

THE LIFE OF GENERAL THE HON. JAMES MURRAY

1721-1794 - A SCOT, A SOLDIER, A BUILDER OF CANADA, A JURAT OF HASTINGS, DEFENDER OF MINORCA and OWNER OF BEAUPORT PARK, BATTLE



James Murray was the son of Alexander, 4th Lord Elibank, a Scottish peer and Elizabeth Stirling, daughter of a surgeon of Edinburgh who was later a member of the Scots Parliament before it was abolished in 1707, as was the English Parliament, at the passing by both Parliaments of the Acts of Union.

Alexander, Lord Elibank lost a great deal of money in the South Sea Bubble, and James his fifth and youngest son and 14th child was born at Ballencrieff on 21st January 1721, just after the bubble burst. His older brothers had had many more benefits than young James who was sent to a school at Selkirk where pride, poverty, and self-reliance were hallmarks. In his boyhood he will have witnessed that within a few miles of Ballencrieff the labourers in the salt and coal mines were basically slaves, and James must have witnessed unforgettable misery there.

James's father died when he was 14 and soon afterwards in late 1736 James left school, becoming a cadet in the 3rd Scots Regiment on 6th December 1736. The regiment was attached to the Austrian Netherlands (at present essentially Belgium) after the Treaty of Utrecht when Spain handed over control of the Spanish Netherlands to Austria. The 3rd Scots were stationed at Ypres in West Flanders, where the garrison stood ready to repel any French aggression.

In 1740 the 19 year old James Murray became a 2nd lieutenant, and commenced his military career in a new battalion of marines (Wynyard's Marines) under the Union Flag. By 1740 Britain had become tired of Spanish supremacy in South America and James's new 4th battalion was one of six formed to try to break the control of Spain over the South American trade. They embarked but, delayed and scattered by storms, the ships only began to assemble in St. Rupert's Bay, Dominica, on 19th December 1740. Already scurvy and dysentery had made terrible inroads on the strength of the force, and the day after arrival the commander-in-chief himself died. The campaign was a disaster, but James's unit stayed on in the West Indies where he took part in the attack on Cartagena (Colombia) and operations in Cuba. Fortunately James survived and returned to Britain in 1742.

In 1744 we find Murray's first recorded connection with the town of Hastings, when he was attached for his first soldiering in England as a Captain in an anti-smuggling unit. This was when he first met Mr. John Collier and his family. Collier was one of the jurats of Hastings (a jurat was a cross between a magistrate and an alderman). His son James Collier was the same age as Murray, and Cordelia Collier, his sister, a year younger. The former became

friendly with the young soldier, and the young soldier was clearly attracted to Cordelia from the first.



Extract from a portrait of James Murray as a young man by Allan Ramsay (1742) (Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh)
<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/PG 2215>

As a Scot, Murray might have been tempted to support the attempt by Bonnie Prince Charlie to regain what he believed to be his throne in 1745 (his older brothers were known Jacobites), which attempt was ended at the Battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746. The Quadruple Alliance with Holland, Saxony, and Austria had been formed by the Treaty of Warsaw during the War of the Austrian Succession against France, and in 1745 Britain agreed to send reinforcements to Ostend. One of the battalions sent was Harrison's (15th Foot), and Murray went with it, thus removing him from both Jacobean and for the time being Cordelian temptations. The battalion sailed for Ostend in July, 1745, and can only just have arrived when the town was surrounded and had to surrender after a short resistance on 23rd August. In this operation Murray was badly wounded.

Once recovered James Murray was involved in various military excursions including the abortive raid to seize Lorient, but by 1747 was back in garrison and spent some time in London and in further wooing of Miss Collier. His approaches to Cordelia's father were not too welcome as Collier obviously 'could never think of marrying my daughter to the uncertain situation he was in'. James was not discouraged. In May 1748 he visited Hastings again to make a personal application, and following some negotiations concerning housing and money, made some progress. James won in the end, and wrote to John Collier (who was in Bath) on 17th December 1748: "I have the pleasure to inform you that this day I had the happiness of being made your son at St. Bride's Church."

