

## Seventeenth-Century Scandinavia: The Evidence in the State Papers

Professor Steven Murdoch, University of St Andrews

The *State Papers Online* project provides digital access to two major collections of documents relating to Scandinavia which are housed in The National Archives at Kew. These are SP75 (Denmark) and SP95 (Sweden) and both of these collections are very well known to the scholar of British-Scandinavian relations. It should be observed from the outset that these sets contain information pertaining to many more nations, kingdoms, duchies and cities beyond those implied by the titles of the collections. For example, SP75 more correctly concerns the multiple monarchy of Denmark-Norway. Thus any scholar wishing to discern information pertaining to Norway, Iceland, Greenland or the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, or even the city of Hamburg, will find this collection of particular use. Similarly, SP95 is an invaluable source to scholars of seventeenth century Sweden, but also Finland (then a duchy within Sweden), Pomerania, the secularised German bishoprics of Bremen and Verden and Swedish occupied lands, which variously included parts of Poland-Lithuania, the Baltic countries and parts of the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, this source could provide information to a scholar researching English trade with Elbing (Elbling) in Prussia while the city was under Swedish domination. Of the two collections, SP75 contains more and wider-ranging information than SP95 due in no small part to the formal alliance between the House of Stuart and the House of Oldenburg which dated from 1589.

The collections have been indexed in a traditional manner which reflects much about the where the focus of previous generations of scholars interested in this area lay. For example, specific volumes have been entitled according to the most prominent of the known diplomatic contacts of a given period. Thus, while the early volumes of SP75 are simply given a name such as 'SP75, Vol. 4 1603 Apr-1612 July', later volume names highlight either the diplomatic representative who authored them, or with whom the corpus is largely concerned. In the Danish case this might be volume 22 which considers the author and diplomat Viscount Robert Molesworth. Now that the *State Papers Online* Project has made the entire collection more accessible to scholars, many of the activities of previously overlooked individuals become easier to trace, and the importance of this to British diplomatic history becomes apparent.

It should be remembered that the main focus of the House of Stuart's European diplomacy both before and immediately after the Union of Crowns in 1603 was with Northern Europe in general and Denmark-Norway in particular. That remained the case up until the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick V of the Palatinate in 1613 and the eventual diplomatic quagmire this union would lead Britain into at the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). James's strategy for conducting his Northern diplomacy was through the employment of ambassadors, consuls and agents embedded within the political and military structures of his allies rather than through the more traditional route of sending expensive embassies for singular events. Often these men were sent out of Scotland as boys or young men and they grew up immersed in the court culture, languages and politics of their host nation. Thus, throughout the reign of James VI/I, Northern European diplomacy became the preserve of a trusted group of Scottish diplomats who often served not only as ambassadors of the host nation to Britain but also to third countries.[1] In Poland-Lithuania the role of diplomatic and merchant consul fell to Sir Patrick Gordon in 1610, until he was succeeded by his nephew Francis Gordon in 1625. In Denmark-Norway, Sir Andrew Sinclair of Ravenscraig became a dual ambassador between 1590 and 1625, and he even became a member of the Rigsraad (State Council) of Christian IV. The benefits of the Jacobean policy were certainly effective in terms of cost, but also in the transmission of information between the embedded agents. By way of example we might consider Sir Robert Anstruther and Sir James Spens of Wormiston.[2] Anstruther served as another implanted ambassador in Denmark-Norway having arrived as a page in 1598 to understudy Sinclair and before serving as dual ambassador until he retired in 1639. His relative, Spens, was both an officer in the Swedish army and a dual Stuart-Vasa ambassador from 1605 until his death in 1632.[3] By looking to just one set of events concerning Anstruther and Spens in 1612 we can reveal the important work of the subjects themselves, cast light on almost forgotten elements of Jacobean diplomacy and reveal by implication the importance of both Scandinavian monarchies to the House of Stuart. This episode also highlights the benefit of consulting both collections of Scandinavian State Papers together rather than separately.

