the dissatisfaction which has certainly attended the St. Eustatius business.”<sup>86</sup>

While he was doing his duty and meeting with the French minister Vergennes and providing good commentary upon the actions of the French court, he was not a necessarily skilled negotiator with Vergennes. To the governments of the time, this role was more important than is generally allowed in scholarship, and thus more significant in the assessment of individual diplomats.

One of the biggest difficulties of the various British administrations during this period was that their ministers and Secretaries of State often had to come before Parliament to defend their policies. Although most of the diplomats covered were members of Parliament either in the Commons or Lords, they would sometimes be subject to answering critics in Parliament. Both Gower and Dorset left their posts in Paris in order to go back and campaign for reelection. Rochford was considered a political lightweight, as he lacked the extensive estates and large

---

<sup>85</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 64.

fortunes that made some politicians essential members of successive cabinets, however mediocre their talents.<sup>87</sup> Stormont, Gower, and Dorset possessed rather large estates and were members of the House of Lords, so it was not as difficult for them. Rochford interestingly enough, did not belong to any of the great political interests or factions of his day. He really was a political independent and preferred to be known as a ‘king’s servant’. His long absence abroad on diplomatic postings removed him from the day to day back and forth nature of politics for long periods, and meant that he had very little parliamentary experience when he was appointed secretary of state.<sup>88</sup> Yet in the administration of foreign policy, Rochford had few equals. His diplomatic experience was unmatched among the Secretaries of State between 1760-1775 and he brought a rare degree of professionalism and dedication in an era of titled amateurs in both diplomacy and government. Only Stormont was considered to have more diplomatic experience than him upon entering the post of Secretary of State. In considering effectiveness, it is also crucial to note that the diplomatic system was little better elsewhere. Throughout Europe, most diplomats owed their appointment to patronage; Lord Rochford was Lord of the Bedchamber to George II and Lord Stormont’s rise was “quite exceptional and it was principally a testimony to the support of his uncle, the distinguished lawyer Lord Mansfield.”<sup>89</sup> Rank was at a premium and pay frequently differed drastically; while aristocratic amateurs were not always a success.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 637.

<sup>88</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 637.

<sup>89</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 25.

<sup>90</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 63.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Structure of the British Diplomatic Service and Ambassadorial Training

The second chapter of this thesis will serve to illustrate the structure of the British diplomatic service and how that developed over time into a powerful bureaucracy that aided and guided ambassadors during this period. The service would even come to be directed by two of the very same ambassadors covered in this paper, Lord Rochford and Lord Stormont, who both would become Secretary of State for the Southern department after their terms serving as ambassador to Paris. Becoming Secretary of State for the Southern department, which was an office that oversaw the posts at Paris, Madrid, Turin, Rome, Lisbon, as well as a few other Italian cities, during this period was one of the only promotions within the British diplomatic service and the secretary played a crucial role in executing foreign policy, especially with France as this was within their area of oversight. This chapter will also detail some of the primary expenses and operations of the service as a whole, with a special focus on the Paris embassy and its resident ambassadors during this time period. The bureaucracy of the British diplomatic service, which was often criticized by early diplomats, would become a very influential force to aid the ambassadors in their difficult negotiations with France covered in this study by the end of the

term of Lord Gower in 1792. This chapter will also discuss how these ambassadors were trained, not as members of the gentry as was previously covered, but instead as professional diplomats. This training, which I believe was often heavily influenced by the sitting Secretary of State, would be greatly influential for some of the ambassadors, namely Lord Rochford and Lord Stormont. By covering the Grand Tour and some of the other ways of preparing for service in the diplomatic service, it may help uncover why some of the ambassadors covered in this study were successful or not.

The British diplomatic service during this era was a large and important part of the British government. The Home and Foreign Offices were created in 1782 by King George III, but a robust diplomatic service existed long before that date.<sup>91</sup> This service kept regular offices at various capitals throughout Europe, however there were a half dozen or so that carried a bit more weight and prestige, and were therefore more highly sought after by British diplomats. These more prominent stations included Paris, the Hague, Madrid, Naples, St. Petersburg, and Vienna, with many other 'lesser' positions to be filled as well, however filling empty posts in these other cities was often harder to do, and so it would take longer. The British diplomatic service filled a very important role within British foreign policy during this period, especially in negotiations with the major countries of Europe. Britain also preferred to conduct diplomacy through their ambassadors abroad instead of through foreign diplomats stationed in London. This practice of conducting diplomacy through its ambassadors stationed abroad instead of through the other country's ambassadors in London is often referred to as the 'English Plan'.

---

<sup>91</sup> Horn, David Bayne, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961), 116.

The 'English Plan' was a term employed to describe the system of conducting negotiations through British envoys rather than foreign diplomats in London. This was seen as characteristic of British diplomacy and unique among European powers at the time. It had some attractions, and it was usually easier for British ministers to control such negotiations and to limit the impact of the British domestic politics on them. Furthermore, foreign envoys in London were seen as likely to enter into intrigues with British opposition politicians in Parliament, so this was another way to avoid a potentially hazardous situation. At times, their conduct could lead to serious tension, for example in the collapse of Anglo-Prussian relations at the close of the Seven Years War since the Prussian envoy in London actively intrigued against the sitting government. However, this plan did lead to more trust being placed in British envoys, but not all were equal to the increased responsibility. In particular, there was always a danger that British diplomats would 'go native' and become overly sympathetic to the views of the court to which they were posted. There was also the possibility that diplomats would become overly involved with a specific group or faction at their post, and that this group would be unsuccessful. The fault was usually excusable if the group was pro-British, but diplomats risked alienating other ministers or courtiers if they overly committed themselves to such a party.<sup>92</sup>

If you consider that the British diplomatic service was the primary conduit for all British foreign policy decisions throughout this period then you can begin to appreciate the value of the service to Britain. It served as the basis for all British diplomacy abroad, directly through its secretaries and ambassadors posted in embassies around the world. The monarch no longer had the tight grip on foreign policy that they usually had. Previously, the monarch would conduct all

---

<sup>92</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 64-65.



diplomacy personally with the other monarchs of Europe, however now the diplomatic service had drastically evolved into a fairly efficient machine that held the trust of the monarch. The service was also costly, but not incredibly well funded and many of the ambassadors complained about a lack of funds. Depending on the location and the inherent prestige of the post, some ambassadors could have a rather large staff in their embassy. This staff, which will be covered more in depth later in the chapter, were absolutely vital in the work of the embassy. The bulk of their work consisted namely of correspondence and news gathering, something that Rochford established during his tenure between 1766-68, while the ambassador himself would be a professional flatterer. The relationships that these ambassadors held with their staff, the king, other ambassadors at the same court, and secretary of state were also key to the day to day functions of the embassy.

The qualifications for ambassadors during this time were also vital to the long-term success of the diplomatic service as well. The education and experience required for the position will be covered later in this chapter, but there was a very deliberate strategy for most young men that entered into the diplomatic service. This often involved some sort of a tour of Europe called simply ‘The Grand Tour’, the longer and more focused the better, as well as some sort of secondary and post-secondary school education.

Under King George III the offices that had normally been occupied largely by Englishmen soon became infiltrated by more Welshmen and Scots.<sup>93</sup> This has been attributed to the fact that for the first time ever, Scots and Welshmen had been wooed into service in the diplomatic corps and the military by way of favors and promises for promotions for their

---

<sup>93</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 116.

leaders.<sup>94</sup> Diplomacy, the armed forces, and service in the colonies were the principal careers open to ambitious Scotsmen. Most filled, and were content to fill, middle-rank posts in Britain's diplomatic service, but only one Scottish diplomat used it as a stepping-stone to a high political office in London: Lord Stormont.<sup>95</sup> Presumably this was due to the expansion of the service and the Irish and Scottish infiltration into other parts of the British bureaucracy, like the colonial management of the empire. Lord Stormont himself was one of these successful Scots, and he later would become the Southern Secretary of State. Over the course of his reign, King George III employed 24 ambassadors and for the first time the number of secretaries of embassy equaled the number of ambassadors.<sup>96</sup> These secretaries of embassy fulfilled many duties but they function essentially as an ambassadorial chief of staff. Despite the importance of the office, few British diplomatists reached the dignity of ambassador. There were only 69 ambassadors appointed in a hundred years, and only the diplomatic representatives at the French court were regularly appointed with the rank of ambassador from 1689-1789.<sup>97</sup> However, thanks to the frequent wars between both nations they were not numerous. Furthermore every diplomat between 1740-1790 was Protestant.<sup>98</sup> So while the Scots and Irish were gaining more representation in British diplomatic posts abroad, the king was still choosing them with religion in mind. It is also interesting to note that the average age of entrants to the foreign service

---

<sup>94</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 104-105.

<sup>95</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 25.

<sup>96</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 44.

<sup>97</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 45.

<sup>98</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 45.

between 1750 and 1812 was 28.6 years old.<sup>99</sup> This statistic suggests that the service was dominated primarily by young men, and there were many reasons for that which will be covered later. Beginning with King George III, it was also a requirement to speak French in order to be appointed secretary of state.<sup>100</sup> Languages were often considered the most important aspect of candidates for the diplomatic service. Colley wrote of this language requirement among the British elite saying: “The British elite differed from many other European elites that favored French as their first language, but it was still a prerequisite for entry into high society or high office.”<sup>101</sup>

For hundreds of years, the monarchs had decided upon and executed foreign policy, with the only external input on these decisions being counsel. The monarchs did not have to follow the advice that they were given by the nobility, and they certainly did not need to worry about the opinions of the masses or Parliament. The monarchs would instead conduct diplomacy among each other. This practice had come to an end by the mid 1700’s. Foreign affairs would then be dealt with formally in the Privy Council, and less formally in the various forms assumed by the Cabinet during the eighteenth century. These bodies formulated foreign policy, so far as it ever was formulated in eighteenth-century Britain, and took executive decisions or made recommendations to the king. Once they were approved by the king it was the task of the diplomatic service to do its best to carry them out.<sup>102</sup> So while the monarch still retained extensive power over foreign policy and the diplomatic service, the secretary of state held the

---

<sup>99</sup> Mori, Jennifer. *The Culture of Diplomacy: Britain in Europe, c. 1750-1830*. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), page 26, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 167.

<sup>102</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 1-20.

most influence over diplomacy. All British diplomatists received instructions to follow the orders sent to them by the secretaries and to correspond regularly with the secretaries. After 1689 it became increasingly rare for the crown to use any other channel.

### **The Ambassadors and Their Staff:**

British missions were staffed by a regular hierarchy of officials ranging from ambassadors and other heads of missions downwards through secretaries of embassy and secretaries with creditive letters to unpaid attachés and private secretaries.<sup>103</sup> The basic distinction was between those who had been placed on the establishment and could expect to be paid, if they survived long enough, by the Treasury out of the diplomatic service list, and those who were still unestablished and drew their salaries or at least received room and board from the established diplomats who employed them. Most of the top embassies had a secretary of embassy and could also possibly have multiple other secretaries and other staff. The smaller and less prestigious or important embassies may have had only one secretary funded by the diplomatic service and the ambassador would have to hire a private secretary to supplement his staff. Many established diplomats began their careers with a spell as attaché in the household of a family friend or were accepted by a stranger on the recommendation of a secretary of state.<sup>104</sup>

Many of the private secretaries were nearly always men of humble birth. Many of them were chosen by their employers to remedy their own linguistic incapacity. Since these people were hired due to their various linguistic capabilities, they were often not British citizens. Since

---

<sup>103</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 37.

