

# *The two Sir George Hamiltons and their connections with the castles of Roscrea and Nenagh*

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By Conleth Manning

It has sometimes been assumed that Sir George Hamilton and his wife Mary Butler, a sister of the first duke of Ormonde, lived at Roscrea Castle around the 1640s and that one of their sons, the famous Anthony Hamilton, author of *Les Memoires de Grammont*, was born there about 1645.<sup>1</sup> Gleeson adds that Anthony's father was also governor of Nenagh Castle for his brother in law and that Anthony might have been born there.<sup>2</sup>

In fact the situation was a little more complicated in that there were two Sir George Hamiltons, one being the nephew of the other and both married to different Mary Butlers, one of whom was the niece of the other. The older couple lived at Roscrea Castle and the younger couple, the parents of Anthony Hamilton, were at Nenagh.<sup>3</sup> It is easy to see how the two couples could be confused and in the case of some references it is still not clear which Sir George or which Lady Mary is intended.

The involvement of this Hamilton family with Ireland goes back to the Plantation of Ulster when James Hamilton, first earl of Abercorn, and his brothers Sir George and Sir Claud were granted lands in the barony of Strabane, Co. Tyrone.<sup>4</sup> Their father, Claud Hamilton, first Baron Paisley, as a loyal supporter of Mary Queen of Scots, forfeited his estates under Regent Moray, but had them restored to him by Mary's son, James VI of Scotland, in 1573.<sup>5</sup>

After James was crowned king of England in 1603 the Hamiltons continued to receive royal favour, including the earldom of Abercorn in 1606 and grants of land in Ulster in 1610. The earl of Abercorn was granted lands amounting to 23,800 statute acres at Strabane and Dunalong; his brother George, known as Sir George Hamilton of Greenlaw<sup>6</sup> got 12,400 statute acres at Largie between Strabane and Dunalong and the other brother, Claud, got 18,000 statute acres in Killenny and Eden.<sup>7</sup>

When the first earl died in 1618 he was succeeded by his eldest son James, who became the 2nd earl of Abercorn. In 1633 he resigned his Irish peerage and land to his brother Claud, who then became Baron of Strabane.<sup>8</sup> Another brother George inherited Dunalong and was later known as Sir George Hamilton of Dunalong. To distinguish the two they will be referred to here as Sir George Hamilton the elder (of Greenlaw and later of Roscrea) and Sir George Hamilton the younger (of Dunalong and later of Nenagh).

Strange as it may seem, some of these Hamiltons were Catholics. The wife of the 1st earl of Abercorn was a prominent Roman Catholic and was excommunicated by the kirk of Paisley in 1628. The 2nd earl was excommunicated by the general assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1649 and ordered out of the kingdom.<sup>9</sup> His brothers, one of whom was Sir George Hamilton the younger, were the subjects of complaints to the Dublin administration in 1629 where they were referred to as drawing priests and Jesuits to Strabane.<sup>10</sup>

Their uncle, Sir George the elder, a staunch Catholic, was made their guardian when the 1st earl died in 1618 and he probably also had an influence on their religion.<sup>11</sup> In 1622 he was described as "an arch-papist and a great patron of them"<sup>12</sup> and in a deposition of 1630 it was stated that: "There is evidence of the holding of mass at Sir George Hamilton's and in other



houses where it is attended by the Irish and forty Scotch from about Strabane. Sir George is praised for having made many converts during his residence in Ireland, both at Strabane and at Killybegs".<sup>13</sup>

He was clearly a wealthy man for on March 18th 1625 he loaned £4,102 to William Hamilton of Eliston, Scotland, a son of his brother Sir Claud.<sup>14</sup> According to Lodge he first married Isabella of the family of Civico of Bruges in Flanders and by her had only one daughter Margaret, who became the first wife of Sir Archibald Acheson of Gosford.<sup>15</sup> While Lodge specifies that this was the first marriage he does not mention a second marriage, the only one mentioned in Burke's *Peerage*, i.e. to Mary, daughter of Walter, 11th earl of Ormond, by whom he had an only son, James, who died without issue in 1659.<sup>16</sup>

