

Sir Alexander Cockburn-Campbell (1804-1871): A Biographical Note

Timothy C. F. Stunt

The name of Sir Alexander [Cockburn-]Campbell¹ is one with which readers of Neatby's *History of the Plymouth Brethren* will be familiar. Neatby cites Sir Alexander as an example of 'a tendency to a kind of Pentecostal communism' among the early Brethren. The baronet's servants were encouraged to dine at the table of the master of the household and, on one occasion, when he was late for dinner—such was their familiarity with Sir Alexander—they began the meal without him.² More recently I have found confirmation of this domestic simplicity in a letter of Charles de Rodt, who stayed with Sir Alexander in 1837.³

General Sir Alexander Campbell (1760–1824, the grandfather of our subject) was a distinguished soldier and became Commander-in-Chief of British forces in Madras where he lived for many years. He was created the first baronet of Gartsford in 1815. His two sons fell in combat in India (Battle of Assaye, 1803) and in Spain (Battle of the Pyrenees, 1813). In January 1804, his older daughter, Olympia, married Alexander Cockburn, a banker⁴ in Madras of which he had been the Mayor in 1799, and it was there that their son Alexander

1 This biographical note is based on a variety of printed sources and websites acknowledged in the footnotes, and on the generous help of Ms Julia Crawley to whom I am greatly indebted for an intermittent correspondence. She is an Australian great-great granddaughter of Sir Alexander Cockburn-Campbell and has access to a Diary kept by A. C.-C.'s first wife as well as to a scrap-book produced by his second wife in the later part of her life. She also introduced me to the letters written by A. C.-C.'s second wife to Frances Emily Cotton Bowker (later Mrs. Thomas Arthur Bussell, 1809–74) in the Bussell Archive of the J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History, Perth.

2 W. B. Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, (2nd edn., London, 1902), 41–2.

3 T. C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815–1835* (Edinburgh, 2000), 302–3.

4 The company was called Harington, Burnaby and Cockburn.

Thomas Cockburn (the subject of this note) was born in November of the same year.⁵ When he was not yet three years old Alexander Thomas travelled with his grandfather back to England, but in June 1808 his father, Alexander, returning to England, died and was buried in Ceylon. Later in the same year (November), his mother, Olympia (with his younger brother William), was drowned when the *Lord Nelson* (East Indiaman) sank off the Cape of Good Hope.⁶ During the remainder of his childhood he was raised by his uncle Thomas Cockburn in Devon or Cornwall.

Because Sir Alexander, the first baronet of Gartsford, had no surviving male heirs, it was permitted, by a specially renewed patent, in 1821, that on his death, the baronetcy would pass to the son of his deceased daughter, Olympia, if he (the grandson) added the name Campbell to his existing surname Cockburn. Sir Alexander Campbell's second daughter, Isabella Charlotte had married Sir John Malcolm (in 1807) and in June 1827 their daughter Margaret Malcolm⁷ married her cousin Sir Alexander Cockburn-Campbell [A.C.-C], who had succeeded as the 2nd baronet of Gartsford, three years earlier. Three weeks after their marriage the young couple travelled with Margaret's father to India where Sir A.C.-C. was Sir John Malcolm's *aide-de-camp* for about a year before returning to England on account of Margaret's poor health.⁸

5 J. Malcolm, *Malcolm: Soldier, Diplomat, Ideologue of British India: The Life of Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833)* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2014.), chap. 16; see <<https://books.google.com/books?id=6Ji8BQAAQBAJ&pg=PT1&dq=%22malcolm+soldier+diplomat+ideologue>>, accessed 24 Aug. 2016.

6 It was previously supposed that both parents were drowned in 1809, but Ms. J. Crawley's latest researches (making use of the inscription on Cockburn's tombstone in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka) are conclusive (e-mails 12/5/2016; 14/5/2016). For Cockburn's grave see <<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-sri-lanka-trincomalee-old-colonial-era-cemetery-1808-grave-of-alexander-101611137.html>>; for the fate of the *Lord Nelson*, see S. Taylor, *Storm and Conquest: The Clash of Empires in the Eastern Seas, 1809* (New York, 2008), 77–78.

