

# Introduction

The first duke of Hamilton played an important role in the politics and life of Britain in the first half of the seventeenth century. Born in 1606 into the Scottish ancient noble family of Hamilton, who enjoyed a blood connection with the royal Stuarts through marriage, he was well placed to take full advantage of the union of the crowns which opened up substantial opportunities in England and Ireland. The centre of that new world was the recently established Stuart court in London. Hamilton's father, the 2<sup>nd</sup> marquis had been lured there by James VI & I in 1617 to become the Scottish favourite. Hamilton, styled earl of Arran, entered that courtly world in December 1620 at the age of fourteen and was executed on a scaffold outside Whitehall Palace in March 1649. During that period, he was involved in some of the most momentous events in British history, the wars of the three kingdoms and the collapse of the Stuart monarchy. His story casts a distinctive light on the period and allows a fresh account of the slowly unfolding crisis that saw an anointed king put on trial and publicly executed.

The career of James, 3<sup>rd</sup> marquis and 1<sup>st</sup> duke of Hamilton (1606–1649) falls into three parts: the first, from 1606–1638 concerns events prior to the Scottish troubles and the subsequent three kingdom crisis that enveloped the British Isles; the second, from 1637–1643, spans Hamilton's involvement in the collapse of Charles I's three monarchies in Scotland, Ireland and England; and the third and final part, from 1644–1649, covers Hamilton's role in the Engagement in Scotland and the second series of wars in England and Scotland.

Part one consists of five chapters: essentially a cluster of studies mainly concentrating on events prior to 1638. Chapter 1 covers the background of the Hamilton family, and looks at the career of Hamilton's father, James, 2<sup>nd</sup> marquis of Hamilton, and it concludes with a discussion of our subject's early career to 1629. Chapter 2 recounts Hamilton's involvement in the German wars under the king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, and the impact of his German venture at home and abroad. Chapter 3 looks at Hamilton's patronage of the Protestant cause, his continued interests in

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foreign policy and concludes with a short section on his religion. Chapter 4 reconstructs Hamilton's career in England and Chapter 5 does the same for Scotland and Ireland.

Part two presents three chapters on Hamilton's role in the three-kingdom crisis between 1637–1643. The conclusions from part one will offer a fuller picture of the marquis during the political crisis. Not only that, but a distinctive picture also emerges of one of Charles I's most intimate and British-minded ministers struggling to steer the king towards a settlement, while trying to avoid censure from the king's opponents and his hard-line supporters in the three kingdoms. Part three covers the remarkable final phase in Hamilton's life over three chapters detailing the Engagement, defeat at Preston and his execution in London.

This is a story of a conciliator, a skilled politician seeking to avoid the descent into civil war in all three kingdoms. That the king ordered the imprisonment of his friend and moderate counsellor, illustrates the depth of the crisis in the three kingdoms at the close of 1643. In a truly remarkable final act, Hamilton emerged from prison in the summer of 1646 and in a matter of eighteen months transformed the political situation in Scotland. This led to an invasion of England by a Scottish army determined to restore their uncovenanted king. That Hamilton did it through the Scottish parliament and vanquished the marquis of Argyll in the process is no less extraordinary and compares to the parliamentary revolution in Scotland in 1639–1640 that ushered the Argyll covenanters into power.

The study is based principally on the massive Hamilton archive located at the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh and the papers retained by the duke of Hamilton at Lennoxlove, East Lothian. The archive contains approximately 10,200 items of correspondence and 10,000 estate, building and household accounts.<sup>1</sup> Given this amount of material, the structure of the study has been determined by – and is in some part an attempt to make sense of – the relevant material in that collection. At that level therefore, it was essential to master the archive before mastering the subject under study. Most of the state papers in the Hamilton archive were sold to the National Records of Scotland in 1982 and the correspondence part was made available to the public as GD 406/1 using the catalogue compiled by Dr Rosalind Marshall as an appendix to her 1968 thesis.<sup>2</sup> The other part of the State Papers (M1 and M9) comprising draft papers, petitions, commercial papers and political papers is currently being catalogued and will appear as GD 406/2.<sup>3</sup> What remains at the present duke of Hamilton's residence at Lennoxlove comprise largely of estate papers and other financial accounts.<sup>4</sup>