<sup>104</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 37.

these foreigners were often regarded as security risks they could not be given credentials and therefore had little inclination to remain for long in a badly paid position.<sup>105</sup> However, despite the fact that many of them did not stay for long, this was a form of social mobility for some of these secretaries. Since they were often men of humble birth, they could attach themselves to an ambassador by way of ability and perhaps they may serve long enough to be elevated. Either way, these secretaries, either private or the secretary of embassy, were very valuable to the ambassadors serving in Paris. Rochford brought the same secretary of embassy along with him from Turin, to Madrid, then to Paris, and finally brought the man along to London when he became Secretary of State. Lord Dorset's secretary often wrote to the Secretary of State in his absence after they had discussed things. There are some periods in the dispatches from Paris, sometimes for many months like the period between late February of 1784 until early July of the same year where Dorset's secretary was the only one writing reports to London.<sup>106</sup> Rochford's secretary famously served as a witness during a meeting that Rochford believed would be very intense between himself and the famous French minister Duke Choiseul. Rochford wrote about his happiness over the decision to bring his secretary along as a witness writing: "In contrast to his previous outbursts on the Topic, this time Duke Choiseul spoke with great Coolness and Moderation".<sup>107</sup> Besides private secretaries, some of the ambassadors, notably Lord Dorset, also employed their own personal servants during their residence abroad. Lord Dorset only mentioned them twice, both times when they had fallen into some sort of trouble, such as when two of them were gathered into the storming of the Bastille in 1789, and another time when they were

---

<sup>105</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 37.

<sup>106</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 2-11.

<sup>107</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 192.

arrested for wearing “the dress of a Chasseur (French light calvary) in common with some of those belonging to Foreign Ministers, and a great many of the Kings subjects, in this capital.”<sup>108</sup>

In the latter instance, he requests advice on how best to get them out of the situation.

Despite the prestige of the positions, especially the top handful of postings to the great powers of Europe, few elite British men were attracted to the post of ambassador. Most of them had done a more or less extended variety of the fashionable Grand Tour in their teens or early twenties and returned home firmly convinced of the advantages of permanent residence in England. Many of them complained especially about the food and religious institutions abroad.<sup>109</sup> These young British men were notoriously choosy about accepting even the best appointments in the diplomatic service. In one circumstance, it proved quite difficult to fill the Madrid embassy in 1766 despite Madrid being one of the most prestigious posts, in one of the best climates, and well staffed posts that the British funded. Since this was the prevalent attitude to employment abroad, the dispatch of a prominent courtier or politician to a foreign court was often regarded as an honorable kind of banishment.<sup>110</sup>

The king could (and often would) send quarreling nobles away as ambassadors to rid himself of their troubles. This could inherently cause bitter feelings and some people refused the positions because they did not agree with the policies of the king, and would instead prefer to answer to the Parliament. Many of the potential candidates objected to the second-rate pay in their opinions and many would only agree to go for a step up in the British peerage.<sup>111</sup> This was

---

<sup>108</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 141.

<sup>109</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 87.

<sup>110</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 87.

<sup>111</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 90.

especially common of any ambassadors of humble birth as it was more desirable and profitable for them to attain titles and it would often help in gaining the respect of their host countries if they had a legitimate title. This was also especially true in the Paris post as dealings with the French were often tenuous at best and they refused to respect the British ambassador if they did not feel he was of proper rank in their eyes. It was a slight to the honor and dignity of the French court if the British sent someone of humble birth to deal with them. The French were particularly concerned about the matter of rank in any sort of negotiations. Rank was vital when dealing with the French.

During Rochford's term as ambassador there was a problem in dealing with difficulties encountered by British merchants at French ports, and these difficulties could never be sorted out on the spot due to the highly centralized bureaucracy of France at the time which sent all such disputes to Paris. Redress for any issues could only be obtained through the First Clerks of the Marine. Rochford claimed that "these men have immense influence over their Minister", but they were below the rank of someone that the foreign ambassador could directly make deals with.<sup>112</sup> To solve this problem, Rochford made a formal proposal to Lord Shelburne for a British consul-general to be sent to Paris to negotiate with the French ministers about these issues. In a letter in 1767 he wrote: "Such an appointment might with Decency cultivate an Intimacy with them of Great Utility...and obtain informations almost impossible to be acquired through any other Channel".<sup>113</sup> It was also quite usual for ambassadors to be sworn into the Privy Council, the

---

<sup>112</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 200.

<sup>113</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 200.

formal body of advisors to the monarch made up nearly entirely by aristocrats, upon their return from abroad or move into other parts of the foreign service.<sup>114</sup>

Few British men of rank or fortune regarded a diplomatic career as an end in itself and fewer still accepted a first appointment abroad with the intention of making their career in diplomacy, which could help to explain the youth of ambassadors during this time. Many simply used the post as a stepping stone in their career. This was especially true of young men of good family for which the army and the law, not to mention politics (Parliament), offered much greater prospects than diplomacy. Many diplomatists however retained their army commissions both in war and in peace, though under King George III this practice was more strictly controlled.<sup>115</sup> Young men, often single, were particularly chosen for service since they were able to move around more easily and were more willing to accept the relatively low pay. Out of 19 appointments as ambassadors to France between 1689-1789, seven of them had had no previous diplomatic experience whatsoever and some of the returning ambassadors had had only the slightest connection with diplomacy.<sup>116</sup> This practice was offset by sending a seasoned and/or highly skilled secretary to Paris to assist the ambassador. Since the British secretary of state often suspected that the French court would be inhospitable to British ambassadors on account of the frequent conflict, they did not always send their best diplomats to Paris. It would also be expected that sometimes British diplomats could be allowed to act also as the accredited representative of another power at the same court. In one instance the Duke of Manchester, while British ambassador at Paris, was formally accredited to Louis XIV, during the illness of his

---

<sup>114</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 90.

<sup>115</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 90.

<sup>116</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 116.



Dutch colleague, as the Dutch diplomatic representative. This arrangement was formally approved by the King of Great Britain William III.<sup>117</sup>

One of the largest components of the relationship between ambassadors, the crown, and the secretary of state was the communication speed between the posts and London. These communication routes to London, not to mention other parts of Europe, were slow and unpredictable, which meant that diplomats could be left without orders for months at a time. After the isolation of the posting at Madrid and the long delays involved in any correspondence between England and Spain, Lord Rochford was glad to be closer to home. At Paris he could expect an urgent dispatch to be answered in a matter of days rather than weeks. He rightly distrusted the French postal service, for he knew well that most governments including his own regularly intercepted and copied all foreign diplomatic mail sent by post.<sup>118</sup> He could not routinely use a King's messenger because they were few in number and often serving in the more far reaching posts like Constantinople, so Rochford's solution was to find a trusted servant and send them to Calais to meet the Saturday packet for Dover.<sup>119</sup> His messenger would then wait at Calais for the return packet on Sunday night which brought mail from London. This way Rochford would have regular weekly reports and he would have information in time for his Tuesday meetings with Choiseul.<sup>120</sup> A courier could easily get from London to Paris or the Hague and return in a week. It was said that London and Paris 'are too near for any step not to be

---

<sup>117</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 37.

<sup>118</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 187.

<sup>119</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 188.

<sup>120</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 189.

known and aggravated'.<sup>121</sup> Such correspondence could be too slow at crucial moments, such as in the developing crisis with Revolutionary France in late 1792.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, it was still relatively quick compared to the situation with British embassies further east in Europe. There, distance exacerbated the difficulties that arose for all British diplomats from their country's island character. Adverse winds could prevent messengers sailing or cause them to blow off course. Problems with communications were not restricted solely to sea crossings though, there were also many difficulties facing travelers within Europe. The roads were frequently poor and facilities could be very limited.<sup>123</sup> Communications also became more of a problem in wartime. War with France led to the suspension of the cross-channel packet services.<sup>124</sup> For any man who liked to be left alone, diplomacy made a good career, particularly in peacetime, when little was expected of the king's servants beyond maintaining the status quo. However in wartime, a diplomat also became an executive officer with considerable latitude to promote and bind the national interest. They would become essentially a maker, as much as an executer, of policy.

British diplomats were first and foremost observers. The English ambassadors would often read local newspapers and interact with local nobles to gather as much useful information that they possibly could. Dorset comments on the introduction of British newspapers to Paris in a letter written on October 25 1786 writing:

“The almost unrestrained introduction of our daily publications (tolerated indeed by the Government from the conviction of the impossibility of preventing it) having attracted the attention of the people more towards the freedom and advantages of our constitution, has also infused into them a spirit of discussion of public matters which did not exist

---

<sup>121</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 81.

<sup>122</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 81.

<sup>123</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 82.

<sup>124</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 85.

before. But amongst the most disadvantageous effects of this intercourse, may certainly be reckoned an almost universal taste for the elegancies and luxuries of British manufacture, a taste, which, since the war, has turned the scale of trade entirely against this nation.”<sup>125</sup>

Many of the ambassadors’ letters were filled dominated by small little bits of information that they thought necessary to pass along. Rochford would often write little things like this when he reported French activity, in this instance he was reporting the movement of French battalions being sent to Corsica. He wrote:

“Your Lordship and the rest of His Majesty’s Servants are the best Judges whether it will be proper for me to demand from the Duke of Choiseul what the intentions of this Court are with Regard to Corsica, what I would not take upon myself to do, least I should have received such an Answer as perhaps would not have been liked. I shall only therefore be very attentive in attending to what passes further on this Subject, until I receive Other Instructions from Your Lordship.”<sup>126</sup>

Most of the time they wrote these comments since it was probably the only thing they could comment on. Diplomacy moved a lot slower during this time, so sometimes dispatches are filled with reports of suspicious French activity even though it is probably not a serious threat. Lord Dorset thought it necessary to include this in one of this letters on November 24 1785: “I should not omit to mention to your Lordship that Lauzun, the messenger, told me that, whilst he was at Calais, a smuggling vessel passed between that port and Dover, having 22 brass guns, and 200 men on board. She was steering towards the West of England.”<sup>127</sup> While it may have been important for him to comment upon at the time, looking back it seems silly that the English would be worried over one smuggling vessel sailing in their direction.

---

<sup>125</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 148.

<sup>126</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 222.

<sup>127</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 82.