The marriage agreement between Hamilton and Walter, earl of Ormond, survives among the unpublished Ormond deeds.<sup>17</sup> The deed is dated February 14th 1630 (new style) and in it Walter agreed to pay Hamilton a marriage portion of £1,800. This was a good time for Walter, who after many years of struggle, including some years in prison in London, in his efforts to regain his rightful inheritance of all of the Ormond estates, had lived to see the reuniting of these vast estates with the marriage of his grandson and heir, James, to Elizabeth Preston the grand-daughter of Thomas 10th earl of Ormond. Despite his good fortune he and the estates were still burdened with debts and, as the £1,800 was not forthcoming, Walter now joined by his grandson James and his wife, Elizabeth in a deed dated April 16th 1631 granted the manor, castle, town and lands of Roscrea to Sir George Hamilton and Dame Mary his wife for 21 years, in part payment of the dowry.<sup>18</sup>

From this time on Sir George Hamilton the elder is sometimes referred to as of Roscrea, as is the case in the *Civil Survey* for Co. Tipperary, where he is described as an Irish Papist.<sup>19</sup> I have not been able to ascertain the time, place or circumstances of Sir George the elder's death, but he was certainly dead by 1654-6 and most likely died of natural causes in the early to mid 1640s. His son is described in the *Civil Survey* of Tyrone as: "James Hamilton of Roskre Esqr. a minor Sone to Sr George Hamillton ye elder of Roskrea knight deceased who was a Scottish papist".<sup>20</sup>

Sir George Hamilton the younger followed in his uncle's footsteps in marrying into the Butlers. An unpublished deed in the Ormond collection records the marriage agreement between George Hamilton, knight, of "Dunelonge" and James earl of Ormond of February 28th 1635 regarding the marriage intended between Hamilton and Mary Butler, sister of the earl, which was to take place before the last day of April.<sup>21</sup> This was followed up on May 1st 1640 by a grant to the same Sir George, referred to in this case as George Hamilton of Knockanderig<sup>22</sup> in the county of Tipperary, knight and baronet, and Lady Mary Butler, specified as the sister of the earl, of the manor, castle, town and lands of Nenagh for 31 years.



Engraving of Anthony Hamilton, the son of Sir George Hamilton the younger and Mary Butler, sister of the 1st Duke of Ormond (from the 1908 edition of the *Memoirs*, where its source is given as the 1772 edition).



For the first fifteen years they were only to pay a peppercorn and thereafter £60 sterling but he was to "well and truly repair the castle or manor house aforesaid with the orchard, gardens and other the houses" and "shall and will impale and enclose a park of 300 acres of 21 foot to the perch".<sup>23</sup> Some years previously on November 10th 1632 Walter the 11th earl had demised Nenagh to William Grace for 21 years; £10 of the £100 annual rent was to go towards the reparation of the buildings of the manor house of Nenagh.<sup>24</sup> This deed must have been partly rescinded to make the grant of 1640 possible, where there is a reference to the land granted "adjoining the lands now possessed by William Grace".

According to Gleeson Nenagh Castle was taken by Phelim O'Neill in 1648 but recaptured by Inchiquin<sup>25</sup> in the same year, and Sir George Hamilton was back again to defend it against Ireton and Abbott in 1650. He surrendered after a short siege and was allowed to march away. The unpublished Ormond deeds are informative as to how Abbott then got possession. In a deed dated September 6th 1655 between Sir William Ussher, John Percival, Lady Elizabeth Countess of Ormond (who was allowed to hold on to her share of the Ormond estates as part of the Cromwellian settlement) and Colonel Daniel Abbott of the Nenagh, Abbott was granted the manor, castle and lands of Nenagh "in as large and ample a manner as Sir George Hamilton Knt. or any other tenant of the premises held or enjoyed the same", for 41 years for £80 sterling per annum, the money to be paid to Ussher and Percival until they are satisfied in the sum of £2,837-10-0 plus interest due on a mortgage deed of July 30th 1640.<sup>26</sup> At the Restoration Abbott was unceremoniously dispossessed by Sir William Flower on behalf of the Countess of Ormond<sup>27</sup> and subsequently the manor, castle and lands were leased again to the Hamiltons.<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain what exactly happened the two Hamilton families during the 1640s and 1650s. The younger Sir George fought with the earl of Ormond and is frequently mentioned in accounts of the wars. The younger Lady Hamilton was still in Nenagh in 1642, when on March 25th she sent an Irish fellow to Dublin to enquire of her husband. On this matter Ormond wrote: "I have sent this man to be examined by Sir Maurice Eustace, the rather because I find he is able to say who it was that destroyed the English at the [Silver] Mines, where they were most barbarously killed, man, woman, and child, except some few that got into Nenagh and Roscrea, where my sister and aunt live."<sup>29</sup> The younger Lady Hamilton was brought to Dublin, presumably with her family, in 1646, with her mother, Lady Thurles, and her sisters: Lady Muskerry and the wife of the baron of Loghmoe as reported on May 30th 1646.<sup>30</sup>

