FRANCE, BRITAIN AND SCOTLAND:
FROM THE AULD ALLIANCE TO THE ENTENTE CORDIALE

BEAULIEU-SUR-MER

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Today I thought it might be interesting, not least given the extensive Scottish presence here at the Beaulieu festival, to look first at a particular and these days not necessarily very well-known aspect of the relations between our two countries, the Auld Alliance between France and Scotland, to explore what lay behind it; then to move on to Franco-British relations and the Entente Cordiale agreements of 1904; and to finish on Franco-British relations today and in the future, in the wider context of Europe and transatlantic relations.

<u>The Auld Alliance</u>

The Auld Alliance is not only an important element of our common history. It is also a living symbol. A Scot turning up in France, not least a Scottish football or rugby supporter, is guaranteed a warmer welcome than his English equivalent - and not just from the local barmen – even if he may feel insulted from time to time by being described as Anglais. Let it be said in passing, by the way, that if part of the fuel of the Auld Alliance in the past was French claret, this is more than matched today by the whisky flowing in the other direction – France is now one of the biggest markets for Scotch in the world – which if Robert Burns was right about freedom and

whisky going together, should be doing wonders for French democracy.

On a more noble level, General de Gaulle, in a speech in Edinburgh in 1942, expressed it thus: "I do not think that a Frenchman could have come to Scotland at any time without being sensible of a special emotion – awareness of the thousand links, still living and cherished, of the Franco-Scottish Alliance, the oldest alliance in the world, leaps to his mind".

But what was the alliance all about? There is no point beating about the bush. It was founded on a common distrust, suspicion, fear, dislike, hostility – call it what you will – of the mutual neighbour, the English.

But there was of course more to it than this, particularly in the latter centuries as intrigue and war gave way to deeper links built on culture, education, philosophy and enlightenment, and of course trade and investment too.

The oldest bilateral treaty was signed in Paris in October 1295, when the Scots decided to make common cause against Edward I of England as he tried to defend his territories in South West France.

The short term result for Scotland was disastrous, as Edward took much of Scotland and, denied the very existence of the Scottish kingdom. The French, despite a minor incursion at Dover in 1295, were unable or unwilling to do anything serious to help.

So this first treaty of alliance lasted only a few months. But it nevertheless symbolised, in a pattern to be repeated again and again in succeeding centuries, the convergence of the twin conflicts of Scotland against England and England against France, and the resulting commonality of interest - on the age-old principles that my enemy's enemy is my friend and that an enemy forced to fight on two fronts is bound to find life more difficult.

A few decades later, the context of the Hundred Years' War offered plenty of new opportunities for the Auld Alliance. David II of Scotland was captured when he led an expedition to England to take the pressure off the French after the battle of Crecy. There were two French military expeditions to Scotland in the 1340s and 1350s, and a Scottish contingent fighting for the French in France in 1355.

In the first half of the 15th century, as the fortunes of the Hundred Years War swung back and forth, substantial Scottish contingents fought on the side of the French King, living and in some cases settling in France. Some 16,000 Scots, a huge force for the time, landed at La Rochelle in successive waves, between 1419 and 1424. They caused fury in London. Henry V is said to have cursed Scotland on his deathbed, and exclaimed of the Scots: "Wherever I go, I find them in my beard". One notable long-term result was a contingent of Knights and archers who for many years served as the personal bodyguard of the French King.

Accusations of treachery were two a penny, for example when the French King bought himself out of an English prison through the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360, renouncing the Alliance with Scotland in the process. The Scots regularly complained that the French Kings spent their time dodging payment and organising truces with the English rather than getting on with any serious fighting, while the French knights who came on the various expeditions to Scotland didn't think much of their living conditions, with not much to eat and certainly nothing serious to drink.

Despite these problems, there seems to have been already an affection between the two peoples which went beyond their common cause against the English.

This was underpinned by the increasing number of Scottish students in the French universities of Paris and Orleans.

Meanwhile joint military adventures continued. When Henry VIII arrived on the throne of England, and decided to invade France, James IV saw his opportunity to make war on England, on sea and on land. The subsequent disaster of Flodden weakened Scotland, but did nothing to weaken the Auld Alliance.

The Alliance was nevertheless already beginning to change its nature, as the Reformation gathered strength and the struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism began in earnest. Much of Scotland, particularly the lowlands, was already providing fertile ground for the Protestant cause, and John Knox. There was plenty of resistance. When Mary Queen of Scots went to France in 1548 as the future bride of the dauphin, the French King reportedly leapt for joy, going so far as to declare that France and Scotland were now one country. But the clock could not be turned back and it was from a largely Protestant Scotland that Mary, having returned as Queen in 1561, fled 6

years later, fatally to England, rather than to France, where she would have been safer.