Although the character of the correspondence ranges from draft, copy and original, a lot of the material prior to 1638 consists mainly of incoming letters. This means that we are often reconstructing Hamilton's activities from other people's correspondence. An attempt has been made to balance this with material from the Feilding of Newnham Paddox MSS (Hamilton's English relatives) and the Traquair MSS, but it is nevertheless the main weakness in the Hamilton Papers.<sup>5</sup> Naturally then, this is reflected in part one of the study. This is less of a problem in part two, though it is replaced by the archive taking on a dual role from February 1640 when Hamilton's brother William, earl of Lanark, was made secretary for Scotland at court following the death of

<sup>1</sup> R.K. Marshall, 'The House of Hamilton in its Anglo-Scottish Setting in the Seventeenth Century' (PhD University of Edinburgh, 1968), Abstract. My own estimate for the period 1625–1644 from a rough count in the Hamilton correspondence catalogues (including the supplementary and undated catalogues) amounts to 3,250 letters. This does not include the M1/M9 state papers nor the Lennoxlove papers: for them see below.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, 'The House of Hamilton', catalogue appendices.

<sup>3</sup> Dr David Brown is cataloguing the M1, M9 series and I am most grateful to him for many helpful discussions on the Hamilton Papers and for allowing me access to the M1, M9 papers.

<sup>4</sup> This is a massive archive in itself and is currently being sorted by the National Register of Archives, Scotland. The current surveys are NRA(S) 2177, 332. I would like to thank His Grace the duke of Hamilton for permission to consult the Lennoxlove archive.

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton regularly made copies of his letters during his commissionership to Scotland in 1638, but less frequently before.

William Alexander, earl of Stirling. From then on, we must judge what material is Hamilton's or Lanark's as secretary. These problems aside, using the Hamilton Papers as a master source has allowed not only the reconstruction of the duke of Hamilton's career in considerable depth, but it permits a distinctive version of the period between 1628 and 1649.

The 1<sup>st</sup> duke of Hamilton has had two previous biographers: Bishop Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715), a near contemporary writing in the first two decades of the Restoration, and Hilary L. Rubinstein, whose work appeared in 1976.<sup>6</sup> Burnet burned with indignation that the duke had been:

represented to the world with foul and base characters, as if he had been a monster both for ingratitude and treachery, though he had laid down his life for the king and involved his estate in vast debts for his service. It seemed to me the greatest injustice in the world ...<sup>7</sup>

His study is on the one hand dedicated to Charles II with whom he corresponded during the research and writing and who allowed the author 'to tell the truth freely'.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Burnet drew some of his historical context from conversations with his own father, Robert, Lord Crimond (1592–1661), a Court of Session judge, who lived through the times and was Archibald Johnston of Wariston's brother-in-law, one of the leading Covenanters.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Burnet was sent the Hamilton archive by the duke and duchess of Hamilton and proceeded to bring it 'into some order' before writing his history.

All of these factors need to be considered when assessing Burnet's text. In essence, the author sought to correct a historical error in relation to the poor reputation of the duke of Hamilton, he rearranged the archive possibly to suit his purpose, and his final written text righted a historical wrong. Burnet's biography is an *apologia* for Hamilton and is structured around the selective presentation of largely accurate transcriptions of letters from the Hamilton Papers, punctuated by a commentary on Hamilton's unwavering loyalty to Charles I.<sup>10</sup> Three hundred years later, the opposite view was taken by Hamilton's second biographer. Hilary L. Rubinstein felt that the catchy title of her biography, *Captain Luckless*, a soubriquet coined by Hamilton's *bête noire* James Graham, 5<sup>th</sup> earl and 1<sup>st</sup> marquis of Montrose in 1649, provided 'a fitting epitaph for this maligned and misunderstood man'.<sup>11</sup> Rubinstein portrayed Hamilton as 'the arch-apostle of compromise' compelled by 'vague prejudices or self-interest' who in the final analysis was 'the most disastrous adviser a monarch ever had'.<sup>12</sup> It can be safely argued, therefore, Rubinstein challenged Burnet's uncritical appraisal of Hamilton's worth, but her argument is not supported by any evidence that she returned to the vast primary sources available for such an appraisal. Instead, she relied almost exclusively on the transcribed letters in Burnet's *Lives* as her primary source. Further discussion of Rubinstein's biography would serve little useful purpose, as it largely belongs to the genre of popular biographies normally associated with the marquis of Montrose (who conveniently provided the title for Rubinstein's biography) and Mary, Queen of Scots, in which a superficial narrative is enlivened by anecdotes of questionable provenance.<sup>13</sup>

For these reasons, it would be pedantic and tiresome to engage at every stage with the arguments of Hamilton's previous biographers as the present study differs so fundamentally in form,

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *The Memoirs of The Lives and Actions of James and William Dukes of Hamilton and Castle-Herald* (Oxford, 1673, repr. 1852); H.L. Rubinstein, *Captain Luckless: James, First Duke of Hamilton, 1606–1649* (New Jersey, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Burnet, *Lives*, p.ix.