7 B. Burke, A. P. Burke (eds.), *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage and Baronetage...* (76th edn., London, 1914), 370.

8 Information from Ms Crawley, based on Margaret's Diary.

In a few years Sir Alexander and his wife Margaret were part of the circle of piety associated with Plymouth,⁹ described above by Neatby, though in due course they moved to Exeter where A. C.-C. played an important part in the building of Providence Chapel, Northernhay, in 1840.¹⁰ He was evidently, too, a familiar figure at the prophetic conferences at Powerscourt and elsewhere.¹¹ His wife, Margaret, was the mother of two daughters and her hymn, *Praise Ye Jehovah, Praise the Lord Most Holy*, was included in many Brethren hymnals. She died on the 6 February 1841.¹²

When in July of the following year, Sir A. C.-C. married a second time it was to Grace Spence (1805–1870), a member of a Quaker family from Birstwith,¹³ Yorkshire, whose baptism in the Baptist Church, Wellington (c. 25 miles from Exeter), by John Dyer in 1837 was recorded together with those of other former Quakers in John

⁹ According to the 1851 census, their second daughter, Olympia, was born in Plymouth (1836). In the interests of genealogical clarity it should be explained that the first name, 'Olympia', had been used in the family for several generations and we shall encounter no fewer than three members of the family with this unusual name. A. C.-C.'s maternal grandmother was Olympia Morshead who married Colonel Alexander Campbell in 1783 and who was an aunt of William Morshead (1805–74, associated with Charles Brenton and the early Plymouth Brethren in Bath). Her elder daughter, Olympia Campbell, who married Alexander Cockburn, was the mother of A. C.-C. and therefore the grandmother of A. C.-C.'s daughter Olympia (1836–92).

¹⁰ Although the date of building is sometimes given as 1839 (e.g. Allan Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter 1650-1875* (Manchester, 1962), 228; N. Pevsner, B. Cherry, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (2nd edn. New Haven, 1991), 442), it was only in 1840 that the *Exeter Flying Post* (2 April 1840) reported the acquisition of land in Northernhay by A. C.-C. for the building of a chapel for Christians 'commonly denominated "The Providence Brethren" or "Hallites" from Capt. Hall one of the founders of the sect.' The Brethren in Exeter followed the Plymouth assembly in adopting the name 'Providence Chapel'. For the existence of an earlier assembly in Exeter, see T. Grass, *Gathering to His Name: the Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland*, (Milton Keynes, 2006), 42–43.

¹¹ Neatby, *History*, 39.

¹² J. Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology* . . . 2 vols. (2nd edn., London: Murray, 1907), 1: 202.

¹³ Her parents were Joseph Spence and Rachel (*née* Sutcliffe); see <<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/QUAKER-ROOTS/2003-02/1045560533>>.

Eliot Howard's *Inquirer*.¹⁴ According to the 1841 census (made four months after the first Lady Campbell's death), Grace Spence was one of four female employees living in A. C.-C.'s household, at Clifton Place, St Sidwell, Exeter,¹⁵ so she may well have been a governess for A. C.-C.'s two daughters by his first marriage, Charlotte and Olympia, whom she describes as her 'pets' in a letter dated October 1841.¹⁶ Sir A. C.-C.'s second marriage took place in Yorkshire at the Registry Office in Knaresborough, on 21 July 1842, and this would suggest the Quakers were reluctant to solemnize the union for a Quaker daughter who, by being baptized by immersion, had effectively renounced the Quaker communion and was now 'marrying out' (as they called it). The couple would probably have then had their nuptials 'blessed' in a local chapel.