The last, Highland, twist, of the Alliance came when a Catholic Stuart returned to the throne in 1685, and set in train the chain of events which was to lead to further disaster for Scotland at Cullodden: the flight of James II to France in 1688, when William of Orange invaded; the abortive invasion by Louis XIV in 1692; and the rebellions of 1708, 1715 and 1745.

One of the great unanswered questions of British history is whether the Stuart rebellion could have succeeded, if France had been able to invade when she had apparently promised? Would the British as a whole have been ready to welcome Bonnie Prince Charlie, with French support, given the glue which already existed between England and Scotland in terms of religion, language and economic interdependence?

Probably not, in my humble view. But in any case, the death of Charles Stuart in France in 1788, and his brother twenty years later, marked the end not only of Jacobitism but also of the Auld Alliance in its original form.

Yet it continued to flourish in new ways. It had left deep roots of mutual respect and affection, including through the presence of Scottish exiles in France at different times, and strong educational and cultural ties. And while Scotland had tended to be seen in France at one time as the wild frontier of civilisation, this was to change in the second half of the 18th century as the French recognised the contribution of the Scottish Enlightenment and Edinburgh as the Athens of the North. For the French, Ecossais came to mean something intellectually different from, and often superior to, Anglais. This was followed by what we might call the discovery of Romantic Scotland, started by translations of Ossian, and immeasurably reinforced by the widely read works of Walter Scott. The idea of the noble Highlander in particular helped to create a particular place in French hearts for Scotland.

What of the present day? Scottish universities have departments of French studies. Scotland's romantic landscapes and history continue to exercise a significant hold over French imaginations. Many French know nothing of England north of London, but are aficionados of Scotland. Trade, investment and tourism are powerful drivers of contemporary ties. Edinburgh remains France's only Consulate outside London. Paris is a significant port of call for Scottish ministers and politicians. The emotional and cultural links remain strong. The psychological legacy of the Auld Alliance remains powerful.

But let me put this in a wider context and turn now to Franco-British relations and the Entente Cordiale. One of the reasons why the Auld Alliance lost much of its force and relevance in the 19th century was that Scottish influence was growing in England and Britain. In particular the Scots were playing an increasing role in the expansion of the British Empire: military, administrative, economic and cultural. And as Britain's imperial ambitions brought her increasingly into conflict once more with France, in North America, India, the Pacific, and later and most obviously Africa, the Scots were virtually indistinguishable from the English in these struggles. It was precisely these colonial struggles. And it was of course precisely these colonial struggles which led to the Entente Cordiale Agreements in 1904.

Anglo-French history had of course been a roller-coaster for centuries before that. We spent many centuries fighting each other and, although these long periods of hostility were interspersed by times of mutual admiration, they obviously left significant traces on both of us. It speaks for itself that when Queen Victoria met King Louis-Philippe in 1843, it was the first meeting of French and British sovereigns on French soil since the ceremony of the Field of the Cloth of Gold between Henry VIII and François Premier in 1520. And when Louis-Philippe

went to Britain in 1844, even more extraordinarily, he was the first French King to set foot in Britain since Jean II arrived as a state hostage after the battle of Poitiers in 1356.

It was in fact around the time of these visits that the expression "Entente Cordiale" first began to be heard, first used oddly enough by Palmerston, not usually a great friend of France, in 1831, when he remarked: "We feel sincerely how such a good and cordial understanding, a firm friendship between England and France, must contribute to the maintenance of freedom and the happiness of nations".

King Louis Philippe himself seems to have been the first to use the French version on his visit in 1844, when he said that France wanted nothing from Britain. Britain wanted nothing from France. We simply wanted an Entente Cordiale. Since then the French version has almost always been used – indeed there is effectively no satisfactory English translation, although we all know, or at least think we know, what it means.

In fact the 19th century did see significant periods of cooperation, notably in the Crimean War. But British neutrality in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 aroused much bitterness in Paris. And a fresh burst of colonial rivalry in the 1880s and 90s, particularly the scramble for Africa, blew on the embers of past

rancours and brought Britain and France back to the very brink of war at the end of the century, following the bitter stand-off at Fashoda in 1898.