If Anthony Hamilton was born in 1645 it is most likely that he was born in Nenagh, though it is possible that his mother might have gone to her aunt at Roscrea for the birth, if the tradition of his being born at Roscrea is genuine and not just the result of confusion between the two families. This confusion goes back at least to the time of Carte who, in reporting the taking of Roscrea by Owen Roe O'Neill on Sept. 17th 1646, claimed that O'Neill put "man, woman and child to the sword, except Sir G. Hamilton's Lady, sister to the Marquis of Ormonde, and some few gentlewomen whom he kept prisoners".<sup>31</sup> This is more likely to have been the older Lady Hamilton considering that the younger Lady Hamilton was reported in May of that year as having been brought to Dublin. Carte does not seem to have been aware of the older Hamilton couple for, when listing the children of earl Walter, he gives Mary as having died unmarried.<sup>32</sup>

The younger Sir George's children were probably in Dublin in July 1647, to judge from his attempts to have them transported to Britain.<sup>33</sup> The petition of Lady Mary Hamilton of Roscrea of December 21st 1649 concerning the ravages of the Ulster army when Mc Mahon's regiment of horse spent two days there probably concerns the older Lady Hamilton, though the calendar entry gives her as the sister of the marquis of Ormonde.<sup>34</sup> Colonel Grace held the castle for



Ormond in March 1650 but it was soon after in the hands of the Cromwellians and remained a garrison until the Restoration.<sup>35</sup> By that time Sir George Hamilton<sup>36</sup> the elder and his only son were dead and probably also the older Lady Hamilton. In March 1660, a couple of months before the Restoration, the Countess of Ormond and her trustees leased the castle, town, lands and friary of Roscrea to Francis Peisley Esq. for 21 years.<sup>37</sup> After Sir Francis<sup>38</sup> died in 1667, his wife Mary Bullen continued to live at Roscrea until her death about 1689.<sup>39</sup>

The fate of the younger Lady Hamilton after 1646 is unclear. She is unlikely to have been at Nenagh Castle when it was taken by Sir Phelim O'Neill<sup>40</sup> in 1648 and retaken by the earl of Inchiquin for the royalists later the same year,<sup>41</sup> or even when her husband surrendered it to Ireton and Abbott in 1650.<sup>42</sup> Hamilton, his wife and family left Ireland to go into exile in France in the Spring of 1651.<sup>43</sup> After the Restoration the family lived at Whitehall in London and Sir George died in 1679 and Lady Mary in 1680.<sup>44</sup> Their eldest son James became a Protestant on marrying in 1660 and, with the failure of the Strabane and Abercorn lines, his son James became the 6th earl of Abercorn in 1701.

Sir George Hamilton's son, James, sided with king William while his brothers Anthony, Richard and John sided with James II. Anthony was made Governor of Limerick after the accession of James II<sup>45</sup> and he with his brothers Richard and John fought in the Williamite wars.<sup>46</sup> John was killed at the battle of Aughrim. Anthony ended up in France where he wrote *Les Memoires de Grammont* and is said to have been 74 years old when he died in 1719. While the date of his birth and the exact whereabouts of his mother at the time are both uncertain, his family associations were with Nenagh Castle rather than Roscrea.