James's brother, by now the 5th Lord Elibank also strongly disapproved of the marriage; mainly it seems for political reasons for Elibank was a strong opponent of the then Whig government. The Colliers were staunch Whigs – and he perceived the marriage as weakening his position.

Soon afterwards James's regiment was sent to Waterford in Ireland. Cordelia at first resisted going but no exchange with another posting was possible, so she had to go. In 1749 James

informed his father in law that he was buying the rank of Major for £1100 which will have been a very considerable strain on his personal finances ... he could not access the £3000 Cordelia had received on marriage as it was held in real estate. Clearly John Collier had protected his assets.

Murray was slowly developing supporters in higher places, but remained hampered by the political antics of his Jacobite brothers Patrick (5th Lord Elibank) and Andrew Murray at Westminster. In spite of this in 1751 he became Lieutenant-Colonel of the 15th Foot and in 1753 they moved to Limerick, returning to England in 1755.

John Collier arranged for his son in law to be appointed a freeman and Jurat of Hastings in 1757, hoping that he might draw him away from the military, but also in 1757 the 15th Foot became embroiled in the raid on Rochefort, a French naval base and arsenal, and James went with them. This was not successful and after much naval delay all that was succeeded in was to take the small Ile d'Aix! This led William Pitt (the Elder) to take the leader of the raid, Sir John Mordaunt, before a court martial. Two of the principal witnesses called were James Wolfe and James Murray, the former for the prosecution, the latter for the defence. Mordaunt was acquitted.

Pitt at this time had returned to the government as Secretary of State, with full control of foreign policy. He assumed control not only of the army, but also of the navy. He had plans for the conquest of Canada and the plan of campaign included, as a principal objective, the capture of the fortress of Louisburg on the Atlantic coast of Cape Breton Island, the bastion guarding the entrance to the Saint Lawrence River and access to French Canada.

Orders were issued for the assembly of a large force at Halifax in Nova Scotia. There were twenty-one battalions of the regular army in North America, and twelve battalions of these were sent to Halifax. Two additional battalions, the 15th Foot, commanded by Lt. -Col. the Hon. James Murray, plus the 58th Foot were sent out from England with a fleet of twenty-three warships which sailed on 19th February 1758. The 15th was apparently included at the request of its colonel, Lord Amherst, backed up by all the influence which James Murray could bring to bear through his connections via his father in law John Collier with the Pelhams (Henry Pelham [to 1754] and his brother the Duke of Newcastle, later Prime Ministers between 1743 and 1762). Amherst was appointed to the command of the whole force and made a Major General. One of his three brigadiers was James Wolfe.

The Louisburg assault achieved success remarkably easily and the fortress surrendered on 27th July 1758. Murray only lost 21 men from his battalion, 13 of whom drowned when a boat overturned. Murray became a Colonel 'in America' but it was becoming clear that his brothers' actions and politics were inhibiting his promotions and younger officers were becoming full Colonels.

It was too late in the year to undertake a large expedition up the St Lawrence to take Québec, but some raids were made on settlements along the huge estuary and these affected the provisioning of Québec. The instructions for 1759 given at the end of 1758 were: *"To build forts at Lake George and the Oneida Carrying Place" (at the head of the Mohawk river, on the Oswego route). To invade Canada, by Crown Point or La Gallette, or both, and invade and attack Montreal or Québec, or both, by the forces in one body, or by dividing them. To give due attention to Lake Ontario. To attack Niagara. To rebuild Fort Duquesne."*

The command of the force was given to James Wolfe, who was given the local rank 'in America' of major-general (dated 12th January 1759). He was subordinate to Amherst as Commander-in-Chief in America. His three brigadiers were Robert Monckton, colonel of the 2nd Battalion Royal Americans; George Townshend, colonel of the 64th Foot; and James Murray.