<sup>8</sup> Burnet, *Lives*, p.xv.

<sup>9</sup> Burnet, *Lives*, pp.iii–iv, ix.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Burnet, *Lives*, pp.1–3, 8, 142, 187, 424–25, 520–21, 523.

<sup>11</sup> Rubinstein, *Captain Luckless*, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.174.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, *Ibid*, pp.16–17, 23, 41, 42, 45, 65–72 and *passim*. The chapter titles that Rubinstein employs suggest a popular audience, for example, 'Cry Treason', 'A kindly Scotsman' and 'Scotland ablaze'.

content and aims. Not only is this study from a British, even European, perspective, it is grounded on a thorough examination of the original Hamilton manuscripts and other primary sources that have never been used in a full-length treatment of one of Scotland's principal 17<sup>th</sup> century figures. Rubinstein's efforts aside, this has not been attempted since Hamilton received such sympathetic treatment from Bishop Burnet in 1673, some twenty-five years after the young duke lost his life on the scaffold in London.

The historical context in which Hamilton's life played out is amongst the most turbulent in the history of the British islands. A rich and complex bibliography has resulted with successive generations of academic and popular historians mining the sources and presenting a myriad of interpretations. I have benefited hugely from the wonderfully different narrative arcs created by historians over the last 150 years. S.R. Gardiner stands the tallest of all with his multi-volume histories, *History of England 1603–42* (1883–4) and *History of the Great Civil War 1642–49* (1893). Putting aside the author's Victorian liberal views and his promotion of the great men of the English House of Commons to the forefront of his account, and thereby demoting the nobles to mere bit players, his two multi-volume works dazzle on every page and provide a narrative that has yet to be equalled. I found great value in the elegant writing of C.V. Wedgwood, whose *The King's Peace 1637–41* (1955) and *The King's War* (1958) remain a smooth entry point into a complex world. I would have struggled to lay a narrative foundation on Scottish events of the period, without the guiding hand of David Stevenson's *The Scottish Revolution* (1973) and *Revolution & Counter-Revolution* (1977), alongside his numerous scholarly articles, many of them handily brought together in 1997 by Ashgate.<sup>14</sup> More recent accounts by a number of scholars, including Allan Macinnes, Peter Donald, John Young and Laura Stewart, have added considerably to the story.<sup>15</sup> Conrad Russell's work as the lead revisionist of his day remains stimulating, especially his insistence on events in Scotland being the factor that fatally destabilised the Caroline polity. His *Fall of the British Monarchies 1637–42* (1991), *The Causes of the English Civil War* (1990) and selected essays *Unrevolutionary England 1603–42* (1990) still yield interesting insights and deadly quotes from the archives.<sup>16</sup>

John Morrill stands out in 17<sup>th</sup> century history and for over 40 years he has kept up a constant dialogue, in print and public speaking, spanning all the Stuart kingdoms, critiquing religious, political, and economic topics with a generosity and openness that is uniquely him. His collected essays up to the early 1990s, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (1993) are an essential read, particularly around causes and scholarly debates on the period; so too is his work on Oliver Cromwell (1990 and 2007 and 2023 forthcoming) and his prodigious editorial work and book reviews. John Adamson's *Noble Revolt* (2007) superbly recasts the nobility to a more central role in the unfolding crisis and rehabilitates the House of Lords, while his edited volume *The English Civil: conflicts and contexts, 1640–49* (2009) contains a terrific introduction 'High Roads and Blind