The fact that these aristocratic families were living in Roscrea and Nenagh castles by 1641 has implications for the building history of both structures. By this time there must have been a high-status residence in both castles. No trace of such a residence survives at Nenagh, nor were many finds of this period found during recent archaeological excavations in the gatehouse.<sup>47</sup> However, there must have been a fine residence of the period, whether masonry or timber-framed, either within the narrow confines of the inner ward or within an outer bailey. At Roscrea there is evidence for such a building in the remnants of fine early 17th-century stucco work in the first and second floors of the south-west tower.<sup>48</sup>

"Old Sir George Hamilton's house"<sup>49</sup> at Roscrea presumably ran from this tower eastwards along the south curtain wall, with its first floor connecting with the first floor of the tower, which has the remains of particularly fine stucco work over the fireplace and forming a frieze below the ceiling. There are slight traces of stucco over the fireplace in the second-floor attic room in the tower and, in view of the Hamiltons' Catholic allegiance, it is significant that these include remnants of a crucifixion scene.<sup>50</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Gordon Goodwin (ed.) *Memoirs of Count Grammont by Count Anthony Hamilton*, 2 Vols. Edinburgh 1908, Vol. 1, x; M. Lenihan, *Limerick: its History and Antiquities*, Dublin 1866, 210, note 2; D.F. Gleeson, *Roscrea: A history of the catholic parish of Roscrea from the earliest times to the present day with some account of the territories of Uí Cairin and Éile Uí Cearbhaill*, Dublin 1947, 101-2; G. Cunningham, *Roscrea and district: Monuments and antiquities*, Roscrea 1976, 42.
2. Gleeson. *op. cit.*, 102.



3. B. Burke and A.P. Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the peerage and baronetage*, 80th edition, London 1921, 54.
4. R.J. Hunter (ed.), *The Plantation in Ulster in Strabane Barony, Co. Tyrone c. 1600-41*, Derry 1982, 18.
5. *Ibid.*
6. There are two places called Greenlaw in Scotland, one of which must have been his original residence.
7. Hunter, *op. cit.*, 18. G. Hill, *An historical account of the plantation of Ulster*, Belfast 1877, 527-30; R.C. Simington, *The Civil Survey A.D. 1654-1656: Counties of Donegal, Londonderry and Tyrone Vol. III*, Dublin 1937, 382-401.
8. V. Gibbs, *The complete peerage*, Vol. 1, London 1910, 2-3.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Calendar of State Papers Ireland, 1625-1632*, 499.
11. Hunter, *op. cit.* 20.
12. Hunter, *op. cit.*, 36.
13. *Ibid.* 512. Eight estates in the Killybegs area of Co. Donegal were leased to Sir George Hamilton of Greenlaw in 1626. R.J. Hunter, *Plantation in Donegal*, in W. Nolan, L. Ronayne and M. Dunleavy (eds.) *Donegal History and Society*, Dublin 1995, 283-324 (294).
14. J. Ohlmeyer and É. Ó Ciardha (eds.), *The Irish Statute Staple Books, 1596-1687*, Dublin 1998, 105-6, 236.
15. Lodge, J. *The peerage of Ireland*, revised by Mervyn Archdall, Dublin 1789, Vol. 5, 110. This may be wrong for, according to Burke's *Peerage*, Acheson's wife was the daughter of Sir George's brother John. There does, however, appear to have been an earlier marriage, as shown by references to Sir George and his family being resident in a timber house at Largie in 1611 and another to him, his lady and their family usually inhabiting a stone-built bawn in 1622. Hunter, *op. cit.*, 57.
16. Burke and Burke, *op. cit.*, 54.
17. National Library of Ireland, D3753. I am very grateful to Jane Fenlon for bringing this and the following deed to my attention.
18. NLI D3793. The unpublished Ormond deeds were consulted in the form of typed abstracts by T. Blake Butler (5 Vols.) in the Manuscripts Reading Room of the National Library of Ireland.
19. R.C. Simington (ed.), *The Civil Survey A.D. 1654-1656, County of Tipperary, Vol. 1*, Dublin 1931, 29, 31.
20. Simington, *op. cit.* in note 6, 384.
21. NLI Ms. D3983.
22. This is Knockaunderrick, the old name for the Silvermines, some five miles south-south-west of Nenagh. Sir George Hamilton (the younger?), along with Sir Basil Brooke and Sir William Russell, formed a company to exploit the mines about 1633. D. Cowman, *The Silvermines – Sporadic Working: 1289-1874*, *Tipperary Historical Journal* 1988, 96-115 (96-9).
23. NLI Ms. D4158.
24. NLI Ms. D3870.
25. The garrison in the castle surrendered after a mine had been dug under it, "capable to receive a barrel of powder". J.T. Gilbert (ed.) *History of the Irish Confederation and the war in Ireland*, 7 Vols., Dublin 1891 (Vol. 7, 105).
26. NLI Ms. D4384.
27. D.F. Gleeson, *The castle and manor of Nenagh*, *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland* 66 (1936), 247-63 (257).
28. In 1665 Sir George Hamilton paid eight shillings tmax on four hearths at Nenagh and in 1666-7 paid thirty shillings on fifteen hearths, Thomas Laffan (ed.), *Tipperary's families: being the Hearth Money records for 1665-6-7*, Dublin 1911, pp. 51, 182.
29. Egmont Mss. Vol. 1, 173.
30. *Ibid.* 294.
31. T. Carte, *An history of the life of James, Duke of Ormonde, from his birth in 1610, to his death in 1688*, 2 Vols., London 1736, Vol. 1, 584.
32. *Ibid.* Vol. 1, lxvii.
33. C. McNeill (ed.), *The Tanner letters*, Dublin 1943, 253-4.