Arriving at Québec on 26th June, Wolfe saw that the northern shore of the St. Lawrence River around Beauport (the Beauport shore), a favourable site for the landing of troops, was strongly defended by the French. It took some days to devise an alternative plan, but on 8 or 9 July British forces landed 1.2 km (3/4 of a mile) east of the Montmorency Falls. Wolfe landed meeting no opposition from the French. James Murray, and his brigade, joined him on 10 July.

After establishing a fortified position at Montmorency, Wolfe considered his plans. The initial plan to attack Québec from the east was suspended on 20 July when the Royal Navy succeeded, on the night of 18–19 July, in getting seven ships through the narrow passage between Quebec and Pointe-Lévy, enabling a landing west of Québec. Wolfe then decided to attempt a landing on the steep northern bank of the St Lawrence to the west of the city.

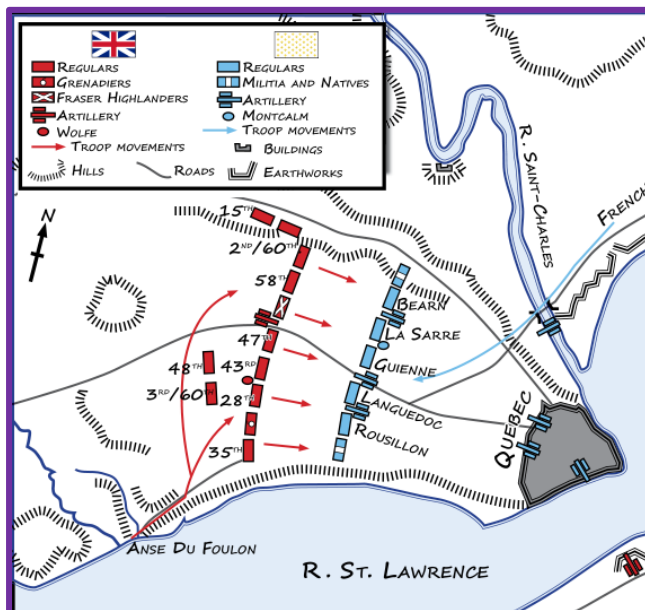
The army shipped from the Isle d 'Orleans up river and landed at Anse du Foulon (Wolfe's Cove) on the night of 13th September. They then climbed a steep path up the Heights of Abraham with minimal challenge from the French. Wolfe deployed his army on the Plains of Abraham in a single line of battalions, with the right flank at the edge of the heights above the St Lawrence. Monckton and Murray commanded the line, with James Murray to the left and Townsend commanding the reserves. Wolfe positioned himself to the right of the line and died of the wounds he received in action. The British, now under the command of Townshend and later under Murray, then besieged the city in conjunction with the fleet on the St. Lawrence River. On 18th September the city was turned over to British control.

After the capture of Québec Murray was in command of the city, facing undefeated French forces further up the St Lawrence River. In April 1760 the Duc de Levis advanced on Québec. Murray's garrison, weakened by disease, attacked near Sainte-Foy, just to the west, but was driven back into the city and besieged until British warships arrived. Then in the summer of 1760 Murray took part in actions including the occupation of Montreal (together with Amherst) which led to the surrender of the French in Canada. In the autumn of 1760 he was

appointed military governor of Québec. He commanded the troops in this area during the period of military rule; and in he was sworn in as the first civil governor of the Province of Québec on 10 August 1764. On 10th February 1763, by the Treaty of Paris, France formally ceded Canada to Great Britain.