<sup>14</sup> S.R. Gardiner, *History of England, 1603–1642* (12 vols in 10, London, 1883–1884); S.R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War, 1642–1649* (4 vols., London, 1893); C.V. Wedgwood, *The King's Peace 1637–41* (London, 1955); C.V. Wedgwood, *The King's War, 1642–1647* (London, 1958); David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637–1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (Newton Abbot, 1973); David Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland, 1644–1651* (London, 1977; repr. 2003); David Stevenson, *Union, Revolution and Religion in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland* (Aldershot, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> A.I. Macinnes, *Charles I and the making of the Covenanting Movement* (Edinburgh, 1991); P.H. Donald *An Uncounselled King: Charles I and the Scottish Troubles, 1637–1641* (Cambridge, 1990); J.R. Young, *The Scottish Parliament 1639–1661: a political and constitutional analysis* (Edinburgh, 1996); Laura A.M. Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution: Covenanted Scotland 1637–1651* (Oxford, 2016). See also, Leonie James, *'This Great Firebrand': William Laud and Scotland, 1617–1645* (Woodbridge, 2017); Alexander D. Campbell, *The life and works of Robert Baillie (1602–1662): politics, religion and record-keeping in the British Civil Wars* (Woodbridge, 2017); Barry Robertson, *Royalists at War in Scotland and Ireland, 1638–1650* (London, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990); Russell, *Unrevolutionary England, 1603–42* (London, 1990); Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies, 1637–1642* (Oxford, 1991).

Alleys – The English Civil War and its Historiography’ followed by excellent essays by leading scholars. Keith Brown’s work on the Scottish nobles, particularly his *Noble Society in Scotland* (2000) and *Noble Power in Scotland* (2013) and numerous essays have helped develop my thinking about the issues vexing the Scottish nobility in the run up to the National Covenant. John Young’s *The Scottish Parliament 1639–1661* (1996), Clyve Jones ed., *The Scots and Parliament* (1996) and the *History of the Scottish Parliament* volumes of essays (2004–10) produced from the St Andrews parliamentary project resulted in a sharpening of my thinking on the role of the nobles in the unicameral chamber.<sup>17</sup>

Scholarly work on royalism and royalists has never kept pace with the attention received by, for example, parliamentarians in England, covenanters in Scotland and confederates in Ireland. In recent years, however, the subject has enjoyed a revival in publications. We have been catapulted from Brian Wormald’s *Clarendon* (1951) to vigorous debate on the motivation of the various royalist individuals and factions supporting the king. Early works include Joyce Lee Malcolm’s *Caesar’s Due: Loyalty and King Charles, 1642–1646* (1993), David Smith’s *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for Settlement, c.1640–1649* (1994) and James Loxley’s *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: the Drawn Sword* (1997).<sup>18</sup> An important aspect of Smith’s clear defining of constitutional royalism was that it prompted discussion over the next decade and a half. This can be followed through Jason McElliot’s *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (2007), a collection of essays edited by McElliot and Smith on *Royalists and Royalism during the English Civil Wars* (2007) and David Scott, ‘Rethinking Royalist Politics, 1642–1649’ (2009).<sup>19</sup>

Aside from those mentioned already, a few books stirred me to stay the course, John Adamson’s *The Princely Courts of Europe* (2000), Richard Cust’s *Charles I: A political life* (2007), Allan Macinnes’s *The British Confederate* (2011) on the marquis of Argyll, Jane Ohlmeyer’s *The Career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim* (1993), Micheál Ó Siochru’s *God’s Executioner* (2008) on Cromwell in Ireland, Blair Worden’s *The English Civil Wars 1640–60* (2009), Tessa Watt’s *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550–1640* (1991), and Austin Woolrych’s *magisterial Britain in Revolution* (2002).

Of course, writing a biography is not the same as many of the excellent scholarly works mentioned here and in the bibliography. For one thing, the subject is born and dies, which sets hard dates on either end of the study. There are fewer biographies of key individuals than you would expect, given the richness of study on every other subject. Roger Lockyer’s life of the duke of

<sup>17</sup> John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution: essays by John Morrill* (London, 1993); Morrill, ed., *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context, 1638–51* (Edinburgh, 1990); Morrill, *Oliver Cromwell* (Oxford, 2007) and other refs in the Bibliography; John Adamson, *Noble Revolt: the overthrow of Charles I* (London, 2007); Adamson, ed., *The English Civil War: Conflicts and Contexts, 1640–1649* (Basingstoke, 2009); Adamson, ‘The Baronial context of the English Civil War’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, xl (1990), 93–120, and other refs; Keith Brown, *Noble Society in Scotland: wealth, family and culture from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2000); Brown, *Noble Power in Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2011, ppk 2013) and other refs. See also R.C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Manchester, 1999). See the Bibliography for the rest.