These ambassadors also kept up correspondence with their other noble friends posted abroad. Dorset had a friend who was living in Boulogne in northern France who gave him information, and he often travelled to visit the gentleman. This reflects the importance of elite networks during this period. These other nobles and friends helped provide the ambassadors with more information that they could, and often did, use in their intelligence networks. Dorset comments on this in a letter written December 22nd 1785 when he wrote:

“I heard at Boulogne, from an English gentleman who has resided there some time that no less than two or three vessels from the coasts of Kent and Sussex have landed every week in that port cargoes of English wool, and that this practice has been continued for several months past. I mention this matter to your Lordship as thinking it highly deserving of the attention of Government.”<sup>128</sup>

Many of their dispatches are dominated by the health and doings of the kings, his ministers, his families, and not to mention the fortunes of factions and favorites at court. Lord Dorset even thought to report on the number of Englishmen living in France while he was ambassador. In a letter dating August 11, 1785 he wrote:

“The great number of English families now resident, or travelling in France, is a circumstance which I have more than once thought of mentioning to your Lordship, as not altogether unworthy of our notice. It would be extremely difficulty to ascertain in any degree what the number amounts to, but I have good reason to believe that there is scarcely a town in which there are not one of more families settled. How far such large emigrations to this Country and others may desire to be considered as an object of future taxation, in case of necessity, I will not pretend to decide.”<sup>129</sup>

The focus on the royal family is especially true in absolute monarchies, which still prevailed in much of Europe, as the health of the sovereign was key to the state’s well being. These diplomats also reported any protests or support for royal policies, foreign and domestic, as

---

<sup>128</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 69.

well as confrontations between major interest groups within the state, most notably between the clergy, the military, the nobility, and occasionally other corporate groups. The career diplomats were neither administrators nor, except in times of war or crisis, policy makers. Their place in the infrastructure of the state was one of data-provision, a role to which some, either by intellectual background or experience and the importance of their stations, were better suited than others.<sup>130</sup> None of this could be done without access to the royal household. Men who wished to shine at court were advised to practice dissimulation and flattery so that they would gain favor with the monarch and be invited to spend more time with them away from the public scene of court where they could gather other information. Often times diplomats would direct their attention to royal consorts, as it was presumed that they would carry a good deal of interest with their spouses, so attempts were always made at assessing the personality of the queen and other women in the royal household.<sup>131</sup> This in turn impacted the culture of gift-giving at court, whereby the women in the royal household began to receive more lavish gifts in order to procure favor.

Maintaining these many embassies world-wide was incredibly expensive however, but Britain's emergence as a world power made it necessary. Britain's arrival on the international stage made it desirable to keep a permanent diplomatic corps on the public payroll, but embassies were still expensive to run, and the work in peacetime was often uneventful. These diplomats were also often responsible for feeding the British 'Grand Tourists' as well, and many homesick young British men in search of a good free meal were wandering all over Europe. Paris, the most often visited city, was easily the most expensive station in the service. The periodic movements

---

<sup>130</sup> Mori, Jennifer, *The Culture of Diplomacy: Britain in Europe, c. 1750-1830*. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), 8.

<sup>131</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 106-120.

of the French court also necessitated regular travel on the part of the ambassador, who was nevertheless under no obligation, unlike his colleague in Spain for example, to keep two residences, one at Madrid and the other at Aranjuez. In St. Petersburg, it was also a costly station to manage due to the bribes that Russian nobles sought in exchange for promoting the interests of foreign powers at court. Apparently this wasn't as outrageous at some of the other courts.

### **The Structure of an Embassy:**

Before 1815, the British government expected its servants to find, lease, furnish and staff their own embassies without official assistance, so household expenses became a major concern. Being a diplomat during this time was a career oriented for single men.<sup>132</sup> Many of them did not get married, or married late. Some, who were married, chose not to bring their wives with them for various reasons, and some wives did not want to leave their social spheres of friends and families. Sometimes wives would be targeted and captured by enemies in wartime, and ambassadors were too. This reduced the odds of an ambassador bringing his wife, and it also placed a bad image in the public's mind, thereby making ambassadorial recruitment even harder. It is suspected that many would-be diplomats turned down foreign posts because their wives refused to leave England.<sup>133</sup>

Since the British government had no input on the location of the ambassador's residence when they were posted abroad, the embassies could come in all shapes and sizes. Since embassies ranged in size from apartments to mansions, it could be difficult to separate living

---

<sup>132</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 65.

<sup>133</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 65.

quarters from reception rooms. The layout of the household was also incredibly important for ambassadors when they hosting important political guests. As the eighteenth century was a very materialistic time, the household and office where the guests would be invited to had to be as impressive as possible. These houses not only had to have enough room for all of the staff, servants, and the ambassador and his family to sleep, but also to perform their day-to-day business activities. The ambassadors were also expected to house and feed any young British nobles traveling through the city in which they were posted, so they often were prepared with extra space for those guests as well. In a letter written in March 1784 Dorset wrote that “The English crowd in upon us here every day” when referring to the number of visiting Grand Tourists.<sup>134</sup> The additional work of organizing the servants, extra travelers from Britain, as well as their own staff and political guests was nearly an impossible task alone. This could all be mitigated by bringing a capable wife with you abroad. Women organized regular dinners for expatriates, local notables, and international celebrities that alleviated some of the ambassador’s work. This hectic lifestyle inevitably ate into family life and time. Since family was a much more inclusive environment than today, servants and clients were important members of a diplomats home. This ‘family embassy’ would not disappear until the 1850’s. Diplomacy, like other trades of the time, was best learned through apprenticeship, which meant that additional envoys were often acting as attachés to secretaries, other staff members, and the ambassador. However, since many diplomats did not marry until their mid-thirties on average, no maternal figure was necessarily present. Some of their functions could and often were replaced by the secretary of the embassy.

---

<sup>134</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 9.

**Ambassadorial Education and Training:**

The training and education of these ambassadors was also an important part in formulating connections among other members of the aristocracy, but it was also a good way to receive training on how to deal with foreign nobles as well, especially the French. It was supposed that would-be diplomatists should first make themselves familiar with European politics and with the history, constitutions, and economics of the leading European states as well with the public laws of Europe. The single best training that a young prospective diplomat could receive was the European 'Grand Tour'. Getting these people to travel to the principal courts of Europe at a somewhat 'riper' age was very beneficial. It was supposed that after a certain maturity they were more capable of reflection and of appreciating the form and spirit of government in each country, as well as studying the merits and faults of individual princes and ministers. They may also sometimes accompany the King's ambassadors or envoys as traveling companions. The most important skill in becoming an ambassador was learning foreign languages. Some other secretaries of state also preferred one to know the causes and consequences of revolutions in the various leading countries of Europe. The manners, customs and other parts of a 'good society' were to be studied extensively while on the Grand Tour. Many young nobles did their own Grand Tour of Europe alone, which was very helpful for the career of diplomacy, but a tutor could also be part of this education. If a tutor could be afforded, it would often make the trip a more educational experience as opposed to the often recreational experiences of these young travelers when they went alone. Lord Gower himself did his own



Grand Tour, traveling in 1780 through Scotland and Ireland, and he spent the next two years traveling with the Archbishop of York through France, Germany, Austria, and the Dutch Republic, spending the most time in Paris. He would later make another tour of Europe in 1786 after he had married his wife, the Countess of Sutherland in her own right, and they spent a great deal of time in Italy.<sup>135</sup>

Besides the Grand Tour of Europe, formal education could also play a role in the training of diplomats from noble families. As early as 1724, Oxford and Cambridge had chairs of modern history devoted to the education and training of diplomatists. Both schools selected twenty young men to be instructed in modern history and languages.<sup>136</sup> The emphasis was on languages more so than history. The University of Edinburgh provided similar training for potential Scottish diplomatists. Above all, a proficiency in French was required for any diplomatic post abroad, especially during the reign of King George III. Various other languages were used in some of the other prominent courts, for example Italian was put to good use in Constantinople, and German was necessary at the Russian embassy, however French was the dominant language of most courts. Some secretaries of state also put a high value on German speakers as it seems there were very few German speakers in England during the late eighteenth century.<sup>137</sup>

To be the best diplomat possible, you had to possess the ability to speak multiple languages, at least English and French, you must possess a knowledge of history, politics, and culture of at least the major European countries. This was a difficult task in British culture as acting like a European was frowned upon. Most British people regarded themselves as distinctly

---

<sup>135</sup> Loch, *Memoir of George Granville, Late Duke of Sutherland*, 7.

<sup>136</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 131.

<sup>137</sup> Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, 139.

separate from Europe, and therefore superior in culture, language, and custom. Becoming European was seen in Britain to be a troublesome business, and was best begun in the teens. It was thought that only through familiarity with European society could a man, the best example of whom was French, truly fulfill his mission, because the British thought the Europeans to be not only easy, but unguarded before them. “By these means, he became well placed to acquire knowledge of the characters, the humors, the abilities, or weaknesses, of the actors at court.”<sup>138</sup>

The British, Lord Chesterfield thought, made bad diplomats because their manners ill-fitted them for social intercourse in Europe.<sup>139</sup> ‘Going native’ was, however, frowned upon at home. ‘Englishness’, the core component of a public service identity, was somehow at odds with cosmopolitanism, which may be one reason why the foreign service was not a popular form of employment. To what extent Britons were ill-equipped by birth and upbringing for the representation of their king abroad was debated by diplomats throughout the period. The duty to one’s king was slowly being replaced by duty to the Parliament. Although few agree entirely with Chesterfield’s denigrations of their service, there is no doubt that the religious, political, social, and cultural baggage of the British Isles gave the diplomatic corps its own unique character.<sup>140</sup>

Foreign service, as far as many were concerned in the eighteenth century was tantamount to exile. Those seeking fame or fortune in the name of king and country tended to steer clear of postings to far-flung lands where their work might be overlooked or forgotten. Since influence, not merit, was the key to recognition and reward back at home, most civil servants, regardless of

---

<sup>138</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 21.

<sup>139</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 21.

<sup>140</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 22.

department, were politicians for the sake of survival.<sup>141</sup> Consequently, diplomacy was an unattractive career. The longer one was absent from London, the center of power and influence, the more likely one was to lose any credit that one had once possessed or could lay claim to. It did not use to be so, as during the Tudor and Stuart reigns, when diplomacy was an uncontested royal prerogative and it was within the realm of personal gifts from the crown which made diplomatic service appealing. This was also one route to royal favor, but since the 1688 Glorious Revolution, and the following quarter century of warfare, diplomacy became less a matter of service to the personal interests of the crown. The ambassadors instead began to focus on representing the political, economic, and military needs of the state.<sup>142</sup>

For the prospective diplomats seriously considering joining the foreign service, the job wasn't quite as bad as it was made out to be back in Britain. In fact, the pay on paper was pretty generous, ambassadors made either £10 per day or £100 per week.<sup>143</sup> In addition, most ambassadors tended to receive a government subsidy of £3 per day for hiring staff, in addition to a lump sum at the end of each year which began at around £1,000 and was later raised to £2,000 after 1795.<sup>144</sup> Where the expenses could add up however, came from the smaller embassies abroad where private secretaries had to be hired. In addition, the Treasury was often tardy in the reimbursement of certain expenses like political gifts. This of course contributed to the turnover rate in the foreign service. The history of the eighteenth-century foreign service is littered with instances of posts evaded, refused, or resigned. Secretaries of state often had a

---

<sup>141</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 21.

<sup>142</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 21.

<sup>143</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 26.