British siege positions circled. Route of the river invasion fleet as a dotted line and diversionary probes on 12th September as a dashed line. Army battle lines – British (red), French (blue)
Map from the Public Schools Historical Atlas by C. Colbeck (1905). Overlays including scale by author



Detail of the battle of Quebec – Extracted from Wikimedia Commons by Hoodinski [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)]



The first Battle on the Plains of Abraham – Copy of an engraving from Tuttle's *'History of the Dominion of Canada'*

James Murray was promoted Major-General on 26 March 1765. He was sympathetic to the French-Canadians, and he allowed the continuance of French civil law because at the time the French outnumbered the British 25:1 and the last thing he needed was a rebellion. The later dissatisfaction of British settlers about this led to complaints and his recall to England in 1766 to face charges made against him. After full inquiry, the charges made against him by the British settlers were dismissed, and he continued to hold the office of governor of Québec until 1768, although he did not return to Canada. His common sense approach was preserved in the Quebec Act of 1774. A detailed account of Murray's time in Canada can be read in Brown's article on Murray in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography. Tuttle's wide history of Canada gives an earlier and very comprehensive view, putting into perspective the whole British campaign in Canada.

Slavery was still being permitted in North America and Murray allowed the Québécois to continue slavery in Québec as it had existed under the French. It was reckoned that in 1759 there were about 3600 slaves in 'New France' mostly around Montreal. About two thirds of these were mainly Fox nation Native Americans traded to the French by the Miami and Algonquian tribes, but the other third were black Africans, traded up from the southern states.

Clearly Murray had no problem with slavery as an advertisement appeared in the *Québec Gazette* on 23rd February 1769 for a "*negro woman, aged 25 years, with a mulatto male child, 9 months old. She was formerly the property of General Murray. She can be well*

recommended as a good house servant, handles milk well and makes butter to perfection". It also appears that Murray may have brought black servants to Beauport Park as there is a Battle parish burial record for one 'William Murry, on 13th May 1768, a negro: the same person baptised the 1st day of the same month.' The baptism record says that he was '*a negro servant to the Hon General Murry aged 22 years*'.

James Murray's father-in-law John Collier died in December, 1760, and by a codicil to his will, dated the previous April, he assigned Cordelia Murray's share of the estate to her husband. This change in attitude towards James was a somewhat remarkable tribute of respect as John Collier's original will had expressly excluded James Murray from any control of his wife's fortune.

The death of John Collier has been reported in 'The Hastings Chronicle':

1760 Dec 9 - Death of John Collier, aged 75, the most powerful establishment figure in Hastings from c1710 onwards. He had acquired a very large amount of land, including much of what is today the Country Park. He had 24 children, but only five daughters survived him.

The inheritance divided amongst the five surviving Collier daughters, amounted to a very large sum, principally in real estate in Hastings and adjacent area, and Murray thus became, through his wife, a considerable Sussex proprietor. Amongst other properties he owned much of Bohemia and the Swan Inn on Hastings High Street.

Murray and Cordelia had had no children, and he had never been able to persuade Cordelia to join him in Canada. But it seems that whilst still in Canada, he had visions of retiring to a life in Sussex, so he purchased the estate of Denham or Denham's Folly in about April, 1762.



Murray from a print of circa. 1773

Denham was immediately re-christened Beauport after a French village, near Québec, which Murray knew well.

Clearly Murray did not take up his right to return to Canada in 1766, something he could have taken up. He retired to his new Sussex estates, where he built the house at Beauport, where he also started planting specimen trees and experimenting with farming. But he also resumed a part-time military career serving on the Irish staff in 1766 and then as an inspecting general of the Southern District. In December 1767 he exchanged his colonelcy in the 60th Foot for that of the 13th, and in May 1772 was promoted lieutenant-general.

Even in 1772 he was still a jurat in Hastings as evidenced by some correspondence that year between him and the town clerk about payments by jurats towards the Poor Tax – he seems to have felt that the wealthier jurats were hiding behind ancient customs to avoid paying too much. It was possibly a coincidence that one of

the wealthiest jurats had the immunity from the tax confirmed and on becoming mayor in 1775 did not re-appoint James Murray as a jurat.

