

Exch. for £350 Sterling Malta 20th July 1796.

Thirty days after sight of this my Bill of Exchange drawn and third of the same tenor & date not being paid please to pay unto William England Esq. His Britannic Majesty's Consul at Malta or Order the sum of three hundred & fifty pounds sterling value received for the service of His Britannic Majesty and please place the same to Account as per Order

The Right Honble I am your Lordship's
The Lords Commissioners Most obedient &
of His Majesty's Treasury humble servant
Whitehall London. Hugh Cleghorn

Venice the 15th May 1795

Received of M^r John Conrad Reck the Summ of Three thousand Pounds Sterling in full for a Letter of Credit of Sir Robert Kerrieff in London dated the 14th April directed to M^r James Partridge at Leghorn, which payment has been made to me at the request of M^r Richard Worley His Britannic Majesty's Resident & having signed for it four Receipts of the same Tenor & date to value only for the payment of £3000

Hugh Cleghorn

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A bill of exchange dated July 20, 1796, issued by the British consul in Malta, transferring £350 to Cleghorn. Right: A bill of exchange dated May 15, 1795, for £3,000, signed in Venice by Cleghorn.

On a mission: Professor Cleghorn and the de Meuron Regiment



CHRISTOPHER GRECH

During the French Revolutionary Wars (1793-1802) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), Great Britain embarked on a number of strategies for defeating France and its allies: one was to engage foreign regiments as mercenary forces in the pay of the British government. This article explores the part played by Prof. Hugh Cleghorn in the transfer of allegiance of a Swiss regiment that was based in Malta from 1806 to 1813.

There were, apparently, no less than 17 Swiss mercenary regiments at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries; three that spent some time in Malta were the de Roll, de Watteville and de Meuron regiments. The latter was raised in 1781 by Count Charles de Meuron and was originally in the employ of the Dutch East India Company based in Trincomalee, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

Hugh Cleghorn (1751-1836) was an ambitious and enterprising Scottish academic; at the age of 21 he was appointed to the chair of Civil History at St Andrew's University. He was the first to hold this position and his lectures took inspiration from Adam Smith's *Enquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations* and John Millar's *Distinction of Ranks*. Cleghorn's aim was to form the minds of young men intending to assume roles as responsible citizens.

Cleghorn took a leave of absence from 1788 to 1790 to accompany the young Alexander Home, 10th Earl of Home, on a grand tour of Europe. Serving as Home's tutor, he cannily combined this duty with the opportunity of giving lectures at various European universities; there he also garnered introductions to eminent personages who could enlighten both pupil and tutor with the developing philosophical and political views evolving in a continent riven by the upheaval resulting from the French Revolution.

It is almost certain that Cleghorn first got to know Count Charles de Meuron when he and Lord Home travelled to de Meuron's home town, Neuchâtel, late in 1788. Their

friendship, partly nurtured by Cleghorn's belief that closer bonds should be formed between Britain and the Swiss cantons, blossomed and bore fruit in subsequent years.

Cleghorn's travels around and experiences in Europe seem to have transformed him from an observant academic into a proactive agent of empire; on his return he solicited his Scottish contacts, chief among them Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War, for an active role in the government of Empire. His thoughts turned to the value of Ceylon to British interests in India. These concerns were no doubt influenced by his acquaintance with de Meuron, whose regiment was no longer being paid by the Dutch and might soon accede to French control.

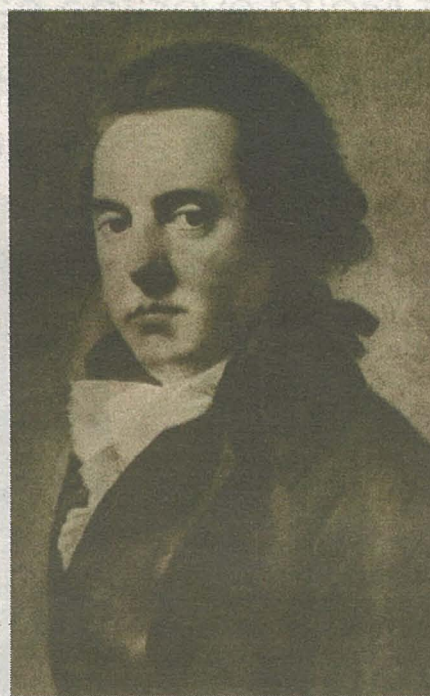
Cleghorn hatched a plan to transfer the allegiance of the only effective troops defending Dutch-held Trincomalee to the British and in the process weakening the Dutch colony to the extent that it could easily be taken over by Britain. To achieve these ends, Cleghorn was despatched on a secret mission first to Switzerland to convince Count de Meuron to enter the payroll of the British and subsequently to Ceylon with de Meuron to implement this plan. It was important that neither Dutch nor French intelligence got word of Cleghorn's mission. Secrecy was essential.

A series of 10 bills of exchange in the author's collection signed by Cleghorn show his progress through Europe in 1795: from Neuchâtel to Hamburg, then on to Venice. There, on May 15, 1795, Cleghorn drew funds amounting to the enormous sum of £3,850 (between £500,000 and £1 million at today's value). Sources state that de Meuron received £4,000 for the transfer of his regiment to British service. These bills most likely detail this transaction.

Having accomplished his mission in Ceylon, Cleghorn headed back to England

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In January 1810 the regiment was stationed at Floriana



Professor Hugh Cleghorn.



Count Charles de Meuron (1738-1806). PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

and was in Malta on July 20, 1796, where a further £350 was to be transferred to Cleghorn by William England, His Britannic Majesty's consul in Malta. It is most likely that these sums were reimbursements due to Cleghorn for travel-related expenses on his return journey.

On his arrival in London, Cleghorn was paid £5,000 in the currency of the day for his year-long mission to Ceylon: a tidy sum indeed. In 1798, he was appointed Colonial Secretary of Ceylon, a post he held for approximately two years.

Clear confirmation of Cleghorn's clandestine activities can be seen in an affidavit signed by him at Westminster Hall, London, on May 12, 1803, in which he swears: "I have disbursed the money, entrusted to me for Foreign Secret Service, faithfully, according to the intent and purpose for which it was given, according to my best judgement, for His Majesty's Service."

In 1799, the de Meuron regiment joined the Mysore Campaign in India where they earned high praise from the future Duke of Wellington. In 1806, the regiment received orders to sail for England where they were garrisoned for a

short time on the Isle of Wight. They were then sent to Gibraltar and arrived in Malta in 1809. In January 1810 the regiment was stationed at Floriana; in August the same year the regiment was recorded as being made up of 789 men, rising at the end of 1812 to 1,043 men.

On June 7, 1810, tragedy struck the regiment when Louis, Lieutenant-Colonel Lardy's 18-year-old son, who was serving as a lieutenant in the regiment, died in Malta after a very short illness.

The regiment left Malta for duty in Canada on May 5, 1813. On their departure, Lieutenant-General Oakes, the Civil Commissioner, issued the following Garrison Order: "Lieutenant-General Oakes cannot suffer the Regiment De Meuron to quit this garrison where they have so long been stationed under his command, without assuring them of the satisfaction which their good conduct and attention to military discipline have constantly afforded him, and which have been equally conspicuous in every rank. They will embark from hence as fine and well appointed a regiment as any in His Majesty's service."