In 1612 the closest ally of James VI/I remained his brother-in-law, Christian IV of Denmark-Norway. The monarchical alliance was cemented when James married Anna of Denmark in 1589 and the union ensured Denmark-Norway remained the closest ally of the House of Stuart until the execution of Charles I in 1649.[4] There were military and commercial benefits to both dynasties through this alliance, but on occasion there were also testing times. One of these arose when Denmark-Norway and Sweden engaged in the Kalmar War (1611-1613). From his base in Denmark, Anstruther informed his colleagues in Britain about the progress of the war, which initially went quite well for the Danes. At this time Sweden had limited resources available for military expenses due to an ongoing conflict between the contesting Swedish and Polish branches of the House of Vasa.[5] and Anstruther informed King James's Latin secretary, Sir Thomas Lake, that the Swedes could barely muster a serious fighting force to confront the much stronger Danish army then besieging Kalmar. However, while James strove to meet his military obligations to Christian IV, he simultaneously aided Sweden in her on-going conflict with Poland-Lithuania and in so doing walked a diplomatic tightrope. Thus, Anstruther made it clear to Spens that while British soldiers in Danish service could be employed anywhere by Christian IV, those destined for Sweden could not be deployed against the Danish king's forces and were only for use against Poles and Muscovites.[6] It has been established that several thousand Scottish troops were sent to Sweden during this period, with Sir James Spens being promoted as 'General of British' to command them while curiously still serving as a British ambassador.[7] Simultaneously Lord Willoughby mustered a largely English force to take to Denmark to fight against the Swedes.[8] In essence this meant that many Scottish soldiers in the Swedish army were in danger of facing their fellow Britons sent by James to aid Denmark-Norway. In July 1612, Anstruther wrote a letter to Spens regarding the possible implications of this on Anglo-Scottish relations:

honourable brother, if this mater be not speedelie looked unto, it is lyk to breed a graite inconvenience betuix the contries of England and Scotland, and it is to be feared at if ther be a day of battell, at then the English and Scots will cout on [an]others throths, and by report afore my coming unto the leager, ther haith passeth some message alreadie betwixt some of the nations.  
[9]

Given the large numbers of Scots serving in the Swedish army and the recruiting drive underway in England for the Danes, these concerns had a very real foundation. Indeed, the arming of both sides was a delicate matter which required a skilled diplomatic response from King James. When James dispatched Anstruther and Spens back to Scandinavia in 1612, it is clear that the two men travelled together as far as Elsinore where Anstruther met with Danish councillors while Spens continued on to Sweden. The anonymous memorial which relates this service is confusingly headed 'Germany' and in entirety simply states

Germany 1612. Sir James Spence was employ'd in Sweden (as r Robert Anstruther in Denmark) to further the treaty of peace between the two princes of Danmarke and Sweden".[10] (Manuscript)

Nonetheless, from other documents in *State Papers Online*, and supplemented by archival sources elsewhere, we can complete the actual picture of events.

Once in Denmark, Anstruther reported to King James on the strength of the Danish forces and the weakness of the Swedes, and also related rumours that the King of Sweden was dead.[11] It seems clear that the Danes had the upper hand, but were either unwilling or unable to press forward their advantage against the successor to Karl IX, the young Gustav II Adolf, the man who would later earn the epithet 'The Lion of the North' for his campaigns in Germany on behalf of the Protestants of Europe.[12] This gave all sides an excuse to pause and call a truce, resulting in a conference that was held at Knäred. During the negotiations which followed, Sir James Spens and Sir Robert Anstruther corresponded and discoursed with each other on behalf of the warring nations; Spens negotiated for Sweden while his kinsman Anstruther represented Denmark-Norway while both held accreditation as British ambassadors.[13] In a bid to speed up the process the two diplomats themselves exchanged sensitive letters. Using the diplomatic means at his disposal, Anstruther sent an agent into Sweden accompanied by a trumpeter, whose

presence signalled that this man was on a diplomatic errand and thus not to be interfered with. The purpose of this mission was to find out from Spens what the mind of the Swedish king was in regard to the proposals for peace.[14] On the same day he wrote a more detailed letter to King James in which he outlined the terms by which Christian might consider negotiations, the main point being that the Swedes had to make the first move in such a direction, not least due to their military weakness. Indeed Christian had expressed feeling snubbed by the Swedes as they had not written to him already.[15] Although this is technically true, the Council of Sweden (Riksråd) had actually written to their counterparts in Denmark (Rigsraad) in January 1612.[16] Nonetheless, within days of Anstruther's agent being sent to Spens with information about the need for direct royal correspondence, Gustav II Adolf made the required move and wrote directly to the King of Denmark.[17] Thereafter Anstruther was able to send transcripts of Christian IV's response to Gustav II Adolf, which he had copied out and translated into Scots[18] to allow Spens to be fully appraised of the official Danish position.[19] Another letter from Anstruther to Spens noted the safe receipt of a copy of the letter from Gustav II Adolf to Christian IV, thus exposing the trade in royal letters as a two-way affair.[20]