His mixed life between country residence and the military still appeared to be insufficient to keep his interest as in 1774 he began another colonial assignment, as lieutenant-governor of Minorca. Minorca had been ruled by Britain from its initial capture in 1708 during the War of the Spanish Succession, ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 (at the same time as Gibraltar), held until 1756, then occupied by France until 1763 and the Treaty of Paris when it was returned to Britain.

James, together with Cordelia and his niece Maria arrived on Christmas Eve 1774. Since the governor, General John Mostyn, was not resident, Murray, although only lieutenant-governor was de facto in charge and in April 1779 he was made governor and a lieutenant governor of his own, Sir William Draper, was appointed a month later. There were personal problems almost from the start between Draper and Murray.

Hostilities with France had re-commenced in 1778 and French ships made life difficult on Minorca, with communications with Britain only possible via Leghorn (Livorno, Italy) by neutral ships. Cordelia developed malaria and was despatched back home (presumably with niece Maria) via a neutral ship going to Barcelona, arriving back in England in April 1779. She died in Hastings on 26th June soon afterwards.

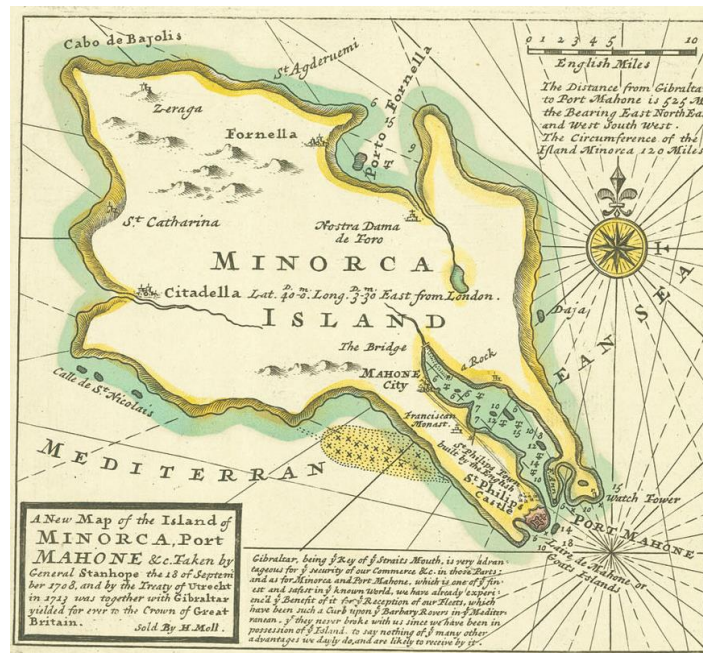
Into 1780 the French, now allied with the Spanish, continued the blockade of Minorca. Murray also made a second marriage, on 1st June 1780 to Miss Ann Whitham, who was only 18. Her father, Abraham Whitham, was employed on the island in the Consular service. A daughter, named Cordelia, was born on 16th March 1781.

On 19th August 1781 a Spanish army landed on the island. The landing was practically unopposed. The Spanish occupied the town of Mahon at once and isolated Fort St. Philip where Murray's small garrison was holed up. On the day of the landing of the Spanish army the new Mrs. Murray, once more pregnant and with the new Cordelia, made the difficult crossing to Leghorn in a small vessel.