<sup>144</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 26.

difficult time searching for noblemen to undertake diplomatic work. Diplomacy as a profession had a much higher social and political standing in Europe than in Britain, often attributable to the direct involvement of the 'absolute' monarchs in terms of appointment, instruction, negotiation, or policy formation. In addition, the development of society in Britain had shifted from defending the crown to promoting British freedom. This was reflected in the policies of Parliament at the time, as the prevalence of promoting 'freedom' against absolute monarchy within the body politic of Britain guaranteed successive British governments the support of the masses in nearly a century of wars against France. This often resulted in a focus on the religious divide between the two countries, but the defense of actual Protestants, as opposed to their interests, waned in importance as the century progressed but remained a component of Britain's national identity as late as 1816. Again, this religious divide was further emphasized by a chain of monarchs who had only appointed Protestant ambassadors between 1740-1790.

However, once the British monarch stopped making the direct appointments and also stopped giving luxurious gifts to the ambassadors when they arrived back in Britain, it was less advantageous for noblemen to enter the foreign service. However since this paper is focused on the Paris embassy, it should be noted that Britain's embassy in Paris was often headed by wealthy and titled figureheads. Since little friendship was expected from Bourbon France, no man of special ability was normally needed to fill the position, and most of the business, which particularly focused on information collection and dispatch-writing, was done by the secretary of the embassy.<sup>145</sup> Movement between different departments that focused on sending agents abroad was quite common. This can be seen most in the movement from the diplomatic service to the

---

<sup>145</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 26.

colonial service, however transfer in the other direction was not common since diplomacy as a vocation was interactive rather than managerial. The colonial service attracted different candidates than the diplomatic service. It did occur on occasion, it was just not as common. It was also common to see men that had previously served in the army also joining the foreign service at the end of wars, as they would often be faced with the prospect of receiving half-pay at home.<sup>146</sup> Their military expertise was also useful in assessing the offensive and defensive capabilities of other states while they were filling diplomatic posts abroad.

Even though maintaining a diplomatic post abroad was very expensive, especially one of the more prominent ones like Paris, the ambassadors staying there were not overly compensated for their work, and it was often incredibly difficult to recruit potential ambassadors from the nobility. Much of the role of the ambassador was focused on observation of the royal court, prominent royal family members, as well as key institutions of the state. Their often immense staff would handle much of the important correspondence between the embassy and London, as well as gathering the local gossip and news to help the ambassador at court. Ambassadorial education, which was absolutely necessary for a career diplomat looking to attain one of the more prominent diplomatic posts abroad, could be handled in a few ways, but going on a tour of Europe and mastering foreign languages, cultures, and history was an excellent start. Another path that many young noblemen took was by being recruited into one of the emerging programs for diplomatic training which emerged at both Oxford and Cambridge, and was later copied to an extent at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Having any family ties to the diplomatic service or using their wealth or influence to attend one of the school programs or go on a lengthy

---

<sup>146</sup> Mori, *The Culture of Diplomacy*, 40.

tour of Europe was also an incredible aid to many of these young men. The British men that got appointed to these posts by the secretary of state were often either promising young single men who could relocate easily and wanted to use the diplomatic service as a means of elevating their career, and retired old noblemen who were interested in European politics and had strong titles and had acquired the wealth to afford some of the more expensive diplomatic posts abroad.

However, as we shall see, the personal relationships within this elite class of society that were developed in their youth by attending the same boarding schools and otherwise having similar experiences that only this small sphere of society could have. These relationships would have a huge impact on British foreign policy during this period.

### CHAPTER THREE

## British Foreign Policy in the Late 18th Century and Ambassadorial Success

The third chapter of this thesis will serve to outline the foreign policy stance of Britain during the late eighteenth century specifically with relations to France from the conclusion of the Seven Years War, which set the stage for future negotiations, up until the French Revolution. I will then cover what a successful career as an ambassador might look like, and conclude the chapter with an evaluation of each ambassador's term in office based upon the perceived influence on British foreign policy in relation to France and/or successful negotiations with France on behalf of Britain. By utilizing their social skills, elite networks, ambassadorial training and preparation that was discussed in previous chapters, some ambassadors actually did have an impact upon British relations with France during their tenure in office, and some did not. Following the decisive British victory over France in the Seven Years War, France's foreign policy aimed solely at getting revenge on Britain, ultimately culminating in France's decision to aid the American colonies in the American Revolutionary War. While this may have been prevented by British diplomatic success either in France or abroad, the lead up to this event took almost fifteen years. Furthermore, British relations with France after the American Revolutionary War did not improve, and only lasted formally for another ten years before the British ambassador was recalled in the early stages of the French Revolution in 1792. Some of these British ambassadors were able to make the full use of their positions during this time, and others were not.

## British Foreign Policy in the Late Eighteenth Century

None of the scholars who established the history of eighteenth century British diplomacy, namely British historian Sir Richard Lodge, carried out detailed research on the two decades after 1763. Lodge himself proclaimed that these years were ‘largely a blank’ in Britain’s foreign relations. Much of the historical scholarship of the period has instead been concentrated on colonial matters and on Britain’s problems in North America. Some justification for this neglect can be found in the attitude of contemporaries. For much of the eighteenth century, questions of foreign policy and military and naval strategy had dominated domestic politics, but this was no longer the case immediately following the Seven Years War. In the 1760’s and early 1770’s successive governments were preoccupied with internal and colonial problems. They were confronted by the emergence of political radicalism, the problems of the East India Company and of Canada, and by unrest and rebellion in Britain’s North American colonies. These, and their own political survival, periodically relegated foreign policy issues to a subsidiary position. Diplomacy became a lower priority for British governments after 1763, but it did not cease to exist.<sup>147</sup> In the later 1770’s with the outbreak of the American rebellion and then a world war with France and Spain, foreign policy once again became important. There is thus little justification for the neglect of Britain’s diplomacy during the age of the American Revolution.

It is unfortunate for the overall reputation of Britain’s diplomacy during the age of the American Revolution that the early years when its shortcomings were all too apparent have been studied in great detail, while the decade when it fared better has been comparatively neglected.

---

<sup>147</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 1-2.



Many of the familiar strictures are in reality comments on the deficiencies of British foreign policy during the 1760's, of which, many of the wounds were self-inflicted through incompetence, conflicting political priorities, and bad luck. In contrast, Britain's diplomacy during the 1770's was more realistic, as its ministers provided more secure direction and their successes were more apparent.<sup>148</sup>

To set the stage for British foreign policy in this age, one must begin by considering the position Britain was in after its exceptional victory over France and Spain in the Seven Years War. Hamish Scott wrote of the victor, saying:

“The Seven Years War had four principal consequences for British foreign policy, and these proved to be enduring. It poisoned Anglo-Prussian relations for a quarter of a century; it substantially reduced Hanover's importance for British diplomacy; it completed the process by which Britain's traditional European perspective came to be supplemented by an imperial and world-view, which complicated the task facing ministers; and it decisively affected Britain's attitude to continental alliances and her ability to conclude them.”<sup>149</sup>

When thinking about British foreign policy, it must be first noted that it could be controlled by just a few men. For example, British foreign policy in the early 1770's was largely controlled by just three men: King George III, Lord North (the Prime Minister at the time), and Lord Rochford (the southern Secretary of State). Until the new northern secretary, Lord Suffolk, had learned enough French to be able to converse with the foreign diplomats in London, Rochford carried the main burden of both southern and northern departments, and his thoughts and advice crucially shape the major foreign policy decisions made in these years.<sup>150</sup> The crown always had a hand in diplomacy, especially during the reign of King George III, and various

---

<sup>148</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 33.

<sup>150</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 355-356.

Prime Ministers often decided to become personally involved in international relations, although this was less common. Since the British preferred to conduct any diplomacy through their ambassadors abroad, so any instances of interference by the Prime Minister was seen to be a bit obsessive. In one instance, the Prime Minister, William Petty 2nd Earl of Shelburne (1737-1805) personally negotiated much of the peace treaty following the American Revolution at his own home during three 'secret' meetings between himself and a French representative. This has been attributed to Shelburne's obsessive secrecy and determination to mould the final treaty himself, but it is unique nonetheless<sup>151</sup>. In addition, this seems to be another case of social status influencing British foreign policy. Shelburne was able to leverage his social skills developed as an elite in order to conduct personal diplomacy with the French representative, who was also an elite.

The principal conclusion which emerges from the study of the formation and execution of official British policy is the importance of personalities. A formal administrative framework existed, but to a significant extent it was still at the mercy of the individuals who controlled Britain's diplomacy. It needed those men to make it work, and the same men could make or break Britain's foreign policy. The skill or incompetence of an ambassador, the foresight, experience, or inexperience, and preoccupations of a Secretary of State, and the wish of the king or the Prime Minister were fundamental to the successes and failures of British foreign policy.<sup>152</sup>

King George III believed that Britain's diplomacy should be based on opposition to France and that this required alliances with continental states. In particular, he favored the revival of the traditional links to Austria and the Dutch Republic. His reluctance to work with

---

<sup>151</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 330-331.

<sup>152</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 28.

France was reinforced by France's assistance to the American rebels and by its eventual intervention in the war. Furthermore, as the Elector of Hanover he was naturally informed about and interested in diplomacy within Germany.<sup>153</sup>

Much of the early-modern government was undercapitalized. These financial problems were further exacerbated by the role of Parliament. The crown was generally dependent, especially in periods of warfare and international confrontation, on financial support from Parliament. This was rarely adequate and fiscal exigencies therefore affected the operations of all areas of British government, including the diplomatic service. In addition, after Oliver Cromwell in the 1650's, Britain's standing army was considerably smaller than its European counterparts, and was often dependent upon a favorable political environment in Britain. The reliance on allied troops added a further requirement to British diplomacy.<sup>154</sup> The problems with Parliament would plague the British ministers for years. Both secretaries of state often had to take time away from their official duties to defend government policy in the House of Lords and Commons when Parliament was in session. After 1763 foreign affairs competed for ministerial attention with a new and ever increasing range of problems, and this affected the emergence of a coherent policy for Europe. Instead, problems were dealt with on an ad hoc basis. This inconsistency and focus on colonial issues made the diplomatic services of continental Europe feel neglected.<sup>155</sup>

However, despite King George III's desires for alliances, during the Seven Years War Britain had few allies and much of Europe was opposed to her, or unsympathetic. Diplomatic relations were cut or diminished, missions closed, and much of the business of diplomacy was

---

<sup>153</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 16-17.

