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Fact-Checking *Dragonfly In Amber*

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Abstract

This paper is the report of a fact-checking exercise for Diana Gabaldon's book *Dragonfly In Amber*.

## Introduction

*Dragonfly In Amber* (1992) is Diana Gabaldon's second book, a sequel to *Outlander* (1991), part of series that presently includes seven books. The *Outlander* series is the tale of Claire Beauchamp Randall Fraser, who accidentally wanders through some standing stones on a trip to Scotland with her husband following their separation during World War II, only to discover that the legends about the stones causing people to travel through time are entirely true. Coming to her senses in 1743, she ends up, after a series of misadventures, married to a Scottish Highlander, Jamie Fraser, for protection from English forces, and is swept up into the intrigues and politics of her new century.

*Dragonfly In Amber* is told two decades after Claire's return to the present, as she tries to explain to her daughter the truth about her ancestry, and the events leading up to the battle on Culloden Moor and the defeat of the Jacobite rebellion, and her abrupt trip back through the stones.

Claire and Jamie are caught up in the mechanizations of the Jacobites, a group of Scots (some of them Jamie's clansmen) seeking the return of James Stuart and his line to the throne of England and Scotland. Claire, with her seeming foresight, knows that the outcome of this Jacobite Rising will be the massacre at Culloden, and she convinces Jamie to join her, journeying from the Paris of Louis XV to the Highlands in an attempt to stop Bonnie Prince Charlie, James Stuart's son, from raising an army against the English crown.

In telling Claire's story, Gabaldon draws on historical figures and events from Scotland, England, and France, creating a long list of verifiable facts that demonstrate her own zeal for research.

## Verified Facts

Gabalton sprinkles historical details throughout the novel, beginning with the Jacobite movement. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1993) contains a long entry on the Jacobites, tracing the movement back to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Their name is taken from the Latin for James (Jacobus), signifying James II, whose line they believed held the claim to the throne by descent and divine right. The movement lasted through the ‘Fifteen and the ‘Forty-Five, the two major attempts in 1715 and 1745 to overthrow the English throne and restore the Jacobean line. Both attempts collapsed, and the movement died out after the failure of the ‘Forty-Five, although *Columbia* states the last of the Jacobean line, Henry Stuart, Cardinal York, lived until 1807.

The ‘Fifteen was an attempt to place James Stuart on the throne. While he does not appear in the book directly, he is referenced by many of the characters; those with Jacobite leanings refer to him as their King (any presumed loyalty to George II, the English King, notwithstanding!). *The Columbia* (1993) confirms his place in the Jacobite line as son of James II, fully named James Francis Edward Stuart (sometimes Stewart), known to the English as the “Old Pretender.”

In the course of Claire and Jamie’s campaign to thwart Charles Stuart, they resort to spying, including stealing letters from the prince, with mixed success, leading to one of Gabaldon’s cleverly disguised facts: “‘What language is that?’ I asked, peering at [the letter]. ‘Polish?’ Charles Stuart’s mother, the late Clementina Sobieski, had been Polish, after all.” (Gabalton 1992). *The Columbia* confirms, in the entry for James Stuart, that he was married in 1719 to a Polish princess by the name of Maria Clementina Sobieski, who was the mother of his children.

Charles Stuart personally appears several times in the course of the novel. Gabaldon (1992) gives his full name as “Prince Charles Edward (Casimir Maria Sylvester) Stuart,” but tracing this given name exactly is difficult, as sources conflict. *Columbia* (1993) gives only “Charles Edward Stuart,” and his common nicknames: “Bonnie Prince Charlie” to his supporters and the “Young Pretender” to the rest – both nicknames are used throughout the novel. *Columbia*’s entry matches that of the *Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1988). *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1998) gives his name as “Charles Edward Louis Philip Casimir Stuart.” This, too, does not match what Gabaldon gives, although it is closer. *Whitaker’s Almanack* has no mention of Charles Stuart, nor his father, and thus cannot be used as a verification source. In order to determine exactly Charles Stuart’s full name, likely a genealogical source or detailed history of Scotland would need to be consulted.

Charles Stuart spent most of his time, prior to the ‘Forty-Five, in Rome, where his father lived, and later France, seeking aid from the French and Spanish. Gabaldon, therefore, sends her characters to Paris, where they find themselves on the periphery of the court of King Louis the XV. One particularly comic scene recounts Jamie’s attendance on the King at his daily *lever*: “Louis awoke punctually at six o’clock every morning. At this hour, the favored few chosen to attend the King’s toilette should be assembled in the antechamber, ready to join the procession of nobles and attendants who were necessary to assist the monarch in greeting the new day...” According to Gabaldon’s description, they did not merely greet the monarch, but performed every personal task for him, as befitting an absolute despot. Unfortunately, none of the works consulted gave a description or even included the *lever*. However, *Cassell’s French-English Dictionary* (1951) includes the following definition: “*lever*: rising, getting up; *levée* (of king).”

Therefore, while a more complete description of the traditional composition of the *lever* were not available in the books consulted, the *lever* itself is confirmed.

Louis XV appears several times, but he is a well-known historical figure and his existence is an accepted fact. Gabaldon, however, also depicts his mistress, Madame Pompadour, presenting her as a fashionable accoutrement during Louis's appearances at Court. *Oxford* (1993) gives her full name as Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, born 1721 and taking on the role of Louis's mistress in 1745, which is the year Claire and Jamie meet her. The *Oxford* describes her thusly: "The people blamed her for the extravagance of the court and the disasters of the Seven Years War, but her political influence has probably been exaggerated." This matches Gabaldon's presentation of her as courtly window dressing, present mostly for her looks.