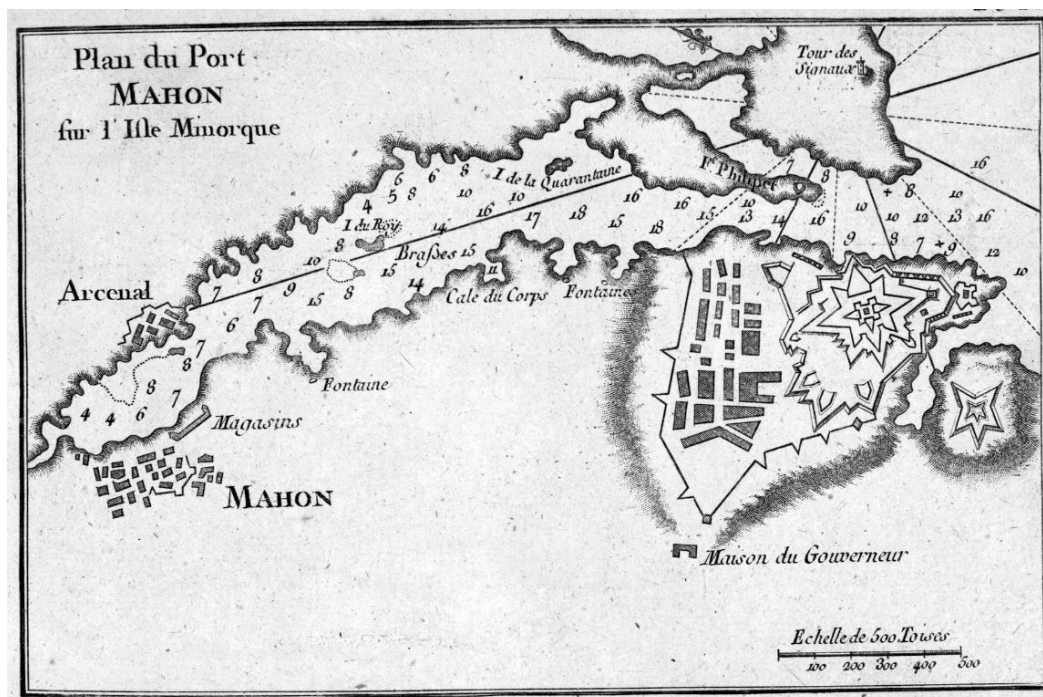
It is very evident with hindsight that there was no British intention of sending any help, but communications were so poor that Murray had no way of definitely knowing this. The Spanish commander tried to bribe Murray with a huge sum of money to surrender. The bribe was refused outright and a siege started. On 28th December scurvy appeared amongst the defenders who were clearly short of fresh food, but astoundingly the garrison held out until February 1782. Murray sent home a despatch to the Earl of Hillsborough dated 16th February 1782: "My Lord, I have the honour to acquaint your Lordship that Fort St. Phillips was surrendered to His Catholic Majesty the 5th instant. The capitulation accompanies this."

Murray remained at Minorca to complete arrangements for embarking the residual garrison to England, and to ensure care of the many invalids. He sent his adjutant, Captain Don,

direct to England with his despatches, and the other officers were permitted to return to England on parole not to serve again during the war.



Extract from an old map of Minorca, showing the position of Mahon and Fort St. Philip



Map of Mahon and Fort St. Philip in c.1764 from Roux's 'Plans et Rades de la Méditerranée' (Paris). (Note the scale - A 'toise' was the French equivalent of one fathom or six feet) http://www.e-corpus.org/eng/ref/9318/FL_11.1_ROU/ This image may not be copied for commercial use without permission of the owners of this web site.

Murray's first son, James, had been born in Livorno on 25th January 1782 sometime after which his new wife and children returned to England. When Murray got back home to see his wife and children his joy must have been severely affected by finding that Draper had made many malicious complaints about his management of affairs in Minorca.

Murray kept silent at first, but then sent a letter to the Commander in Chief dated 12th June replying to those he had received on 11th and 29th May, asking for a formal court martial. This did not take place until November, starting on the 12th and dragging on with various adjournments to 20th January 1783. The case attracted much public interest, but the court only found Murray guilty on two trivial points for which he was reprimanded, but even then the King said *'in consideration of the zeal, courage and firmness with which General Murray appears to the court to have conducted himself in the defence of Fort St Philip, as well as his former long and approved services, His Majesty has been pleased to dispense with any other reprimand.'* On the remaining 27 charges the court declared the accused to be not guilty, and the general summary stated:

"Upon the whole it appears to the court, from the evidence, that Lieut.-General Murray did conduct himself with great zeal, courage, and firmness in the defence of Fort St. Phillips, that the place was not half garrisoned, had no prospect of relief, and was not given up till it became, from the enfeebled state of the garrison, no longer tenable, also that several of the articles of charge which have been preferred against Lieut.-General Murray are frivolous and ill-founded."