<sup>154</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 12.

limited to wartime details, such as the conduct of neutral trade, the major issue at stake in relations with the Dutch. Peace negotiations brought a revival in diplomatic links, and the end of the Seven Years War in 1763 ushered in a period of revived representation that lasted until foreign participation in the War of American Independence severed relations with France, Spain, and the Dutch.<sup>156</sup>

The view of British power and greatness was not complete without illustrations of its financial strength, commercial master, naval power, coupled with social harmony and political stability. This admiration was widely held at the end of the Seven Years War. Yet only twenty years later Britain was going to emerge from the American Revolutionary War amongst prophecies of its future decline. With hindsight, it is clear that the Seven Years War was both a solvent of American problems for Britain and yet the source of later clashes between the two. Britain's diplomacy throughout the age of the American Revolution was influenced directly by the legacies left by the Seven Years War.<sup>157</sup>

The Peace of Paris in 1763 brought Britain substantial territorial gains, mostly at the expense of the French crown. France's position in India was all but destroyed, the loss of Canada as well as part of Louisiana and the cession of the rest to Spain, meant that France was nearly entirely excluded from the North American mainland. The scale of Britain's triumph over both France and Spain was to be the principal factor in diplomatic relations throughout the next two decades. On the European continent, the Seven Years War produced no such drastic territorial exchanges. The outcome of the war was the decisive change of the relative position of the major states. European international relations were changed, and this change would dominate

---

<sup>156</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 5.

<sup>157</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 29.

diplomacy throughout the 1760's and 1770's. While the balance of power had thus far revolved around Britain and Austria struggling against France throughout the first half of the century with the 'second rate' powers attaching themselves to one side or another, Prussia and Russia had now risen into the ranks of the great powers.<sup>158</sup>

Anglo-French rivalry continued to and even intensified after 1763, but it was rapidly ceasing to be the main factor in European diplomacy. Though British and French statesmen recognized the new pattern of international relations slowly, the change was irreversible. Britain's victory in the eighteenth century struggle with France had been based largely on manipulating continental Europe's state system and exploiting the well established Hapsburg-Bourbon rivalry. This strategy, however was based upon the image of a very threatening France over the rest of Europe. After Britain's decisive victory in 1763 however, it was Britain that looked like the predominant power, not France. Britain's traditional diplomatic strategy had now been undermined by its own strength.<sup>159</sup>

During the age of the American Revolution Britain was usually to face not simply France of Spain but a united Bourbon front. British statesmen had fear the potential might of the united House of Bourbon ever since the accession of a French prince to the Spanish throne in the early eighteenth century, but the Franco-Spanish connection usually proved to be less secure and less menacing than anticipated. Although British ministers were aware of Spanish weakness, they were still forced to be seriously worried about the threat posed by joint Franco-Spanish actions. The Spanish state might not have been a serious military power, but its navy was still formidable and was being rebuilt at the time. The real danger was that Spain would deflect sufficient British

---

<sup>158</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 30-31.

<sup>159</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 32.

resources to weaken any efforts against France, which could make all the difference. Britain's contempt for Spain's position was evident in her assumption that France spoke for the Bourbon powers, and ministers usually approached the French government directly in any dispute, believing that Madrid barely had an independent foreign policy.<sup>160</sup>

By 1763 there was an established system of alliances that Britain was most comfortable with. This was cleverly referred to as 'The Old System' of alliances. This group, secured by the alliance of Britain, the Dutch Republic, and Austria, sought to gather as many allies as possible to contain French expansion on the continent.<sup>161</sup> It would serve to especially protect the British interests in the Low Countries and Hanover. This system was very effective throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, however when France signed an alliance with Austria in 1756, the Dutch Republic was now exposed to attack from France. By this point the Dutch Republic itself had faced a decline in economic and political power, and the 'Old System' was all but destroyed.<sup>162</sup> The decline of the Old System was fully complete by the Seven Years War, and the decline of France after its humiliating defeat was now more evident than its power. The conflict had demonstrated that not even France's resources were enough to sustain a military campaign on the continent while fighting the British navy overseas. The shift in French strategy from a primarily continental approach to a colonial one, which would take shape in the late 1760's and 1770's, had its origins in the Seven Years War. After 1763 French foreign policy aimed only to

---

<sup>160</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 40-41.

<sup>161</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 44.

<sup>162</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 44.

neutralize Europe in a future conflict with Britain, and this was accomplished during the American Revolutionary War.<sup>163</sup>

France's political decline and her changed strategic priorities were two important legacies of the Seven Years War for British foreign policy. They were not immediately evident to Britain's ministers who still believed and acted as if French power still threatened Europe as it had before the war. Throughout the age of the American Revolution Britain's search for allies was still conducted in terms of the French threat to Europe or the balance of power. The problem with this mindset was that if any state was a threat to Europe or the balance of power after 1763, it was Britain. This was occasionally glimpsed by British observers during the next two decades but the implications were never fully appreciated and it would never be integrated into official policy. This could have been a factor of the men ruling British policy at this point, men who had grown up during the time of intense rivalry with France and its Spanish ally. Another problem was the intensification of the Anglo-French rivalry after 1763 since France's foreign minister Choiseul focused all his energy on a future war of revenge. Although British fears of French attack might have been exaggerated, it was not unreasonable to fear another attack from a combined French and Spanish force after the decisive and embarrassing British victory over them in 1763.<sup>164</sup>

The large British debt that had been accumulated following the Seven Years War also left a legacy on British foreign policy. This debt confirmed the beliefs of many ministers that peacetime subsidies should not be paid to any allies, therefore furthering the difficulty of acquiring British allies. By the mid eighteenth century the idea that subsidies were a waste of money and seldom produced any tangible results for Britain was ingrained into official policy.

---

<sup>163</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 47.

<sup>164</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 48.

This was to become a central tenant of British foreign policy throughout the age of the American Revolution. Britain's wealth had of course been one of the principal attractions to a potential ally, so the refusal of peacetime subsidies was a hindrance to finding suitable allies. However, this was not as important as it had been before the war, since Britain was now in a position of power relative to France. A central theme of British policy in the age of the American Revolution was Britain's inability to appreciate the consequences of the Seven Years War. While the British remained interested in pursuing the Old System of alliances, its practicality would rapidly diminish.<sup>165</sup>

Britain was now in effect the bully of Europe. Any neutral states during the war were getting increasingly upset with the British habit of restricting their shipping rights, but now with Britain sitting solely in the driver's seat of Europe, it would readily resort to using its naval muscle to enforce its will. Even the Bourbon powers were intimidated into submission through threat of force by Britain's dominant navy. Admiration of British power would quickly become mingled with resentment of British conduct however.<sup>166</sup>

The fundamental continuities in British diplomacy were still more important than the new policies created by the fighting which had ended in 1763. To a significant extent the war's principal impact was to confirm existing assumptions. British foreign policy sought to protect certain areas of either strategic or economic importance: first and foremost the Low Countries, out of a historic fear of invasion across the narrow channel, the King's electorate of Hanover, and the Baltic Sea, which was the main source of Britain's naval supplies at this point in time. These naval supplies were the basis for Britain's naval supremacy. Britain would still actively defend

---

<sup>165</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 50.

<sup>166</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 51.



its historic allies of Portugal and the Dutch Republic. Religion at this time was no longer an important factor in British foreign policy or in international relations in general. Above all, Britain's diplomacy was still dominated by strategic and political concerns, chiefly with France.<sup>167</sup>

In 1773, for the first time since the Seven Years War, the British government gave up looking for an ally, and coldly rejected a late alliance proposal from the Russians. This phase has been termed one of 'Splendid Isolation'. Prussia had been the only other continental ally sought by Britain in the late 1760's, but the Polish Partition of 1772 had put Frederick II beyond the realm of a potential ally.<sup>168</sup> Rochford, as Secretary of State approaching the American Revolutionary War, had worked hard and taken considerable risks to befriend the Bourbons in the early 1770's, but the sudden rebellion in Sweden in which France helped put one of their supporters on the throne served as a sharp reminder to Rochford that France was still Britain's most important potential enemy, especially overseas. However, even after a new French king in 1774 and the start of a new shipbuilding program by the French, Rochford's sources assured him that the French government was very close to bankruptcy and simply could not afford a major war.<sup>169</sup> In late 1774 Britain was feeling relatively secure, which was based on two principal foundations. The first was that it was well documented that the French ministry was plagued with internal problems, especially financial ones, thanks to Rochford's sources. These reports reassured some of the British ministers that there was little danger of immediate French assault. The second source of British security was that the British ministry was confident that it had

---

<sup>167</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 52.

<sup>168</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 456.

<sup>169</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 457.

remained superior in its naval forces. The British intelligence network coming out of its Paris embassy had produced detailed reports of French naval dockyards which confirmed that France was unable to launch an attack.<sup>170</sup>

Once the war with the American colonies did break out in 1775, however, foreign policy was immediately subordinated to the American rebellion. Britain's situation was unprecedented in its foreign policy. It was now being forced to conduct military operations across the Atlantic Ocean, some 3,000 miles away, and the logistical problems that arose from this dwarfed all of the other eighteenth century wars for Britain.<sup>171</sup> Also, the fact that the fighting was in America, and until 1778 did not directly involve any other European powers made it unique. Up to this point, Britain's usual strategy was to secure allies and put their armies into the field on the continent, but now this was clearly impossible. During its early stages, the American campaign, which entailed defending its strategy in Parliament, effectively kept both Secretaries of State busy. Until the end of 1777, the reconquest of the colonies was the cabinet's main priority.<sup>172</sup> The American revolt also served to draw the attention back to the Bourbon powers, particularly France, and relations with these states dominated British diplomacy until war began in Europe in 1778-9. The American rebellion made peace in Europe a priority, which effectively meant peace with France. Otherwise, British ministers would fear a surprise attack from France while they were committed in American.

British confidence of peace with France rested solely on the poor state of the French fleet at the time. Since France's navy would be crucial in any war overseas, its condition was seen as

---

<sup>170</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 204-205.

<sup>171</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 207.

<sup>172</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 207.

the best guide to French intentions. Before the American rebellion broke out, the French fleet was in no condition to challenge Britain at sea, which Rochford reminded the French ambassador of in July 1775.<sup>173</sup> Any attempt to build up the French navy would quickly be picked up by the British intelligence network. Lord Stormont and the Paris embassy were on guard for any French naval activity.

British confidence affected relations with France which was demonstrated by Lord Stormont being allowed to remain on leave when news came in of the first skirmishes in America. King George also made a speech to Parliament in May 1776, announcing the ministry's confidence that peace would continue in Europe due to France's pacific stance so far.<sup>174</sup> However, in the spring of 1776 French strategy towards the colonies took a new direction. The French foreign minister thought that the opportunity to humble Britain had now presented itself, and urged a rapid increase in the French navy. He also argued that aid should be secretly sent to the Americans.<sup>175</sup> By May, 1776 Louis XVI had agreed to both proposals and the French preparations for war were underway. These naval preparations were quickly known to the British intelligence network and the government became quickly alarmed. They sent Lord Stormont, who was on leave at the time, immediately back to Paris. He would remain there until the formal withdrawal of diplomats almost two years later. He immediately began to assess the changed French strategy. The embassy's own intelligence network confirmed the naval buildup, and Stormont believed this to be on an unprecedented scale. He was nervous, but cautious, as he

---

<sup>173</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 209.

<sup>174</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 210.

<sup>175</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 235.

realized that although France was preparing, it was not yet ready to fight.<sup>176</sup> Stormont would be formally withdrawn in 1778 after France declared war on Britain and joined the side of the American colonies. There would be no official representation in Paris from 1778 until 1782 when Lord Dorset was sent to Paris as ambassador.

