

**The Stuarts' Last Secret**  
**The Missing Heirs of Bonnie Prince Charlie**

**Peter Pininski**  
**Tuckwell Press, 2002**

By her liaison with Prince Ferdinand de Rohan, Archbishop of Cambrai, Charlotte Stuart, daughter of Charles Edward Stuart and Clementina Walkinshaw, had a son and two daughters. In his book, *The Last Stuarts*, published in 1983, James Lees-Milne notes that the son, named Charles after his grandfather, died unmarried and childless in 1854, and went on to say that “nothing is known about the two daughters”. Reading Lees-Milne’s enjoyable work one Christmas, I thought to myself that here was an interesting subject for some research, if only I had the time and a decent command of French, and knew where to start looking. No doubt many other readers have reacted in the same way. Peter Pininski, however, did set about the necessary research, on the basis of vague hints in the traditions of his Polish family, and produces a convincing case that he himself is a six-greats-grandson of Charles Edward Stuart through Charlotte’s younger daughter.

Pininski admits that the evidence on which he relies is often indirect, if not elliptical, since several generations of his family took care to conceal their precise antecedents in order to avoid attracting attention to themselves in the turbulent politics of the late eighteenth century and more recently. His own father, Stanislas Pininski, staying in Eastbourne with family friends in August 1939, showed unusual presence of mind for a fourteen-year-old boy when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was concluded, in choosing not to return to Paris, where his parents were then living, still less to Poland, but to remain in England, where he completed his secondary education and served in the Free Polish Air Force in the last stages of the Second World War. The war over, and Poland under the Communist yoke, it was necessary for Stanislas to keep a low profile, even on British soil, since General Bor-Komorowski, leader of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, was his uncle by marriage, and Communist agents might seek to use him to secure his uncle’s return to Poland and probable liquidation. Stanislas therefore married a Scots girl, changed his name, and lived quietly in Scotland until the fall of Communism. It was only in 1997, on reading James Lees-Milne’s book, that Peter Pininski, by then working as an art historian in Warsaw, began his research.

It will be remembered that James Francis Edward Stuart, titular James III and more generally known as the Old Pretender, married Maria Clementina Sobieska, granddaughter of King Jan Sobieski of Poland. Pininski demonstrates that the exiled Stuarts maintained links with Poland even after Clementina’s death in 1735, mainly via the court of Stanislas Leszcynski, briefly King of Poland following the death of Augustus the Strong, and this led ultimately to Charlotte Stuart’s daughter, Marie-Victoire de Rohan, marrying into the Polish nobility and settling in Poland. She left an only son, Antime de Nikorowicz, who in turn produced a son and a daughter. Her son’s descendants have died out, but her daughter, Julia Therese de Nikorowicz, married Count

Leonard Pininski, and her issue flourished and played a prominent role in Polish national life from the mid-nineteenth century until the Communist takeover.

Peter Pininski's tale is a fascinating one, but is told in a fashion which is at times indigestible. A book centred on family history needs more than one genealogical table, and there were times when I became thoroughly confused with all the different people of importance to the narrative (not least the multitudinous Princes de Rohan and their connections), the many difficult foreign names (though Pininski does provide a useful guide to Polish pronunciation), and various digressions into matters peripheral. [Stuart aficionados will find much to interest them](#), as will anyone wishing to learn more about Polish history and culture, particularly in the nineteenth century after the country had been partitioned between Russia, Austria and Prussia.

**Ann Lyon**