With the object of preventing a duel, Draper was ordered to apologise to Murray. Murray was inclined not to accept this apology, but was advised by the King to do so and finally did very reluctantly. Judging from events discussed below his reluctance appears to have somewhat upset his advisor who had supported him.

The Dictionary of National Biography also has the information: *'Soon afterwards a Mr. Sutherland brought an action against Murray for illegal suspension from the office of judge of the vice-admiralty court in Minorca. Murray had offered to reinstate Sutherland on his making a certain apology. The matter had been referred home, and the king had approved Murray's action; but a jury, the king's approval notwithstanding, found that Murray had acted arbitrarily and unreasonably, and gave damages against him to the amount of £5,000. On 6 May 1785, on a division by 57 ayes against 22 noes, the House of Commons decided that the damages and Murray's costs be paid out of the public money.'*

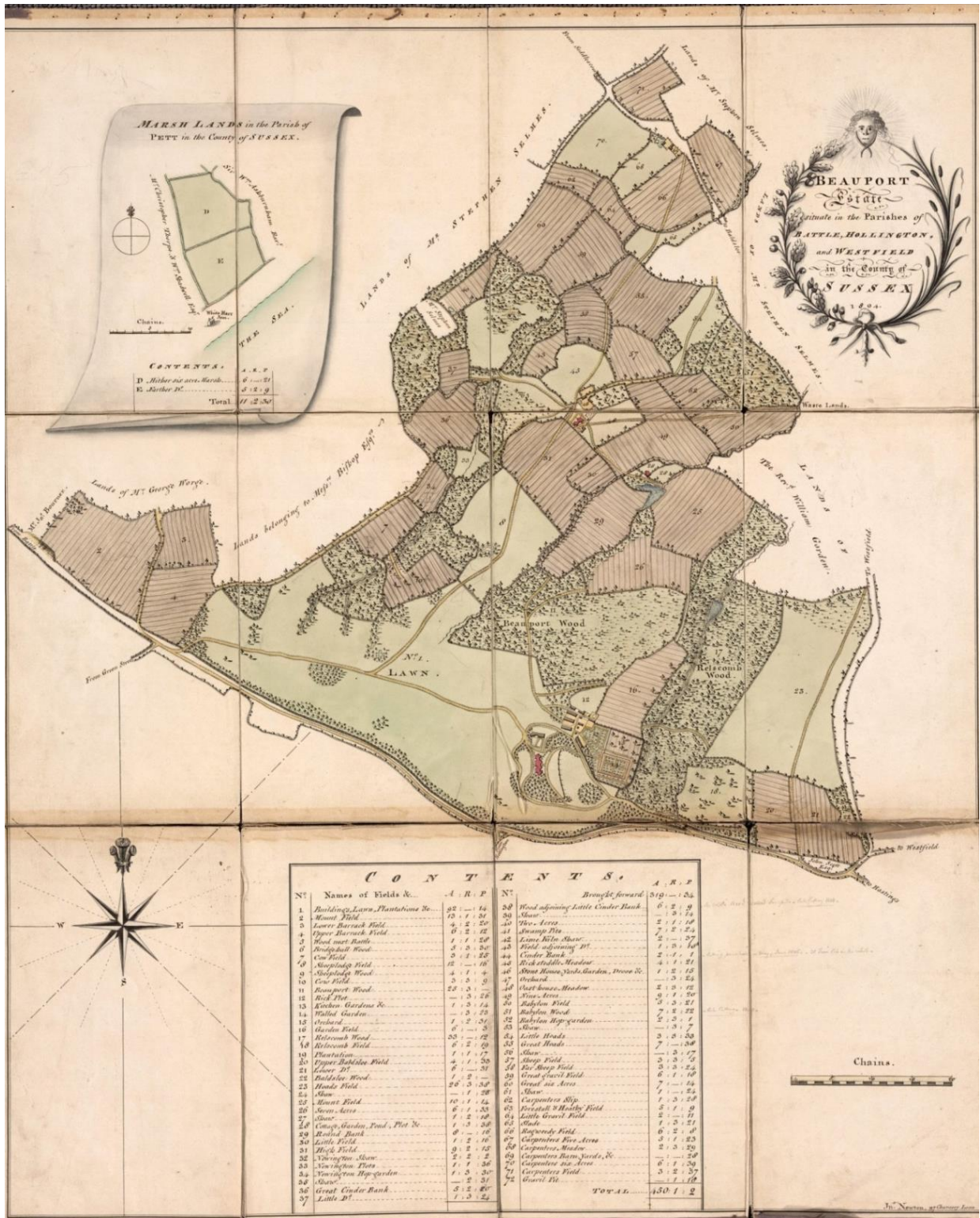
On 19th February 1783, Murray was promoted to the rank of full General. This appears to have been a routine promotion, of a number of Lieut.-Generals of the same date of rank, but it was nevertheless an indication that the court martial had not found him wanting. His ambition to command the Scots Greys was never fulfilled. The King had promised it, but two years later the command became vacant and was given to another. Around the same time