France joining the war on the side of the Americans demonstrates the failure of the British diplomatic service to affect the long-standing French desire for revenge against Britain for the Seven Years War. Parliaments's response to the final treaty would be determined by the terms secured by the Bourbons. Once the Commons had accepted independence in the Conway resolutions in 1782, the detailed terms negotiated with the Americans were less important than the European settlement.<sup>177</sup> A few important military victories were secured later in the same year, which revived British hopes that even though America had been lost, the war with the Bourbons could be successfully fought to a close by British victories rather than concessions for peace. Once again British foreign policy was dictated by the strength of British hatred of France. Dorset commented upon the France's effort to use this war as a way to get back at England and he himself shows his scorn for this French action in a letter written January 20th 1785. He wrote: "It must be very pleasing, My dear Lord, for every Englishman to see how completely the French have missed their object in engaging themselves in the American quarrel".<sup>178</sup>

However, immediately following the conclusion of the war, both Prime Minister Shelburne and George III thought to move immediately into alliance with France.<sup>179</sup> They argued

---

<sup>176</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 236.

<sup>177</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 329.

<sup>178</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 38.

<sup>179</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 330.

that by fighting one another, Britain and France had opened up the other dominant European powers, Prussia, Austria, and Russia to expand their influence. Shelburne himself told the French negotiator 'let us lay down the law to the rest of Europe...If we agree, we shall regain our former place and we shall direct all the changes of Europe'. George III supported this notion and tried to persuade the same French negotiator that such cooperation would prevent any second partition of Poland.<sup>180</sup> The French in turn, wanted to eliminate the commanding position of the British set up in the peace after the Seven Years War. They also wanted to secure visible rewards for its economic and military contributions to the war before any alliances were discussed.<sup>181</sup> There would be no alliance established following the war, but cordial relations were maintained throughout the rest of the 1780's.

France also suffered from the crippling cost of the war, and would suffer throughout this decade from it. Dorset commented upon some information of this large French debt following the war that he had gathered using his spy network and personal relations. In a letter written October 25, 1786 he wrote:

“According to M. Necker’s calculation, the public debts of England and France, by great singularity of accident, at the end of the war, amounted to nearly the same sum. France had been, taking all circumstances together, full as great a sufferer as Great Britain by the war, and she had nothing to console herself with but the unproductive gratification of seeing America politically separated from her parent country, without any increase of commercial advantage to herself; and that for reasons evidently existed in her inability to furnish those articles of first necessity of which America stands in need, either so good, so cheap, or at so long credit as England.”<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 331.

<sup>181</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 331.

<sup>182</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 144.

France would establish another alliance with Spain, but crippling debts from the war with Britain and the costs of rebuilding the French navy in the 1780's would ultimately cause a financial crisis which led to the French Revolution in 1789.

Once the French Revolution began to cause trouble in Paris in 1790, Lord Gower was chosen as the next British ambassador to France. The Revolution was initially popular with many Britons since it appeared to weaken France, but once the Jacobin's took over and began the Reign of Terror, it was seen in a different light.<sup>183</sup> Gower remained there until the deposition of the king in 1792 when he was forced to return to England after his Swiss bodyguard was killed.<sup>184</sup> Following the execution of King Louis XVI in 1793, Britain formally declared war on France, a war which would last for over twenty years.

### **What a Successful Career as a Diplomat Might Look Like**

In the eighteenth century, foreign diplomats were frequently at a loss to fathom who controlled Britain's diplomacy. Most were used to the continental style absolutisms where policy was determined by the sovereign, usually aided by one all powerful minister. No such pattern was evident in London. Looking strictly at the constitution, in theory the crown remained solely in control of foreign policy, but by the 1760's the practice was different. The complex ways in which British foreign policy was formulated and then executed puzzled the European observers. This was a reaction both to Britain's distinctive constitution and the complicated manner in which the foreign relations were conducted. Formal responsibility for the day to day control was

---

<sup>183</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 331.

<sup>184</sup> Loch, *Memoir of George Granville, Late Duke of Sutherland*, 8.

given to the two Secretaries of State, separated into North and South duties respectively. The Southern Secretary was usually recognized to be the senior minister handled the most difficult relations, notably France, Spain, and the Ottoman Empire. The Northern Secretary handled the Dutch Republic, Prussia, Austria, Sweden and Russia amongst other states. Assisted by two under-secretaries and a handful of clerks each, these secretaries were responsible for conducting regular correspondence with British diplomats abroad. This was comparatively small, since the French foreign office in the mid 1780's had over seventy permanent officials while its British counterpart numbered less than twenty.<sup>185</sup> However, while this system may not have concentrated power as much as the French version, it is important to note that it was still largely controlled by a handful of British elites. There were some commoners who had risen through the ranks, but the notable diplomatic posts and cabinet positions were filled largely by the aristocracy. These men kept a tight social network and used their networks to alter foreign policy during this period.

The British system was unique in its geographical division of responsibility. In every other major European state one individual controlled foreign policy. This was not the case in Britain until the establishment of the Foreign Office in 1782. The division between the Northern and Southern Secretaries amazed foreign diplomats, to whom the resulting drawbacks were more evident. These deficiencies were sometimes concealed by one secretary assuming a leading role over the other, as Rochford and Stormont often did during their tenures in the position. The difficulties which could arise when one secretary did not take control were obvious. Foremost among these was the danger that their views and policies might be opposed. This was on display in 1772-73 when the Northern Secretary at the time was following an anti-French strategy but

---

<sup>185</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 10-11.

then discovered that the Southern Secretary, Rochford, was negotiating secretly for an alliance with France.<sup>186</sup> Periodically, foreign diplomats in London would be startled to receive different and even opposite views on the same issue from the two secretaries, and the resulting confusion did nothing to improve Britain's standing in their eyes. This was not common, but it shows the difficulty of getting both secretaries to speak with one voice, or at least not to contradict each other so blatantly.<sup>187</sup>

When thinking about what a successful career as a diplomat might look like, considerations of promotion and continuance of influence within the British diplomatic service must be taken into account. Clearly some of the ambassadors during this time were cut out for a career in diplomacy and some were not, but that will be covered more later in this chapter. Of course, the most important of the southern courts for British foreign policy were obviously the Bourbon maritime powers, France and Spain. It should be assumed then, that the most promising young men in Britain's nobility would then be sent to treat with its most important rival, France. However, this was simply not the case. In one instance, Rochford's predecessor, Lord Richmond, made no secret of his relief at not returning to Paris. Richmond's sister wrote about how well she liked Lord and Lady Rochford and how she thought they would do well in Paris, and commented on how she could sense her husbands (and her own) relief at returning to England.<sup>188</sup>

In another example of an ambassador who was not properly trained for the job, Ambassador Harcourt struggled in negotiating with the French in the late 1760's. Anglo-French tensions had eased considerably after the fall of France's powerful foreign minister Choiseul, and

---

<sup>186</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 13.

<sup>187</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 13.

<sup>188</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 184.



Rochford (then Southern Secretary of State) took the opportunity to make progress on several issues that had always been blocked by him. Barely two weeks after Choiseul's fall, Rochford instructed Ambassador Harcourt at Paris to demand full payment of both capital and interest on the Canada Bills. Harcourt was a timid ambassador and dragged his feet over the issue, pleading that everything was in the 'greatest disorder' at Versailles, nobody was authorized to negotiate, nobody had been named to replace Coiseul, and the caretaker foreign minister was too busy to see him. After much feet dragging on the French side, Rochford instructed Harcourt to tell the French officials that their conduct over the Canada Bills was viewed in London 'not only in an Odious but in a most contemptible Light'.<sup>189</sup> This was unusually strong language in the normally polite and restrained discourse of eighteenth century diplomacy, but it shows how the relationship between just two members of the aristocracy had a profound impact on British foreign policy. If Rochford had not pushed Harcourt into using his elite status and social relationship with the French minister as members of the gentry, the Canada Bills issue may never have been resolved. Harcourt was embarrassed but he conveyed the message and left the French officials no doubt about Britain's determination to settle the Canada Bills affair. This would be Harcourt's only real diplomatic success, and he would be replaced by the powerfully influential Lord Stormont in 1772.

Later in the eighteenth century, the French Revolution also created a crisis in diplomacy, not only because it led, in 1792, to a major war in which Britain became involved the following year, but also because the revolutionaries deliberately rejected the established conventions of diplomatic behavior. From the outset, suspicion of British intentions harmed relations. Lord

---

<sup>189</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 363.

Dorset had to defend the reputation of himself and the British embassy, and wrote about it only a few weeks after the storming of the Bastille in 1789. In a letter written the 27th of July 1789 he wrote:

“Amongst other insinuations at this time circulated in Paris it is asserted that the English Ambassador is known to have been employed in distributing great sums of money for the purpose of cherishing and augmenting the discontents that prevail here; it is unnecessary that I should tell Your Grace how entirely destitute of foundation is this as well as all other reports of the same kind, but it is become highly essential for my own security and likewise for that of the rest of my Nation now at Paris and in other parts of the Kingdom, that I should be furnished immediately with the further authority of my Court to refute in the most satisfactory manner possible reports evidently calculated to prejudice the English Nation in the eyes of the people of this Country, and which, if they continued to be credited, may materially affect the personal safety of His Majesty’s subjects at present in France.”<sup>190</sup>

In 1790 no diplomat of experience was sent to Paris to succeed Dorset. George Granville (Lord Gower), the eldest son of the Marquess of Stafford was sent, who had travelled widely and was an MP but had no diplomatic experience. The challenge posed by the Revolution was made concrete in August 1792 when the violent overthrow of the monarchy led to a breach of formal diplomatic representation in Paris and to fears about the safety of British diplomats there, not least Gower himself. The removal of executive power from Louis XVI ensured that proper diplomatic credentials were no longer valid. It was unclear who was now wielding authority in Paris and what the effect of the French revolutionaries advance on the city would be. Lord Dorset wrote in a letter just two days after the storming of the Bastille on July 16th, 1789: “The regularity and determined conduct of the populace upon the present occasion exceeds all belief and the execration of the Nobility is universal amongst the lower order of people.”<sup>191</sup> The British,

---

<sup>190</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 251, Book 2.

<sup>191</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 241, Book 2.

Danish, Dutch, Polish, Spanish, Swedish, Swiss, and Venetian envoys all left. The British cabinet met on August 17th and decided to recall Granville, in part due to the danger to his life after his Swiss guard had been killed.<sup>192</sup>

Clearly longevity in office is one possible way of evaluating diplomatic success, as ambassadors were not usually recalled without good reason. Rochford was recalled after two years so he could become a Secretary of State in 1768, and Stormont could have stayed in Paris for much longer, but the formal ties to France were broken off after it had joined the American Revolutionary War on the side of the American colonies. Dorset himself wrote that he did not feel comfortable providing information ‘unconfirmed by my own observations’ until he had spent over two years in Paris as ambassador. In a letter written October 25, 1786 he wrote:

“A residence of between two and three years in this Kingdom, where I have not been inattentive to the course of public events, has considerably lessened the diffidence I felt at the beginning of submitting to your Lordship such accounts as I received from others unconfirmed by my own observations. Being more emboldened now, I have to entreat your indulgence for the freedom which I shall venture to use in the delivery of my sentiments upon those matters which may appear to require your Lordship’s full information.”<sup>193</sup>

However, longevity is just one way of measuring diplomatic success, and so the specific duties of the position as a whole must be evaluated, as well as any outstanding achievements made by individual ambassadors.