The gallant French force at Fashoda were so outnumbered by General Kitchener's troops that fighting was out of the question, and the French had no option but to agree to withdraw a few weeks later. But the outburst of jingoistic fervour surrounding the incident in both the British and French press was such that in the ensuing months the French made naval preparations and Britain responded accordingly. Fashoda reinforced French hostility to Britain, as a brutal and perfidious power. The atmosphere was such that the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, despite his love for France, felt obliged to cancel his visit to the Paris Great Exhibition of 1900.

Such was the scene on to which came Delcassé, the French Foreign Minister of the time, and Lord Lansdowne, the British Foreign Minister and incidentally not only himself a Scot, at least in part, but also a great grandson, albeit on the wrong side of the blanket, of the great French Statesman and Ambassador in London, Talleyrand – once famously if rather uncharitably described by Napoleon as a "pile of shit in a silk stocking". The two foreign ministers restarted negotiations in 1902 to try to end the colonial frictions. It was by no means self-evident that they would succeed – rather the contrary. But Edward VII made

a significant contribution at this point, through his State Visit to Paris in May 1903. He transformed his initial rough reception into a triumph by a series of speeches of unprecedented warmth about France, on the theme that: "Providence has made us neighbours, let us make sure that we are friends".

The Agreement itself was finally signed in London on 8 April 1904. It was not a glorious or ambitious Treaty of Peace, or even an Alliance. Rather it was, by the standards of today, a deeply politically incorrect imperial carve-up. The core of it was a deal whereby France gave Britain a free hand to rule Egypt, long contested between the two of them, while Britain effectively gave the green light to France to colonise Morocco when she felt like it, which she did a few years later. There were other deals too: the boundaries of Nigeria, French annexation of Madagascar, spheres of influence in Siam and Indo-China, a condominium in the New Hebrides, and even fishing rights in Newfoundland.

Despite its inglorious nature, the Entente Cordiale agreement was hugely important: it managed not only to take the sting out of Franco-British colonial rivalries in most of the world, but also to lay the foundations for the later relationship of alliance which ensured that the two countries were at each other's side in two World Wars. And of course the term Entente Cordiale

has, remarkably, stuck, though often used ironically by the press on both sides of the Channel. Perhaps it was precisely the severely practical nature of the Agreement which made it more successful than previous Treaties of Perpetual Peace or such like, none of which ever lasted more than a few years. No doubt it was the mutual fear of the rising power of Germany which helped push us together. Whatever the explanation, the agreement was a turning point, and its centenary worth celebrating for that reason alone.

What the Agreement did not do, of course, was to make the river of the Franco-British relationship run entirely smoothly. Nor could it. The legacy of hundreds of years of enmity and suspicion could not be so easily wished away. Even today, old insults, myths and stereotypes surface at the slightest provocation, in the media if rather less in the mouths of politicians and diplomats. In truth the relationship has been, and remains, complex and emotional. How could it be otherwise between the two longest-standing great nation states of Europe, condemned by geographical proximity and similar scale of population and ambition to be rivals, both across the Channel and in the wider imperial world?

But we have long been fascinated by each other as well as suspicious. Periods of Anglophobia in France have been punctuated by phases of Anglomania, when British habits,

clothes and ideas have been all the vogue among the elite; just as hatred and fear of France in Britain over the centuries have alternated with admiration of her culture, style and cuisine. The lurches have been dramatic but relatively easy psychologically: awe at French elegance was easily turned to ridicule of French frivolity. French admiration of British pragmatism could readily be transformed into contempt for British cloddishness and ignorance of higher ideas.

Our relationship has often been described as a love-hate relationship, but I do not think that captures its real essence. It is more a question of mutual fascination and respect, tempered by mutual irritation and rivalry, none of which we ever quite seem to be able to get over.

Put another way, for each of us, the other country is perhaps the only one in the world to which we can never quite feel fully superior.

But my strong view, and the reason why I was so keen to use the Entente Cordiale centenary to emphasise the positive and appeal to the younger generation wherever possible, is that it really is now time to move beyond these clichés and find a genuinely more solid psychological basis for living and working together. Too much has changed both in the nature of our links

and in the dangers we face in the world for us to go on as we have been, deep though our practical dialogue already is in many ways. It really is time to confine the rivalry to the field of sport and get on with the rest as true friends with different traditions, of course, but above all with common interests and values wherever we look.

Our peoples are more than ever intertwined, with the millions of tourists in both directions. Increasing numbers of British settle and work in France, not just in the recolonised Dordogne but virtually all over the country, while hundreds of thousands of young French thrive in London. French footballers can be popular heroes in Britain. Our trade and investment make us ever more interdependent. Our links through mutual membership of the EU grow ever closer. More important still, we both retain a global presence and an ambition to make a difference in the world, together with insistence on retaining enough defence capability to back this up. We are both resolutely multilateral powers. When we work together, in the Security Council, or NATO, or the EU, or the G8 we can achieve almost anything. We are increasingly aware that, when we work against each other, as over Iraq, we simply tend to cancel each other out, and Europe's cohesion and influence are the principal victims.