The roles played by Anstruther and Spens in breaking the deadlock between the two Scandinavian monarchs was well understood both at the time and subsequently by historians. Once the doors were opened in this way, Christian wrote directly to both Gustav II Adolf and the Swedish commissioners in September 1612.[21] and Copies of these letters, and those from the King of Sweden to his counterpart in Denmark-Norway, were sent back to London to keep King James updated.[22] James responded to such news by encouraging Spens to bring the negotiations to a speedy conclusion.[23] In Spens' response he is emphatic that he had, up to that point, been able to convince the Swedes to conduct only a defensive war and had, indeed, arranged the opening of the royal dialogue between the Scandinavian kings and the forwarding of the correspondence to London. However, he also said that the Swedes, feeling that they had given Christian the honour he required, were about to embark on an offensive campaign to recover their losses, all the while hoping that James might do more to persuade Christian that negotiations without a cessation of hostilities was unlikely to end the war.[24] The fact that Gustav II Adolf wrote to King James the following day is probably not a coincidence.[25] The conference at Knäred continued throughout the winter of 1612 and a formalised peace was concluded within months in January 1613. Within six months of their mission to Scandinavia, Anstruther and Spens had broken the political deadlock, got the two monarchs talking directly to each other and actually helped to negotiate a treaty which they were able to guarantee by the word of King James himself.[26] and Both Scandinavian monarchs formally thanked James for his mediation and particularly his diligent ambassadors.[27] The event was widely celebrated even in English-language broadsheets[28] and the full extent of James' successes here had implications for his role as mediator in a number of European conflicts thereafter. For example, early in 1614 James VI/I was again asked by Christian IV to arbitrate on his behalf, this time in the Danish dispute with the city of Lübeck. During his embassy to Lübeck in 1615 Anstruther continued the mediation begun promisingly by Sir Andrew Sinclair, and once more proved influential in resolving Christian's disputes peacefully.[29] and Both Spens and Anstruther remained ambassadors in Scandinavia and, in Anstruther's case, also to the Holy Roman Empire, the Dutch Republic and a number of city states thereafter. The communication between the two ambassadors also continued and can be followed in both State Papers Online and other similar collections of diplomatic correspondence, such as those of the Swedish Chancellor and Regent, Axel Oxenstierna.[30] However, the Anstruther-Spens mission of 1612 demonstrates the opportunities presented by the State Papers Online Project in particular. They show that not confining a search to simply one stream of State Papers gives a more complete understanding of a particular episode, and they also bring into sharp focus the important work done by lesser known, but hugely important diplomats who have only recently come to our attention.

### **Appendix: The Problem of Hamburg**

As has become apparent elsewhere, SP75 (Denmark) contains an important group of documents for the study of British-Danish relations, but there are some problems. Some years appear to be missing from this collection and information from them is sometimes found in collections pertaining to other regions or the city of Hamburg. The English Merchant Adventurers were based in Hamburg and throughout the period the city also played host to British Ambassadors whose official embassies were to Denmark-Norway. The reasons for this are several, not least that the status of Hamburg was contested. Although it was a 'Free Hanse' city, Hamburg had technically fallen under the over-lordship of the Oldenburg kings of Denmark-Norway in the

sixteenth century, albeit the city frequently contested this development and preferred to see itself as either independent, or at least as an Imperial city.[31] Nonetheless, when Robert Anstruther served as resident ambassador to Denmark, he was usually actually based in Hamburg throughout the 1620s and 1630s. His diplomatic letters are thus filed under SP75 (Denmark), as are documents relating to the Merchant Adventurers. During the Danish-Hamburg war of the 1630s, the city sought to assert its independence and in this period British diplomats such as Sir Thomas Roe and Joseph Avery continued to represent the same diplomatic interest (Britain in Denmark and Hamburg), but numerous important letters are filed in SP81 (Germany).[32] This contradicts the descriptor for this collection which states that Hamburg is excluded from the series and many further items pertinent to Denmark-Norway are also contained in it.[33] Perhaps surprisingly, these even include letters from Christian IV himself.[34] Obviously, more can also be found in SP16, a collection which contains numerous records pertinent to Denmark-Norway. For example ambassadorial instructions were issued to Anstruther to convey news of the death of James VI and I.[35] These documents also include details of the degree of funding Anstruther brought to help fund British forces sent to Denmark in support of the king of Denmark.[36] Even more material can be gleaned from the rest of the State Papers Domestic series which contains similar information.[37]