## **Evaluating the Ambassadors**

---

<sup>192</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 164.

<sup>193</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 144.

To speak of a diplomatic service, even by this relatively late period in British history, may give a misleading impression of the degree of professionalization and coherent organization possessed by the assembled ranks of British ambassadors, envoys, and ministers plenipotentiary. Diplomatic vacancies that arose were usually filled on a casual ad-hoc basis and political influence was at least as important as previous experience or relevant expertise. Many posts were difficult to fill, and this problem was probably exacerbated by the relatively unstable ministerial leadership in the 1760's.<sup>194</sup> This appeared to increase the opportunities at home for an ambitious man and he would be able to refuse a brief stint abroad as a necessary step in a political career. This was especially true in trying to fill the backward courts of eastern Europe and the far off posts of Warsaw, St. Petersburg, and Constantinople. This was partly a matter of expense, as these postings were very expensive and they were only belatedly and sometimes partially repaid.<sup>195</sup> No such problems affected the post in Paris, which was held as the pinnacle of the British diplomatic service and in social standing the equivalent of a cabinet post. The problem with the Paris post was appointing a suitable ambassador for such a key position within Britain's diplomatic service. Lord Stormont, holding the office from 1772-1778 and Lord Rochford were also extremely unusual in that they made a career in diplomacy and had risen through the ranks of ministers and envoys to the pinnacle position at Paris. The most important embassies, those in western and southern Europe, tended to be dominated by amateur diplomats, often noblemen who took only one embassy.<sup>196</sup> This could be due to the weight that titles had in the courts of these more established nations, or simply due to their power within the international system.

---

<sup>194</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 24.

<sup>195</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 24.

<sup>196</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 24.

Either way, sending a member of the British aristocracy to one of these such embassies could be beneficial not only because these courts would respect a title, but because these aristocrats had the social skills and personal connections that better suited them for intelligence gathering and negotiating with their elite counterparts.

British envoys and ambassadors exerted some influence on official policy. The conventional thought that they did not must be modified, at least for the 1760's and 1770's. In a very general sense, the reports of these envoys and ambassadors established the framework for official policy to be discussed and formulated, so they therefore always influenced policy.

However their greatest influence was their personal connections and social skills, and their ability to relate to their French counterparts in a way that commoners simply could not.

Rochford, while Secretary of State, deferred some matters to the greater knowledge of Stormont who at the time was ambassador first to Austria and then France.<sup>197</sup> Stormont himself remained an important influence on British diplomacy after Rochford's resignation. Britain's overall diplomatic strategy was devised by the ministry of the day and principally by the two secretaries of state. Its contents, the tactics to be used, the precise policy to be used in particular courts, were often filled in by senior diplomats abroad, many of whom had far greater experience of diplomacy and knowledge of European affairs than their political masters (Parliament) in London. The influence of senior diplomats in part reflected the frequent preoccupation of their superiors with domestic and colonial policy and the inexperience of many of the secretaries of state.<sup>198</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 27.

<sup>198</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 27.

However one of the most influential parts of the ambassadorial role in Paris was the gathering of economic and military intelligence, aided by the ambassador's ability to use their social and personal connections in order to gather such information. Nearly as soon as Rochford set his feet down in Paris he was using his personal networks as an aristocrat to gather useful information. He wrote to the then Secretary of State Lord Shelburne in a letter in December 1766 that he had "made a Connection here with Persons whom I flatter myself shall receive some useful Intelligence."<sup>199</sup> Rochford was one of the first to really establish a strong network of spies, and this was considered the most important part of his routine work.<sup>200</sup> His reports on the state of France's armed forces were sent privately to the Secretary of State, but in one paper in May 1767 he dismissed the army in one line in one of his regular dispatches saying "The state of their army is so well known that it is needless to say anything about it".<sup>201</sup> Their army was in fact considered abysmal, and even the French openly admitted as much. Rochford employed a spy who had access to the French naval dockyards and his value can be seen in a few secret reports in 1767, which besides the usual lists of ships and guns, included details of crews and shore establishments derived from the French financial records. The French were just as active in seeking intelligence on the British fleet, and were greatly assisted by the freedom with which English newspapers reported the movements of warships, but similar information was less readily available in France until the late 1780's. Rochford's reports provided a valuable alternative to the British government's usual source of naval intelligence which came from the Dutch. However, unfortunately for Rochford, his agent was arrested in 1768 and executed as a

---

<sup>199</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 188.

<sup>200</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 199.

<sup>201</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 199.

spy, indicating the importance attached to such activities by the French.<sup>202</sup> The ambassadors also gave great commentary upon the economic situation of France and various trade agreements, alliances, or other diplomatic arrangements throughout their terms. The ambassadors were usually quick to provide these documents and their comments on the proceedings and send them back to London, as Dorset did in a letter written the 11th of November 1785:

“The Treaty of Alliance between France and the States General was signed yesterday. The possessions of the Dutch in the four corners of the World are guaranteed to them by this Court. The Commercial arrangements between the two Countries will immediately be brought into discussion, and will be settled, in all probability, in the course of the winter. I have lost no time in forwarding the information of this important event to your Lordship, and I flatter myself you will be acquainted with it before the States themselves.”<sup>203</sup>

Espionage abroad was not simply devoted to gaining copies of diplomatic correspondence that had evaded British postal interception. For most of the period, Britain was threatened by the Bourbons and the central problem for British intelligence was to ascertain their capabilities and intentions. This was not a problem that could be solved simply by postal interception. Instead there was a requirement for more active intelligence operations designed to discover Bourbon naval strength and preparedness. Most importantly the preparedness of the Bourbon navies was seen as a sign of political intentions. As most warships were not kept prepared for sailing let alone action, but instead, were left without masts and rigging up, cannon on board, or sailors at hand, it was possible to focus on steps taken to prepare them.<sup>204</sup> However, the time British preparations took ensured that it was crucial for the British to be kept fully informed of Bourbon moves. Much effort was devoted to assessing the naval strength,

---

<sup>202</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 199.

<sup>203</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 80.

<sup>204</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 138.

preparedness, and intentions of France and Spain. Agents were sent from the embassies, especially from Paris, to the ports, and envoys also sought to gain information from French officials.<sup>205</sup>

France's preparations continued to be reported with considerable accuracy by Stormont, whose personal intelligence network was sophisticated and wide-ranging: on one occasion Vergennes (the then foreign minister of France) remarked that he was much better informed than the French ministers. The ambassador's detailed knowledge made him increasingly skeptical towards the foreign minister's claims that France's naval preparations were essential self-defense.<sup>206</sup> However, on occasions, the British were surprised by French moves. Nevertheless, in general, the British were fairly well informed about the state of the Bourbon navies which speaks to the job done of the British ambassadors in cultivating their personal relations for information and developing their spy networks. Lists of ships detailing their condition can be found frequently in the British archives, and the major problem was not in establishing the strength of Bourbon forces, but was, rather, one of assessing their probable moves. During peacetime, occasional reports were sent by the ambassador in Paris, usually concerning the size of the army or projected summer maneuvers.<sup>207</sup>

Besides reporting on the various Bourbon naval activities and general advocacy, some ambassadors choose to go out of their way in aiding their country. Rochford often interceded on behalf of British citizens who had gotten into legal trouble in France.<sup>208</sup> Rochford also paid more

---

<sup>205</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 138.

<sup>206</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 240.

<sup>207</sup> Black, *British Diplomats and Diplomacy 1688-1800*, 140.

<sup>208</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 202.



attention than most ambassadors to commercial matters, one one occasion providing London with a detailed appraisal of French trade after only two months in Paris.<sup>209</sup>

When Rochford took over as southern Secretary, Lord Harcourt was Britain's ambassador to France, who would later be replaced by Lord Stormont in 1772. Besides the regular diplomatic correspondents of the ambassadorial posts, Rochford also received and answered reports from the various British consuls stationed throughout his administrative realm. He regularly interacted with consuls stationed in Lisbon, Cadiz, Madrid, Cartagena, Malaga, Seville, Alicante, Corunna, Barcelona, Majorca, the Canary Islands, Nice, Genoa, Leghorn, Cagliari, Naples, Venice, Marseilles, Zante, Fez, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. These consuls regarded Rochford as the most sympathetic secretary of state they had had for years since he actually answered their letters. This was because his experience at Madrid, Turin, and Paris had shown him how valuable consuls were for up-to-date intelligence on Bourbon shipping movements and naval preparations.<sup>210</sup>

Another difficult part associated with being a strong ambassador was dealing with Parliament and defending the policies that the ministry had set out. Parliament's importance arose from two principal factors: its own constitutional role and the political situation during the 1760's and 1770's. After 1688 it had come to assume a general supervisory role over Britain's diplomacy, which had before been solely a responsibility of the crown. Foreign policy was an important part of government business, and therefore ministers were expected to defend it in Parliament, especially any business concerning relations with France and Spain, the two most important rivals.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 199.

<sup>210</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 358.

<sup>211</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 20.

Parliament's oversight of foreign policy partly explains why negotiations were transacted through Britain's ambassadors and ministers abroad. Occasionally, important decisions were conducted or even initiated in London, either at a moment of special crisis or, more usually, to evade Parliament's scrutiny. Secretaries of State believed that Britain's point of view would be more vigorously and accurately represented to a foreign government by one of her own diplomats. This had the additional advantage of ensuring that British policy was sealed in formal written instructions which could be laid before Parliament should the ministry's conduct come under attack.<sup>212</sup>

Parliament's influence especially after the Seven Years War was fundamentally negative. It inhibited and on occasions actually prevented ministers from adopting innovative policies, particularly toward the Bourbon powers of France and Spain. In 1772-3 Rochford abandoned attempts at Anglo-French reconciliation, mostly because of his fear of a hostile reaction from the House of Commons.<sup>213</sup> Even relatively minor concessions to France, for example over the fortifications at Dunkirk, were made all but impossible by the hostility of the House of Commons towards France, whom they considered as the 'national enemy'. Parliament's influence on diplomacy should not be exaggerated, as ministers sometimes exaggerated their own difficulties with the House of Commons as a compensation for their own ineptitude. Yet the importance of Parliament was not made up. It often served as an affirmation for ministers of their strategic diplomatic plans and was an obstacle to innovation. In addition, the tone of parliamentary

---

<sup>212</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 23.