The story shifts shortly thereafter, as Charles Stuart departs for Scotland in preparation to retake his throne. The first battle of the 'Forty-Five takes place in a small field at Prestonpans:

"I told you before, I don't know that much," [Claire] said. "There was very little written about it in the history books, and I didn't pay a great deal of attention at the time. All I can tell you is that the battle was fought – er, will be fought – near the town of Preston, and so it's called the Battle of Prestonpans..."

"Aye. And?"

I furrowed my brow, trying to recall every last scrap of information... "The Scots win," I said helpfully. (Gabaldon 2005).

Prestonpans occurred just as Gabaldon describes it: a battle occurring on September 21, 1745, 14 kilometers east of Edinburgh, which resulted in a Jacobite victory when Bonnie Prince Charlie's forces routed the English troops in five minutes. (*Oxford* 1988).

The victory was not to last, however, and the British troops were then given over to the Duke of Cumberland. Claire, in recounting her tale, refers to Cumberland by his post-Culloden nickname of “Billy Butcher,” and this, too, is confirmed by the *Columbia* (1993). William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, was the third son of George II and commanded the army in the War of Austrian Succession. Following a defeat by the French at Fontenoy in 1745, he took command of the English forces to put down the Jacobite rising. *Columbia* states “[He] earned the nickname ‘the Butcher’ by his ruthless punishment of the rebels.” (1993).

Seeking more troops, Jamie and Claire were sent by Charles Stuart to beg men from his grandfather, Simon, Lord Lovat. He is presented in such a grand manner that the reader might well assume he is not one of the historical personages Gabaldon presents, but is one of her fictional creations:

Jamie snorted. “I suppose ye can call it that. He took his first wife by a forced marriage. Snatched the Dowager Lady Lovat from her bed in the middle o' the night, married her then and there, and went straight back to bed with her. Still,” he added fairly, “she did later decide she loved him, so maybe he wasna so bad...[But] the Dowager's maids spoke up against him, and Simon was outlawed and had to flee to France.”

Gabaldon’s Lovat delayed, finally sending his son in command of a regiment of his men to the service of the Stuarts – gambling, as Jamie explains, on the hope that he could cast all blame upon his son if the Stuarts lost. Claire is informed by a historian friend at the close of the novel that he was executed for treason, instead.

Lord Simon Fraser, the 11<sup>th</sup> Baron of Lovat was a real person, and he did take his first wife by trickery – after a failed elopement with Amelia, his cousin and daughter of the late ninth baron, he abducted her mother instead. He was outlawed in 1701, but returned, only to betray

the Jacobites in the 'Fifteen, regaining his lands, only to lose them after the 'Forty-Five, for sending his son to fight against the king: "Lovat was captured in hiding, tried by impeachment before the House of Lords, and convicted. He was the last British peer to be executed for high treason. (*Columbia* 1903). He was very much a real person, and of much greater historical importance than his brief appearance in Gabaldon's tale indicates.

The climax of this story is the battle on Culloden Moor, which Claire does not actually witness. In fear for her safety, Jamie convinces her to return to the standing stones in the hopes she'll return to her present and to safety, before returning to the battle to fight. Only from the present does Claire speak of Culloden, which occurred on April 16, 1746, when Cumberland defeated Charles Stuart and the Highland troops, ending the 'Forty-Five and the Jacobite movement. (*Columbia*, 1993). Much like Claire's own recounting, the *Columbia's* citation is rather sparse, but it confirms the date and occurrence of the battle.

#### Unverified Facts

One interesting fact for which no confirmation could be found was a brief reference to something known as "hanged-man's grease." Claire, a nurse in the twentieth century, works as a healer in the eighteenth, and receives a container of ointment from a colleague, unaware of the contents until Jamie enlightens her:

"Jamie!" I felt my voice rising. "What is that stuff?" I grabbed the towel, hastily swabbing at my salve-coated hands.

"Hanged-man's grease," he answered reluctantly.

"H-h-h..." I couldn't even get the word out, and started over. "You mean ..."

Goose bumps rippled up my arms, raising the fine hairs like pins in a cushion.

“Er, aye. Rendered fat from hanged criminals.” He spoke cheerfully, regaining his composure as quickly as I was losing mine. “Verra god for the rheumatism and joint-ill, they say.”

None of the works consulted had any information about the existence of hanged-man’s grease, including several medical dictionaries and the Oxford English Dictionary. Thus, this reference remains unverified.

### Conclusion

Despite its status as a British almanac, Whitaker’s Almanack had no information on the Stuart line past James II. In hindsight, this makes sense: as the remainder of the Stuart line were no longer acknowledged as English royalty, there would be no reason to include them in any official listings.

The *Columbia Encyclopedia* proved to be the most useful of the consulted sources. While its description in the preface as “an American encyclopedia written for American readers” might lead one to expect less information on Scottish and French history, the *Columbia* contained a substantial number of entries for the time period and region, and allowed verification of nearly every fact selected in a single volume.

Using the *Columbia* and the other referenced sources demonstrated an impressive degree of accuracy in Gabaldon’s work, even for minor characters and events that did not have any effect on the overall story.

Verified Facts (List)

1. Jacobite movemnet
2. James Francis Edward Stuart
3. Maria Clementina Sobieski (wife of James Stuart)
4. Charles Edward Stuart
5. *lever*
6. Madame Pompoudor
7. Prestonpens
8. Duke of Cumberland
9. Baron Simon Lovat
10. Culloden



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