Murray was appointed Governor of Hull, a military sinecure office with no significant duties: (see The London Gazette: no. 12624. p101 (22 February 1785)

James Murray retired to Sussex, as Mahon says *‘there to reflect on the inconstancy of princes and the unwisdom of those that put trust in them.’* He lived for the rest of his life at Beauport House, near Battle, Sussex, dying on the 18th June 1794. He and Ann had had four more children of whom two, a daughter and son died in infancy, but two more daughters survived. His son, James Patrick, born in Livorno under such difficult circumstances also joined the army and became a Major General before retiring in 1830.



Architect's design for Beauport House in Murray's time (found in Murray's papers). It has since been rebuilt twice.



Beauport Park in 1804, ten years after Murray's death. - AMS 6465-1 reproduced with permission © ESRO

At the time of his death James Murray was Lord of the Manor of Ore and was buried in the churchyard of old St. Helens Church at Ore. The churchyard still contains the family vault of General Murray, 'Conqueror of Canada and builder of Beauport Park', but his monumental inscription was moved to the new church on The Ridge.



Today old St. Helens Ore lies in ruins and the graveyard is overgrown, but recent restoration and conservation work has been carried out see: <http://www.oldsthelenschurch.org.uk/>

Britain captured Minorca again in 1798 during the French Revolutionary Wars, but it returned permanently to Spain in 1802 following the Treaty of Amiens.

Quebec stood firm against the revolutionaries in the American War of Independence when attacked at the end of December 1775. It is believed that Murray's sympathetic behaviour towards the French contributed to the defence and retention of Québec province by both British and French Canadians. Beauport is now a north-eastern suburb of Québec City.

What can we make of James Murray's character at such a distance? Browne in the *'Dictionary of Canadian Biography'* implies that his personality may have accounted for the antagonisms he encountered throughout his life. But looking at the events above his character appears to have been set in his schooldays and early career when his father's financial circumstances and brothers' political antics and his Scots birth held him back. His recorded objection to the tax dodging by some jurats of Hastings also gives a clue. He appears to have been a straight man that dealt in practicalities as evidenced in Québec and did not tolerate personal (personified by Draper's actions) and political machinations or greed (e.g. by the later British 'entrepreneurs' of Québec). His attitude to slavery was of his time and also pragmatic. He was a straight and direct man – no wonder those whose motives were more selfish or politically motivated found him difficult. His marriage to Cordelia Collier fortuitously made him financially secure in later life.

Keith Foord, 2016

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