## Citation

Seven Murdoch, 'Seventeenth-Century Scandinavia: The Evidence in the State Papers', *State Papers Online, 1509–1714*, Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd, 2011

## Notes

[1] The full implications for British diplomacy through this policy after 1603 is discussed in Steve Murdoch, 'Diplomacy in Transition; Stuart-British Diplomacy in Northern Europe, 1603–1618' in A.I. Macinnes, T. Riis and F.G. Pedersen, eds., *Ships, Guns and Bibles in the North Sea and Baltic States* (East Linton, 2000), pp.93–138.

[2] These men are often referred to as half-brothers by historians and certainly always called each other 'brother' in correspondence. In fact there was only a fictive relationship as Spens was brought up by Sir John Anstruther of that ilk who married Spens' mother, Margaret Learmonth, after the death of his father, David Spens of Wormiston.

[3] For James Spens' operation of a spy network within Britain, Sweden and Poland see S. Murdoch, *Network North: Scottish Kin, Commercial and Covert Associations in Northern Europe, 1603–1750* (Leiden, 2006), 251–279. For his diplomatic correspondence to the Swedish chancellor Axel Oxenstierna see Arne Jönsson, ed., *Letters of Sir James Spens and Jan Rutgers* (Stockholm, 2007). Full biographies of all British and Irish ambassadors, agents, consuls and officers operating in Northern Europe at this time can be found in A. Grosjean and S. Murdoch, *The Scotland, Scandinavian and Northern European Biographical Database*, available online at: [www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne)

[4] S. Murdoch, *Britain, Denmark-Norway and the House of Stuart, 1603–1660* (East Linton, 2003).

[5] SP 75/4, ff.316 and 318. Anstruther to Sir Thomas Lake, June 1612.

[6] Swedish Riksarkiv [SRA], Anglica V. Robert Anstruther to James Spens, 18 July 1612.

[7] Alexia Grosjean, *An Unofficial Alliance: Scotland and Sweden, 1569–1654* (Leiden, 2003), pp.31–38.

[8] S. Murdoch, *Britain, Denmark-Norway and the House of Stuart, 1603–1660* (East Linton, 2003), p.190.

[9] SRA, Anglica 5. Anstruther to Spens, 18 July 1612.

[10] SP 95/1, f.217, 1612.

[11] SP 75/4, f.314, Anstruther to King James, 8 June 1612.

[12] Gustav II Adolf is often referred to by in English by the Latin rendering of his name 'Gustavus Adolphus'. Recent scholars of Sweden writing in English use his name as given. His full name was actually Gustav Adolf Vasa and he was Sweden's second Vasa king with the Christian name of Gustav, hence the numeral after his first name and not his middle name.

[13] SP 75/5, f.3. Christian IV to Anstruther, 8 August 1612.

[14] SP 75/4, f.320, Anstruther to Lake, 5 July 1612.

[15] SP 75/4, f.322, 5 July 1612. Anstruther to King James.

[16] SP 75/4, f.295. The States of Sweden to those of Denmark, 1 January 1612.

[17] SP 95/1, f.191. Gustav II Adolf to Christian IV, 8 July 1612.

[18] In this period the state language of Scotland was Scots (not to be confused with Gaelic). Scots, also known as Scottish, is a Germanic tongue on the same linguistic continuum as English and was one of the languages Elizabeth I is said to have mastered. The best article on Scots in the context of a diplomatic language is given in Dauvit Horsbroch, 'Nostra Vulgari Lingua: Scots as a European Language, 1500-1700' in *Scottish Language: The Journal of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies* (1999), Number 18, pp.1-16. A version on available on-line at:  
[www.scots-online.org/airticles/eurlang.htm](http://www.scots-online.org/airticles/eurlang.htm).

[19] SRA, Anglica 5. Anstruther to Spens, 17 July 1612.

[20] SRA, Anglica 5. Anstruther to Spens, 18 July 1612.

[21] SP 95/1, ff.202 and 204. Christian IV to Commissioners and Gustav II Adolf, 18 September 1612.

