

**HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS
COMMISSION; REPORT ON THE
MANUSCRIPTS OF F. W.
LEYBORNE-POPHAM, ESQ., OF
LITTLECOTE, CO. WILTS**

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F. W. LEYBORNE-POPHAM

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Littlecote collection includes two quite distinct series of papers, although it has been thought more convenient and also more interesting to arrange them together chronologically. The value of the collection, setting aside certain documents, which will be spoken of later, is mostly departmental, the one series being chiefly concerned with army matters, and the other with naval affairs.

To take the latter first, the Popham papers, properly so called, consist, with a few exceptions, of the correspondence of Colonel Edward Popham, one of the three "Generals at Sea" for the Commonwealth. He was the fifth and youngest son of Sir Francis Popham of Littlecote, and grandson of Sir John, the Lord Chief Justice of the end of Elizabeth's reign.

There are two letters addressed to Sir John Popham in the collection, the first being on the working of the new poor laws, which, from certain expressions in it, would seem to relate to the Act of 1597 rather than to the more noted one of 1601. The other letter is from Balliol College, Oxford, concerning the benefactions to the College of Peter Blundell, the founder of Tiverton grammar school (*pp.* 1, 3). A later letter, relating to Blundell's foundations at Cambridge (*p.* 80), alludes to the fact that Sir John was one of his trustees.

Edward Popham himself was born about 1610, was the captain of the ill-fated *5th Whelp*, cast away in 1637, received his commission as colonel of a regiment of foot (with which he was to march into the West to Sir Thomas Fairfax) in May, 1645 (*p.* 5), and on February 27, 1648-9, was appointed by the Council of State one of the three "Commissioners for ordering and commanding the fleet during the coming year," the other two being Colonels Robert Blake and Richard Deane (*p.* 9).

His elder brother, Colonel Alexander, was an active Parliament man, and a member of the Council of State.

The Admiralty papers of this period are so fully dealt with in the Calendars of State Papers, that large numbers of documents in this collection may be passed over with a mere mention. There are many of the original orders of the Council of State to their Generals at Sea, signed by Bradshaw, as President, but these have mostly been calendared from the copies in the order books. There are also numerous letters from Robert Coytmor, clerk of the Admiralty, and others, concerning the details of Admiralty and Navy routine, which throw no new light on the subject, and are therefore omitted. But there remain many interesting letters, especially those from the Generals themselves, and there are also portions of Col. Edward Popham's journal, which give a good deal of fresh information.

In March, 1649, the fleet put to sea under Col. Popham's command, and sailed westward. His journal (*p.* 11) gives their movements up to April 16, when there is a break in the narrative. A copy of it was probably sent up to London at that date, as a letter from the Council of State on May 1st acknowledges its receipt (*see Cal. S.P. Dom. undated*). The later part of the paper (for the journal is on loose sheets, not in book form) takes the fleet to Kinsale, which was reached on the 1st of May. Here it was determined that Blake and Deane should remain to block up Prince Rupert's ships, then in the harbour, while Popham returned to London to report to the Council of State and obtain supplies. The fleet had not only to block Kinsale, but to "keep in the rebels" at Waterford and Wexford, Sir George Ayscue having declared, in response to the Admirals' appeals, that he could send no help from Dublin. In June, the want of victuals was so great that Deane followed Popham back to England, but the latter was now able to announce that he had nearly finished his business, and hoped, before leaving London, to get the constant establishment of the Navy settled, and then they would not hereafter "be so to seek for money" when it was needed. Col. Deane urged him also, if possible, to procure the sending of some considerable force into Munster, in order to gain Kinsale, and to withdraw the enemy from Dublin, then besieged by Ormond. Ayscue had already written from Dublin to the same effect.

Cromwell was, just at this time, setting out for Ireland, and there was some little mystery or uncertainty as to where he

intended to take ship. Coytmor wrote to Popham that he had been obliged to remind the Council of State that the Generals of the fleet must know, in order to provide a convoy (*p.* 20). In the same letter he mentions a report that all the Parliament ships were beaten and sunk, and that Rupert was "triumphant before Dublin, blocking up the place," but no credit was given to these "feigned stories."