And the threats we face in the world have changed too. The menace of the Soviet Union, which provided so much of the bedrock glue of the Atlantic Alliance, has gone. The danger of Europe and America drifting apart is real. Meanwhile the threats from international terrorism and the dangers of nuclear, chemical and biological proliferation are greater than ever before. The truth is that, despite much close cooperation, we are still not doing anything like as well as we could in making common cause in Europe, and between Europe and America, to fight against these dangers, though we all know we are all threatened in equal measure. We know that force alone cannot be the answer. We know too that diplomacy, dialogue and more overseas aid - where both Britain and France are making a new major effort - will not be enough, without willingness to use force if necessary. We have to find the right combination, the right middle way. And know that these struggles cannot be won without Europe and the US working together.

But I fear that, collectively, we have not so far managed to find this right, united way forward. I believe profoundly that Britain and France together could show that way. Whatever our different relationships with the US, for obvious historical reasons, and whatever the different rhetoric we use, we both want to see a stronger Europe in the world, more united and listened to; and we both want to see Europe as a strategic partner to the US – not a vassal nor a rival, not a poodle nor a counterweight, but a partner, with all that implies in both

solidarity in times of difficulty, and freedom to make clear differences of approach where necessary.

Our differences over Iraq have perhaps increased the difficulty for both of us of seeing the reality of this commonality of end objective clearly enough. That does not make it less of a reality. It may be too late to come together fully on Iraq now, but we can move beyond it. 2005 will give us new opportunities in transatlantic relations, whoever wins the US elections. We need to prepare to take them.

Meanwhile we face major challenges together in Europe: the prospect of further enlargement, with the decision looming on whether to start negotiations with Turkey; both of us facing the prospect of difficult internal referendums in Europe on the new Constitution; and the need to develop further a common European foreign policy and European defence capability.

I do not propose to go into the details of these issues now, though I am happy to answer questions on them. What I hope is that both of us will face these issues with confidence in ourselves and in the future. In our case, as the Prime Minister has remarked on more than one occasion, Britain has tended to miss European trains as they left the platform, only to leap on them later. This has left us absent at key moments of shaping

Europe's destiny and contributed to a feeling in Britain that Europe was not a project which we helped lead but rather something which was "done" to us. The new Constitution, and the new Commission, are a fresh opportunity to engage fully and enthusiastically in the next stage of Europe's development, without complexes about whether Europe is really for us, or about whether our close relationship with the US should be a brake on this process.

For her part, France is currently going through a period of anxiety and self-doubt, not for the first time, about apparent decline, about the future of its manufacturing industry, about the strength of its capacity to influence, and flourish in, an enlarged Europe of 25 or more, about the dangers of globalisation. In my humble opinion these worries are all greatly exaggerated. France remains a great and prosperous country, able to hold its own economically in the world, and politically right at the heart of Europe and world diplomacy. France has no reason not to have confidence in her ability to face the challenges of globalisation successfully, and to find her fulfilment in a strong, free-trading, outward-looking Europe.

If both of us can find our self-confidence and our belief in the future of Europe – and I repeat, though it may not be self-evident for either of us, that our underlying views of Europe and transatlantic relations are in my view closer than is usually

thought - we really can do new things together. Europe and the world would be the gainers, as well as our two countries.

Together we also have a particular importance in the reinforcement of a common European foreign policy and the development of European defence capability, to complement NATO. It is precisely such a Europe which will be a stronger partner for the Americans. This is our crucial common agenda, if we have the vision to pursue it. We also share a commitment, for example, to Africa's rescue and renewal, to a new effort to find the necessary rapid finance to help the developing world achieve the millenium goals, and to the need to face up to the biggest single challenge we all face, climate change. All this can offer new life to our relationship, if we have the wisdom and foresight to pursue it. And the British Presidency of the G8 next year, and of the EU in the second half of 2005, offer particular opportunities to pursue these goals together.

So let me conclude on that note and by thanking you for listening; I hope I have not been too long. Perhaps I could leave you appropriately with a thought from a French writer who was particularly fond of Scotland, Voltaire. Asked on his deathbed to renounce the devil, he replied "This is no time to be making new enemies".

Thank you again for inviting me to speak. Long live the Auld Alliance. Vive l'Entente Cordiale.