<sup>18</sup> B.H.G. Wormald, *Clarendon: politics, history and religion, 1640–1660* (Cambridge, 1951; repr. 1989); Joyce Lee Malcolm, *Caesar’s Due: Loyalty and King Charles I, 1642–1646* (London, 1983); David L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for Settlement* (Cambridge, 1994), see espec. 1–5 defining constitutional royalism; James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: the Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke, 1997). See also, David Underdown, *Royalist conspiracy in England, 1649–1660* (New Haven, 1960); Ronald Hutton, ‘The Structure of the Royalist Party, 1642–1646’ *HJ*, 24/3, 553–569; Ronald Hutton, *The Royalist War Effort, 1642–1646* (London, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Jason McElliot, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge, 2007); Jason McElliot & David L. Smith, *Royalists and Royalism during the English Civil Wars* (Cambridge, 2007), espec. ‘Introduction: Rethinking Royalists and Royalism’; David Scott, ‘Rethinking Royalist Politics, 1642–1649’, 36–60 (and bibliographical comments, 306–307), in Adamson, ed., *The English Civil War* (Basingstoke, 2009). See also Anthony Milton, ‘Anglicanism and Royalism in the 1640s’, 61–81, in Adamson, *English Civil War*; Robertson, ‘Scottish and Irish Royalism in Context’ in his *Royalists and Royalism in Scotland and Ireland, 1638–1650* (London, 2016).



Buckingham (1981), Jane Ohlmeyer's Antrim (1993), Allan Macinnes's Argyll (2011), David Stevenson's *Highland Warrior* (1980) on Alasdair MacColla, David Smith's PhD thesis (1990) and subsequent articles on the earl of Dorset (1990), Billy Kelly's PhD thesis on the earl of Ormond (1997), Alexander Campbell's *Life and Works of Robert Baillie* (2017) and Richard Cust on Charles I (2007) all helped to challenge my thinking on how to approach a biography.<sup>20</sup> Other scholars have looked at a decisive aspect of an individual's career as the limit for their study. Hugh Kearney's *Strafford in Ireland* (1959) continues to be relevant, while Leonie James' study of Laud's influence on religious policy in Scotland (2017) makes a strong case for the archbishop being much more involved than he later claimed.<sup>21</sup> As we will find, Hamilton would have emphatically agreed that Laud was up to his neck in the formulation of the Canons and Prayer Book.

There are many historiographical essays and perceptive prefaces scattered through these and other volumes which are referenced in the footnotes and listed in the bibliography at the end of this book. The surveys I found most useful were John Morrill's introduction and essays in *The Nature of the English Revolution* (1993), Austin Woolrych's admirably succinct 'Prologue' in *Britain in Revolution* (2002), John Adamson's excellent 'High Roads and Blind Alleys – The English Civil War and its Historiography' in *The English Civil War* (2009), Barry Robertson's bibliographical essay on royalists and royalism in Scotland and Ireland in his *Royalists at War* (2017) which provides a welcome overview of the subject, while Keith Thomas's review 'When the Lid came off England' (2004) nicely encapsulates the historical trends over a much longer timespan.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Roger Lockyer, *The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, 1592–1628* (Singapore, 1981); Jane Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart kingdoms: the career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim, 1609–1683* (Cambridge, 1993); Allan I. Macinnes, *The British Confederate: Archibald Campbell, Marquess of Argyll, 1607–1661* (Edinburgh, 2010); David Stevenson, *Highland Warrior: Alasdair MacColla and the Civil Wars* (Edinburgh, 1980); David L. Smith, 'The Political Career of Edward Sackville, Fourth Earl of Dorset (1590–1652)' (PhD University of Cambridge, 1990); W.P. Kelly, 'The early career of James Butler, twelfth earl and first duke of Ormond (1610–1688)' (PhD University of Cambridge, 1997); Alexander D. Campbell, *The life and works of Robert Baillie (1602–1662): politics, religion and record-keeping in the British Civil Wars* (Woodbridge, 2017); Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2005, ppk 2007).

<sup>21</sup> James, *This Great Firebrand*, pp.1–4, 42–82, 67–69, 86; H.P. Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland, 1633–41* (Manchester, 1959 & Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (1993), pp.1–29; John Adamson, ed., *The English Civil War: Problems in Focus* (London, 2009), pp.1–35; A. Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution* (London, 2002), pp.1–6; Barry Robertson, *Royalists at War in Scotland and Ireland, 1638–1650* (Farnham, 2014), 1–25; Keith Thomas, 'When the Lid Came Off England' (2004), When the Lid Came off England | Keith Thomas | The New York Review of Books (nybooks.com).