A few days later, Sir Henry Vane, having heard from Col. Deane that he must have 2,000*l.* more for victualling, wrote to say that he thought the request very extraordinary, as the estimate was according to the sum given by Col. Popham. Deane showed the letter to Popham, who at once wrote to Vane that his demand had been for money to carry on the work of victualling, but by no means to cover it. "There is not a place in England," he says, "that you can victual in under 1*l.* 5*s.* a man a month . . . for though some things be cheaper in one place than another, yet other things are dearer; if beef be cheap, pork, pease and fish are dearer, and so in other provisions, that there is very little difference of victualling in any place unless we could buy in all places those things which are best cheap, which we have not time to do" (*p.* 22). Coytmor has written, he goes on to say, urging him to step up and perfect the business of the winter guard himself with the Council, but this he cannot understand, as the list is already given in and has been presented to Parliament. "But it is not unusual for Mr. Coytmor to mistake winter for summer," and he may mean that the Council of State must be reminded about money for the next summer guard, concerning which he will write presently. To this Vane, in evident alarm, replies, "pray let our winter guard be out, and this summer's service first over, before you mention the next summer's fleet, lest we be overwhelmed with the prospect of charge before we be able to overcome it." He fears there will be increased difficulty in finding money "for the 100,000*l.* intended us from Deans' and Chapters' lands we have received as yet but 20,000*l.* of, and now the necessities of Ireland are such that the Council think they shall be forced to put a stop upon the remainder for the present, hoping to provide timely enough for the mariners' wages," wherein, he doubts, they will be slow, unless quickened by Popham in the matter (*p.* 22).

In this same July, 1649, the Navy Commissioners write indignantly to Popham that they hear from the Admiralty Committee (whose letter is amongst the State Papers at the Record Office) that he has intimated a mistake of 11,000*l.* in their estimates. They wonder much why he should apply to the Council without in the least acquainting them with their supposed error, and retort by informing him that they have found his estimate miscast as regards the beer, but took no notice of it, being more desirous to rectify their own errors (if any) than to divulge those of others (*p.* 23). Col. Popham's answer, assuring them that he had only written a private letter to Sir Henry Vane, and did not even know that their committee was concerned in the matter, is amongst the State Papers.

At the end of July, Col. Deane tells his brother commander that he has been to Bristol, to confer with the Lord General, and is now at Plymouth, with more load on his back than he can easily carry. He has heard from Blake, who is still on guard at Kinsale, that Rupert's fleet had all gone back to Kinsale town, and that they only kept five of their best sailors to run away with. Deane fears deceit, and hopes they will be closely watched (*p.* 24). A few days later he complains to Popham that Coytmor evidently opens and reads all their letters to each other, even when they send public despatches at the same time to the Council of State, which conduct he judges "very unfit."

There are many allusions in these papers to the difficulties which the authorities had with the commanders and crews of their vessels. In the first place, they were often dilatory in their preparations, liking well to loiter about London or Portsmouth, instead of making all haste to put to sea. In this July, 1649, Popham had evidently been complaining on this head, for Coytmor assures him that they are to have a sharp check for their neglect, and that two of them have promised to be ready forthwith (*p.* 20). Two or three weeks later, Coytmor prays Popham to write a "sharp letter" to Captain Wilkinson of the *Increase*, who, having boarded two vessels and found them full of arms and ammunition for Scotland, let them go because he had no order to stay Scotch vessels; a proceeding which Coytmor stigmatizes as weakness and folly, if indeed there is not more knavery than folly in it (*p.* 23).

On August 8th, Coytmor sends details of a tumult on the *Tiger*, Captain Peacocke's ship, which is only casually alluded to in the State Papers. Some difference between the ship's master and the boatswain grew to such a height that it raised a mutiny, the common men siding with the boatswain. The Captain called a Council of War, which so inflamed the "brable" that he was forced to take his ship into Yarmouth, where he was in danger every hour that the men would run away with her to the enemy. Captain Coppin was there as a guard, but he was not "considerable" against such a ship as the *Tiger*, and they did not dare to call in the help of the land soldiers, for fear of further inflaming the seamen. Coytmor considered Capt. Peacocke to be in fault, and declared that the quarrel arose in consequence of his having gone ashore to see his wife. Indeed, he held the wives responsible for all the disasters, including the loss of the *Heart* and the possible loss of the *Tiger*. Captain Harrison, for instance, "who was wont to be the most vigilant in writing of all the commanders," had not been heard from for a month, and about a month ago his wife went down to him. If the captains were permitted to have their wives aboard, sore damage to the State would, he believed, assuredly follow (*pp.* 25, 26).