One of the witnesses who signed the marriage certificate¹⁷ was a person whose surname was Wellesley. This was almost certainly Captain the Hon. William Henry George Wellesley, RN [WHGW], whose father, Henry, the first Baron Cowley, was the youngest brother of the Duke of Wellington. Sir A. C.-C.'s first father-in-law Sir John Malcolm, like A. C.-C.'s grandfather, had been a friend of the Duke of Wellington. WHGW, being Baron Cowley's second son, was, within a year or so, A. C.-C.'s contemporary and was also a Plymouth Brother.¹⁸ A. C.-C. had lost his parents at a very early age, and Wellesley's childhood had been similarly overshadowed by family misfortune. His mother (Charlotte (née Sloane), daughter of the Earl of Cadogan) had deserted Baron Cowley, who obtained a divorce in 1810 by Act of Parliament. Cowley was also awarded £24,000 damages from the Marquess of Anglesey who promptly

¹⁴ *The Inquirer* 1 (Feb. 1838), 64.

¹⁵ Campbell is spelt as 'Cambell' in the Census form. Grace Spence's age is given as 35, making her just one year younger than A. C.-C.

¹⁶ See letter from Grace to Frances Bowker, 28 Oct. 1841, Perth, J. S. Battye Library, Bussell Archive 3882A/6. For the Plymouth background of Frances Bowker, see T. C. F. Stunt, *The Elusive Quest of the Spiritual Malcontent: Some Early Nineteenth Century Ecclesiastical Mavericks*, (Eugene, OR, 2015) 221–222.

¹⁷ In the possession of Ms. Julia Crawley.

¹⁸ For further details of W. H. G. Wellesley, see Stunt, *Elusive Quest*, 266.

married the divorcee—all this when WHGW was not yet 5 years old. One can easily imagine that the young Wellesley and Cockburn-Campbell may have had some fellowship in the scars of their bruised childhoods.

By late 1847 Sir A. C.-C. had moved with his family to Barnstaple¹⁹ and was evidently somewhat disillusioned with Darby and the Brethren movement. He is described as ‘looking desolate and dejected’ at the Bath Conference of May 1848 where his quotation from Ecclesiastes 10: 1 drew attention to the flies in the ointment which had begun to stink.²⁰

In 1855 (or perhaps even earlier²¹) the family moved to Europe, possibly for financial reasons, and settled for a while at Heidelberg.²² Here they got to know the family of a successful merchant Carl Uhde of Tiefburg Castle, Handschuheim, whose son Charles married Olympia in 1857, but died two years later.²³ It was from Germany in 1858 that Sir A. C.-C. went to Western Australia where he was, for some years, Superintendent of Police in Perth. His descendant Ms Crawley writes that the reasons for his emigration ‘have never been satisfactorily explained but according to my uncle he was thought to have had financial problems and this was probably the reason. He stayed in this position for a couple of years and then went to Albany

19 See letter from Grace C.-C. to Fanny Bowker, 8 Apr. 1847, Bussell Archive, 3882A/12.

20 Neatby, *History*, 148.

21 The only members of the family that I can find in the English and Scottish census of 1851 are Charlotte, aged 17, and Olympia, aged 15, A. C.-C.’s daughters by his first marriage, who were living as lodgers in Paignton, in the home of a linen draper, Edward Tappenden.

22 Many British aristocrats and gentry, living on a fixed income from annuities, found that they could buy more with their pounds when living abroad. A. C.-C.’s second son, Thomas, later attended Heidelberg University, and was said to have read more French than English books, F. Boase (ed.), *Modern English Biography*. . . (Truro, 1908), iv. column 698.

23 D. Dobson, *Scottish German Links, 1550–1850* (Baltimore MD, 2007), 87. Four years later, in 1863 she married the Bavarian Baron Friedrich (‘Fritz’) von Pöllnitz (1840–?) of Ippesheim. He appears to have been something of a spendthrift who according to Olympia’s parents ‘does nothing but spend her money on horses, carriages and the like . . .’ (Letter from Grace C-C to Fanny Bowker, 22 Aug. 1868, Bussell Archive, 3902A/3).

on the south coast as Magistrate.’ In the same letter Ms Crawley continues: ‘Grace stayed on in Europe [she also spent a couple of years in Vevey in Switzerland] until 1861 and then went to Guernsey where her brother lived.’²⁴ She maintained a spasmodic correspondence with her stepdaughters, whose souls were an ongoing source of concern for her,²⁵ but although her younger son encouraged her to think of making the journey to Australia, she never did.