<sup>213</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 21.

debates and their divisions that they revealed, together with their notorious circulation in continental Europe contributed to Britain's decline in the eyes of Europe.<sup>214</sup>

This was equally true of the final influence on British foreign policy, that of public opinion. It is dangerous and perhaps inaccurate to talk of 'public opinion' in the eighteenth century, even in the 1760's and 70's yet there was clearly significant interest in foreign affairs outside of Westminster palace, especially among the commercial classes in London and in the provinces. Newspapers and periodicals printed considerable amounts of foreign news, probably because continental events affected British business. Either way, while the interest is present, it is much more difficult to prove that the public actually exerted any real influence.<sup>215</sup>

While all these things make the ambassador's job difficult, most of the men positioned in Paris to represent their country served their purpose. This ability to succeed seems to be contingent upon their personal and social relations with their French counterparts as well as their connections within the British aristocracy. Most of these ambassadors were able to cultivate an existing spy network through their personal relations as well as gathering intelligence through other elite friends. Furthermore, the ambassadors posted in Paris as well as their boss, the Secretary of State, could entirely dominate British foreign policy with France by themselves. Usually the relationship between these two men was very important in shaping the relations with France. If the ambassador was particularly weak, like Lord Harcourt, then the southern Secretary of State in charge of them would often exert themselves more fully, as both Rochford and Stormont did during their tenure in the position. However, it seems that these two men were the only really influential ambassadors from a negotiating standpoint on foreign policy, as they were

---

<sup>214</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 22.

<sup>215</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 22.

either driving it as Secretaries of State or were uniquely individualistic ambassadors in their prime able to withstand French influences on them and negotiate well. However, both Dorset and Gower were not bad negotiators, they were just not particularly skilled, but they were also able to leverage their social and personal relations to impact British foreign policy in this period.

Rochford seems to be the most talented of all the ambassadors appointed during this time period. Some have even credited Rochford with the almost single-handed rescue of British foreign policy from near-collapse in 1768. To judge from their correspondence, British diplomats abroad heaved a collective sigh of relief when Rochford was appointed secretary of state.<sup>216</sup> At last they were being directed by a fellow diplomat who knew the problems and pitfalls of the business at first hand. Rochford insisted on regular correspondence and prompt replies to dispatches, while previously some British diplomats had been left for months without advice for London. Rochford now kept them fully informed and morale rose accordingly. Foreign diplomats in London found Rochford more accessible and far better informed about Europe than his predecessors. He had been corresponding while ambassador at Paris with other key British diplomats, especially those in the northern courts, and these personal connections he had built up enabled him to pick up the reins of the northern secretaryship very quickly.<sup>217</sup>

The same leadership was possessed by Lord Stormont. Scott wrote of Stormont's influence, and even credits Stormont's ability to create an impact on policy due to his direct social influence on others:

“The ambassador played an important part in Britain's foreign policy throughout the first half of the American War. His proximity to the French government, together with his wide experience, gave his opinions considerable influence. He was, by now, the leading

---

<sup>216</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, ix.

<sup>217</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, ix.

British diplomat of his generation. Though his views were conventional, his dedication and ability were unquestioned. British diplomats had always exerted indirect influence through their dispatches, which shaped the context within which foreign policy was determined. Stormont's influence was more direct and also extremely unusual...His reports from Paris had earlier been circulated as formal instructions to other British diplomats, and they continued to shape official thinking. Many of the assumptions behind British policy towards France originate in his dispatches."<sup>218</sup>

Rochford's settlement of the Canada Bills dispute is another example of his professional approach to diplomacy, and his persistence and perseverance as secretary of state. He shrewdly framed his demands in terms of good faith and national honor, arguments he knew would carry the most weight with Louis XV.<sup>219</sup> Stormont was successful in his tenure simply because everyone respected him so much that they took his advice, and he was then able to shape policy around his own way of thinking. Lord Harcourt and Lord Granville seem to have been the products of their prospective Secretaries of State, coincidentally Rochford and Stormont respectively. Both men were quite timid in nature, were well liked by their peers, but just did not have the diplomatic experience and shrewdness that Rochford and Stormont possessed, which is evident by their short terms in office and lack of significant accomplishment. Something can be said about their ability to be appointed to the most prestigious diplomatic posting abroad, but it is disappointing that neither one took full advantage of it. Rochford and Stormont were simply the diplomatic heavy weights of their time, and the rest of the diplomatic service recognized it. These two were able to heavily influence British foreign policy while being powerful individuals and not just conforming to the common British anti-France policy stance.

However it is important to note the importance of the court gossip and the social relations that these ambassadors built during their terms in Paris. There exists an undercurrent of elite

---

<sup>218</sup> Scott, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of the American Revolution*, 237.

<sup>219</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 365.

status throughout dispatches in this period, although it is generally never fully fleshed out. Only in a few dispatches do the ambassadors make any mention of their social activities. These comments would usually take the form of light banter over dinner or some other social event, with an ambassador casually bringing up some issue or other and the French minister would politely assure the ambassador that the matter was being taken care of. Unfortunately, it seems that the ambassadors did not think it necessary to include these events or discussions in their formal dispatches. This was probably due to their upbringing as members of the aristocracy which taught them that such social events were common, and their elite counterparts in the diplomatic service bureaucracy that they were sending their reports to would assume that such social events were common as well. Usually, any such comments like this would be incredibly useful in determining the effectiveness of their social relations, and therefore their effect on diplomacy, since much of the relationship building between the diplomats and their French counterparts would happen over these social events like dinner, attending the theatre, or gambling. Although such commentary is not present in the formal dispatches, the fact that these elites attended the same social functions in Paris throughout the year (something that Paris was famous for), is indicative of a special bond that could only be shared by these elites. The social grace that these aristocrats could show at such events is another thing that does not garner attention, but it is important nonetheless. If a commoner had been sent to Paris and expected to conduct diplomacy with the French aristocrats, they would have been grossly unprepared to function properly at these social events. This social grace, practiced since birth by the aristocrats, could only come from their small sector of society, and this was crucial to the formation of

relationships, which in turn shaped their formal diplomatic discourse when the ambassadors would attend their meetings with the French ministers.

A good indication of the necessity for higher social ability and grace when dealing with the post at Paris was embodied in the pomp of the court at Versailles. The French court would move from Paris to Versailles each summer. The King of France would take up his royal seat and continue to conduct the affairs of his country, but in Versailles it was accomplished with much more royal pomp and flair. The Duke of Dorset thought to include an instance of Versailles pomp and circumstance that he thought was humorous as an aristocrat, but to a commoner this would probably have thrown them off a bit, further hindering their ability to gracefully and successfully negotiate with the French aristocratic ministers. In a dispatch written January 12, 1786 Dorset wrote:

“I happened yesterday to be at Versailles and during my stay a large body of Savoyards, who had assembled at Paris, arrived there for the purpose of presenting a memorial to the king against an order which the present lieutenant had thought proper to publish respecting them. The number assembled might be computed about two thousand. His Majesty was out a-hunting, and the commanding officer thought proper to have the guard turned out and the avenues leading to Paris lined with troops. The King on his return, passing through the avenues could not conceive what such preparations meant, and on his arrival at Versailles was informed of the cause of them, upon which he immediately ordered the guards from their posts, and laughing exceedingly at the great precautions taken...I mention this circumstance to your Lordship which may serve to give you some idea of the good disposition of the King.”<sup>220</sup>

While this instance may have appeared simple to Dorset, as he leads his dispatch with ‘I happened yesterday to be at Versailles’, such a grand procession to welcome back the king (without his orders) to deal with a minor matter like a group from Savoy bringing him a memorial speaks volumes. It makes one wonder what sort of processions could be held at

---

<sup>220</sup> Browning, *Despatches From Paris 1784-90*, 94.

Versailles for the more serious matters on the king's command. This demonstrates that social standing and social grace, only found in the aristocratic class at this time, was absolutely vital to diplomatic negotiations, especially between rival nations like Britain and France during this period.

## CONCLUSION

In the research I conducted for this project, various strengths and weaknesses of the different ambassadors were revealed. Each one had their own specialties and techniques, however most of them were able to successfully leverage their social and personal connections as men, as high ranking officials, and most importantly as members of the elite class in society. Lord Rochford was the most successful in doing this, as he was feared by the French Foreign Minister, Choiseul, who had a strong reputation for trickery during his tenure in office, and was able to withstand his influence while still being an impressive negotiator in his own right.

Rochford wrote a scathing letter of Choiseul in late 1767 writing:

“He has the peculiar Talent of gaining the Confidence of those he treats with: the Foreign Ministers to a Man adore him, and if I except the Dutch and Sardinian Ambassadors, and Russian Minister, All the others (I presume I need not except myself) are entirely his Creatures, led and governed by him. M. de Souza, the Portugal minister, who I have watched most attentively...is I am afraid devoted enough to him to listen to any Scheme.”<sup>221</sup>

Lord Stormont was also very influential in his own right as a negotiator, and it seems that no one could have prevented the French lust for revenge in the lead up to their entrance in the American Revolution. Lord Harcourt was a very unskilled negotiator, and Lord Rochford often was forced

---

<sup>221</sup> Rice, *Archival Sources for the Life and Career of the Fourth Earl of Rochford*, 211.



to compromise for his weakness by giving him explicit instructions for dealing with Choiseul. Lord Dorset was an average negotiator, but an excellent gatherer of intelligence, and his social skills warranted him an invitation to most social events in Paris. This surely boosted his impact upon British-French relations as he was constantly in the same networks as the handful of people controlling French foreign policy. Lord Gower was able to maintain Dorset's spy network to a degree, but it seems that he was really there for pleasure. He had more wealth than anybody in Britain at the time, and his position as ambassador was probably due to political or financial support in Parliament given that he had absolutely no prior ambassadorial experience and he was given the French posting after Dorset was removed shortly following the start of what would become the French Revolution.

Most importantly in each of the terms of the most successful ambassadors during this period, Rochford, Stormont, and Dorset, was their ability to utilize their personal and social connections in such a way that manifested in a difference in British foreign policy. Rochford began the very successful spy network in Paris, and utilized it in order to send back many detailed reports on the French court, army activity, and naval activity. He even petitioned King George III into allowing him a set allowance in order to make bribes and gather such information, and Rochford was the first to receive such an allowance. Stormont effectively copied the network that Rochford used, while Dorset expanded the realm of British espionage to include his personal friends and other members of the elite in France. His good connection in Boulogne provided him with good intelligence on several occasions. Furthermore, Dorset was able to utilize even his private servants in order to gather intelligence. In one instance, two of his servants were on an errand on the same day of the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and were

pulled into the action. When they returned, they informed Dorset of the details of the event and in this way Dorset was able to debunk myths around death tolls and other figures that were making their way into French newspapers and gossip. The information that each of these men provided to the crown of England ensured that they were always a step ahead of their European counterparts when it came to news of French activities, and they would be able to adjust their policies accordingly. Added to this is the the close proximity of Britain itself relative to some of the other European nations to France and the sophisticated network of messengers that was established under Rochford, and you have a system that not only knew more about French intentions and activities, but could react to them more quickly and effectively. These personal networks, either between these elites or with commoners that they befriended or employed had enormous impacts upon British foreign policy in relation to France. During an era where messages could take weeks to receive and ambassadors abroad either did nothing or had to take initiative on their own, the ambassadors during this period were able to not only represent their country well, but expand the impact and scope of British intelligence and British foreign policy in relation to France by way of their social and political networks that they formed by themselves.