The outbreak on the *Tiger* having been subdued and the ring-leader and principal actors secured on shore, the ship put out to sea again (*p.* 34), but further trouble soon arose, in consequence of the six months' term of service of the merchant ships employed by the State being increased to eight (*pp.* 26, 34), a measure which gave great dissatisfaction both to the captains and their crews. The *Jonas*, Captain Wiltshire, and the *Elizabeth*, Captain Coppin, both refused to stay out any longer, and the State Papers mention the *Dolphin* as doing the same. The *Jonas* was ordered to be paid off, the wages of the ring-leaders suspended, and their persons, if need be, secured. Capt. Wiltshire and six of his men were afterwards ordered to be tried by a Council of War. In the autumn, Capt. Ingle ("one of your mad captains," as Coytmor calls him to Popham), followed suit, declaring that his ship was no winter ship, and that all his victuals were spent (*p.* 44). Captain Holland of the *Falcon* had lately made the same protest and had been discharged.

The ships' commanders were also complained against by the

merchants, but on a different ground, viz., for taking pay for the conveying of their vessels. "It will be very fit," Vane writes to Popham, "you and me have our thought to set down some settled course in this matter" (p. 47).

On August 14th, 1649, Col. Popham joined the fleet in the Downs, this time hoisting his flag upon the *Happy Entrance*, perhaps as being commanded by Capt. Badiley (afterwards Rear-Admiral), of whom he had a very high opinion. The narrative of the voyage will be found on pp. 26-34. On p. 37 is a letter from Popham to Sir Henry Vane, in answer to one of September 12th (p. 36), complaining that the Prince's landing in Jersey had not been prevented. Popham defends himself, saying that he had but three ships of any force with him at the time; he is confident, however, that there is not a Holland man-of-war which the Council has given him notice of but he has been aboard of, including, he believes, those very ships before they took in the Prince (p. 38). The next report was that the Prince had not yet reached Jersey at all (p. 39).

The weather at this time seems to have been very stormy, and Coytmor wrote anxiously to Popham, saying that the sooner he could come away from Guernsey with "the two unruly ships" the better, considering the dangers of the place from the many rocks about the islands and the violence of the tides (p. 42).

In Ireland, the weather seems to have rather played the part of a *deus ex machina*, for on August 23 Deane wrote to the Council of State, announcing his arrival at Dublin, and the safe landing of the troops there, after a vain attempt "to recover Munster and the Bay of Kinsale." There was a strong impression abroad at the time that the troops were never intended for Munster at all, in spite of the official statements to that effect. This idea seems to have been unfounded, although it may be questioned whether Lord Inchiquin's sagacity in "purging" the Munster garrisons had not as much to do with the change of plan as the wind had. In any case Cromwell was probably glad enough to have the forces with him. A month later, Col. Deane repeats the assertion that he was intended for the south of Ireland, while defending the Lord Lieutenant's conduct in looking first to the north; and goes on to assure the Council that my Lord and the gentlemen with him were as sensible of the consequence of Kinsale and the ships as they themselves

were, and that four regiments of foot and Ireton with two thousand horse and dragoons were on the point of being sent into Munster when Sir Charles Coote's brother brought news of O'Neill's intentions, whereon the General did not dare to send so large a force southwards, whilst Trim and Drogheda remained in the enemy's hands (*p.* 40).

The criticisms on Cromwell at this time read rather like an inverted version of the proceedings of 1699, when Essex was so severely blamed for not taking Ulster in hand before turning towards the south.

In this same September, Blake tells Popham of Cromwell's offer to him "with much affection" of the Major Generalship of the foot, praying his friend to prevent its coming before Parliament if he can, as he does not wish to waive any resolution of the House, and yet cannot accept it (*p.* 38).

There are a few other notices of the struggle in Ireland—Coytmor's announcement to Sir George Ayscue of the "good news" of the taking of Drogheda (*p.* 43); a list of the garrison there, differing somewhat from those already printed; an account of a "shrewd dispute" of Venables with Lord Montgomery of Ards and Col. Mark Trevor, whereby "the whole forces of the Lord of Ards and that party are quite defunct" (*p.* 45), and of the fight near Arklow Castle, when three thousand of the enemy betook themselves to a bog, and were there all cut off and slain (*pp.* 44, 45); and an interesting letter from Col. Deane upon the taking of Wexford, in which he states that he came to the Bar on the 29th of September, but for seven days it blew so hard that they could land nothing, and in which also he emphasizes the desire of Cromwell to induce the Governor to surrender, and so to save the town (*p.* 47). See also letters on *pp.* 50, 57.

In the proceedings of the Council of State, September 25, 1649 (*see Cal. S.P. Dom. of that date*), there is a reference to the Admiralty Committee of a letter from Ipswich, concerning the exchange of prisoners, and of one from Luke Whittington, the Royalist agent at Dunkirk, but the letters themselves are not amongst the State Papers. Copies of them, however, are in this collection, and some others on the same subject, notably one from the cavalier Captain Amy, declaring that some of his