34. *The 32nd Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*. London 1871, Appendix 1, 85.
35. Gleeson, *op. cit.* 1947, 82-4.
36. Genealogical Office Ms. 25, p. 139 contains a report that "Sir Claude Hamilton of Castletoome, Co. Antrim, knight, son and heir of Sir Claude Hamilton of Coghney in Scotland and eldest brother of the Archbishop of Cashel" died at Roscrea June 5th 1640 and was interred in the "monastery of Roscrea". He was presumably a relation of Sir George and probably died at his house.
37. NLI Ms. D4450
38. Sir Francis Peisley was paying ten shillings tax on five hearths in 1665 and sixteen shillings on seven hearths and a forge in 1666-7 at Roscrea, Laffan, *op. cit.*, pp. 19, 149.
39. Genealogical Office Ms. 179, 398.
40. Sir Phelim O'Neill had a strange connection with the Hamilton family. After the widow of Claud Hamilton surrendered Strabane Castle to him in December 1641 he took her to his home in Charlemont and proposed marriage to her, his own wife having recently died. Because of a vow she had made not to marry for five years, she declined and he sent her to her brother-in-law, "Sir George Hamilton in Munster" accompanied by a Franciscan friar and a company of horse. T. Ó Donnchadha (Torna) (ed.), Cín lae Ó Mealláin, *Analecta Hibernica* 3 (1931) 1-61. For a translation into English see C. Dillon (ed.), Cín Lae Uí Mhealláin: Friar O Mellan Journal, *Dúiche Néill* 10 (1995-6), 130-207 (144-5). They later married about 1649 and Sir Phelim was executed in 1653. She was Jean Gordon, daughter of the Marquis of Huntly, and was still living in 1668.
41. Gleeson, *op. cit.* 1936, 257.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Ruth Clark, *Anthony Hamilton (Author of the Memoirs of Count Grammont): His life and works and his family*, London 1921, 5.
44. *Ibid.*, 12.
45. Lenihan, *op. cit.*, 210.
46. J.C. O'Callaghan, *History of the Irish Brigades in the service of France*, Glasgow 1870, 14. Anthony was courtmartialled but acquitted for his part in an unfortunate incident at Newtownbutler in 1689 (*Ibid.*, 14-7).
47. B. Hodkinson, Excavations in the gatehouse of Nenagh Castle, 1996 and 1997, *Tipperary Historical Journal* 1999, 162-182.
48. Jane Fenlon, The Plasterwork at Roscrea Castle, in C. Manning (ed.), *Roscrea Castle: History, Survey and Excavation*, in preparation.
49. It is so described in a letter written by the earl of Clanrickarde in 1647, J. Lowe (ed.), *The letter book of the earl of Clanrickarde, 1643-7*, Dublin 1983, 469.
50. The juxtaposition of armorial bearings and Catholic religious iconography is paralleled at Huntly Castle in Aberdeenshire, the seat of the Marquis of Huntly, the foremost Catholic nobleman in Scotland in the early 17th century. Both the remarkable doorway and one of the fireplaces had coats of arms and religious iconography, though the latter was defaced in 1640 (W.D. Simpson and C.J. Tabraham, *Huntley Castle*, 4th edition, Edinburgh 1985, 7-10, 24-5). The wife of Claud Hamilton, Baron of Strabane, was a daughter of the 1st Marquis of Huntley (see note 40 above).