[22] SP 95/1, f.208. Gustav II Adolf to Christian IV, 8 October 1612.

[23] SP 95/1, f.199. King James to Spens, 17 September 1612.

[24] SP 95/1, f.212. Spens to King James, 11 October 1612.

[25] SP 95/1, f.214. Gustav II Adolf to King James.

[26] SP 75/5, ff.63 and 73 The Guarantee of Peace by King James. O. S. Rydberg, ed., *Sverges Traktater med Främmande Magter*, vol. 5:1, 1572-1609 (Stockholm, 1903), 223-224. Kon. Jakob I:s af Storbritannien garanti af den mellan Sverige och Danmark slutna traktaten. Westminster, 2 April 1613.

[27] M. Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus; A History of Sweden, 1611-1632* (2 vols., London, 1962), I, p.70.

[28] Anon., *The Joyful Peace, concluded between the King of Denmarke and the King of Sweden, by the means of our most worthy Sovereigne, James, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britaine, France and Ireland* (London, 1613)

[29] SP SP 82/5 f.172. James to Senate of Lübeck, Feb. 14 1615 and reply from the senate to James SP 82/5 f.173, Mar. 4/14 1615.

[30] SRA, Oxenstiernaregistret [The Register of Oxenstierna Letters] available online at: <http://62.20.57.212/ra/ao/startside.html>  
A free text search [Fritext] reveals some 40 occasions that Spens directly passes on information from or about his step-brother Sir Robert Anstruther beginning in 1615.

[31] The most instructive discussion of this situation from the perspective of all sides (Danish, Hamburg and Imperial) is given by Dr Kathrin Zickermann in chapter one of her thesis 'Across the German Sea' (University of St Andrews, 2009).

[32] SP 81/45, f.244. Roe to Coke, 12 April 1639.

[33] The National Archives series description states " Prussia, and Hamburg and the Hanse Towns are excluded, however, and Saxony after 1696."

[34] SP 81/46, f.54. Christian IV to Sir Thomas Roe, 18/28 January 1639.

[35] SP 16/521, f.4. April 1 1625 . Secretary Conway to Sir Robert Anstruther.

[36] SP 16/3, f.71, June 11 1625. Lord Treasurer Ley to Secretary Conway.

[37] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Charles I, Mar 1625–Dec 1626, preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office.*, Entry Number: Appendix., [92], Page Number: 539, Date: May 27 1625.

The history of Scandinavia is the history of the geographical region of Scandinavia and its peoples. The region is in northern Europe, and consists of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Finland and Iceland are at times, especially in English-speaking contexts, considered part of Scandinavia. Little evidence remains in Scandinavia of the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, or the Iron Age except limited numbers of tools created from stone, bronze, and iron, some jewelry and ornaments, and stone burial cairns. One... The Developmental Welfare State in Scandinavia. Lessons for the Developing World. Stein Kuhnle Sven E. O. Hort. Social Policy and Development Programme Paper Number 17 September 2004. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.Â Important inter- and intracountry variations in the positions of the peasantry existed in the Scandinavian countries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but differences in landholding practices began to diminish as a result of increased peasant proprietorship. This process has been labelled the "individualization of agri Criminality, Social Control, and the Early Modern State: Evidence and Interpretations in Scandinavian Historiography. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 04 January 2016. Eva Ã–sterberg.Â Davis, Natalie Zemon (1987) Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.Google Scholar. Elias, Norbert (1982) The Civilizing Process. Vol. 2, State Formation and Civilization. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.Google Scholar.Â Europe and Scandinavia: Aspects of the Process of Integration in the Seventeenth Century. Lund Studies in International History, no. 18. Lund: Esselte studium: 257-89.Google Scholar. Seventeenth-Century Scandinavia: the Evidence in the State Papers. Steven Murdoch | University of St. Andrews. The State Papers Online project provides digital access to two major collections of documents relating to Scandinavia which are housed in The National Archives at Kew. These are SP75 (Denmark) and SP95 (Sweden) and both of these collections are very well known to the scholar of British-Scandinavian relations. The simple fact is that Scandinavian countries are not, by any reasonable definition, socialist. The flags of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark. In 2015, in fact, the Prime Minister of Denmark, in a lecture at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, addressed the issue directly. I know that some people in the US associate the Nordic model with some sort of socialism. Therefore, I would like to make one thing clear. Denmark is far from a socialist planned economy.