From the 1850s it is hard to establish Sir A. C.-C.’s ecclesiastical position. His wife on the other hand seems to have remained loyal to J. N. Darby. In 1861 she is in Switzerland and drives, on one occasion, from Aigle to Nyon, ‘hoping to find Mr Darby there, but many of the Brethren there had gone to see him at Geneva.’ However, she is sufficiently unsectarian, on another Sunday, to attend ‘the service at the Oratoire [in Geneva] at 9 o’clock. M de Mole [sc. Émile Demole (1805–77), minister in the *Église libre*] spoke well on the 15th Luke—thence we went to hear M Malcee [?? Malan] and found his work also very profitable.’²⁶

Later in 1861 Grace moved for a while to Guernsey²⁷ where her brother Francis was living but by 1863 she was back in England from where in 1867 her older son Alick (Alexander Thomas, 1843–71) sailed to Australia to join his father.²⁸ As early as 1865, her younger son, Thomas (1845–1892), had begun farming in Western Australia

24 E-mail from Ms. Julia Crawley, 7 Dec. 2001.

25 ‘Cecilia [Grace’s daughter] thinks Olympia is converted but alas, Lalla [Charlotte] believes nothing excepting that she shall go to Heaven and wants to die that she may see what it is like.’ Letter from Grace C-C to Fanny Bowker, 22 Aug. 1868, Bussell Archive, 3902A/3.

26 From her journal, transcribed by Ms. Julia Crawley in e-mail, 19 Feb. 2002.

27 Grace’s time in Guernsey may be connected with her sons having attended Elizabeth College, Guernsey.

28 According to his mother in 1868, Alick took ‘an intense dislike to Colonial life.’ (Grace C.-C. to Fanny Bowker, 2 Mar. 1868, Bussell Archive, 3902A/2). He returned to England and on his father’s death in 1870 he was briefly the 3rd baronet of Gartsford, being succeeded by his younger brother Thomas in Sept. 1871.

where he later served on the Legislative Council (1873–90) and for some years successfully edited the *West Australian*.²⁹

Sir A. C.-C.'s relationship with Grace seems to have been a source of sorrow to her, but although we have no indication of his spiritual outlook, Grace's earlier ecclesiastical loyalties were again apparent in October 1867 when she observed in a letter to Frances Bussell:

Satan is very busy everywhere, dearest Fanny, and it is mindful that each one should be on his watch toward some Brethren as Captain Hall, Mr Dorman, Mr Harris, Arthur Pridham and a few others have taken a stand believing Mr Darby to have put forth the error on the sufferings of the blessed Lord. I do not see it but know that Satan is using all these things to separate if possible.³⁰

In 1868 she again went to Switzerland, which is where she hoped her husband would join her when he sailed from Australia in October the following year. In fact he stayed there only briefly before travelling on to England in December. In about March 1870 Grace returned to England where she died in July. Her husband is recorded on the death certificate as the informant who was present at her death. A few months later Sir Alexander returned to Albany, Australia where in April 1871 he married Sophie Jane Trimmer, but died three weeks later on 23 April.³¹

It is perhaps significant that when Grace died in July and was buried in August 1870, she was in Waterhead, Ambleside, Cumberland, where she was staying with her widowed sister Rachel Turner. This was an area in which there were numerous Quakers and many of the Brethren in that county were of Quaker origin. However

²⁹ *Australian Dictionary of Biography* [hereafter *ADB*], 3. (Melbourne, 1969) *s.n.* art. by O.K. Battye; cf. Boase, *Modern English Biography*, 4. column 698.

³⁰ See letter from Grace to Fanny Bussell (née Bowker,) 29 Oct 1867, Bussell Archive, 3627A/759.

³¹ Ms Crawley informs me that Sophie Jane Trimmer was the older sister of Lucy Ann Trimmer, who had married Sir A. C.-C.'s younger son, Thomas, about a year earlier on 16 May 1870 (e-mail 12/5/2016). They were daughters of Arthur Trimmer of Pootenup, near Albany, WA; (*ADB*, *vide supra* n. 29), who was a great-grandson of Mrs Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810), the philanthropist, children's author and founder of Sunday Schools.