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Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History

AN UNCOUNSELLED KING

In a struggle of protest over the government of Scotland, the concept of kingship as Charles I understood it was challenged by the Covenanters. Although many aspects of this episode have received recent attention, Charles's own role has not hitherto been investigated in detail. Using a large body of newly available evidence Dr Donald here attempts to redress the balance, and in doing so offers a substantially new perspective on the Scottish troubles in the crisis years of 1637–41.

The collapse of the king's government in Scotland was by no means due to Charles alone. The problems of ruling over multiple kingdoms in a time of social upheaval were immense. The controversial liturgy of 1637 was certain to meet resistance; but what was less predictable was the extensive organisation of protest on national, religious and legal grounds. Charles's response was nevertheless important in shaping the events of this major crisis in which presbyterianism became established and the king's prerogative powers circumscribed.

Critics of royal policy were most ready to denounce the king's counsel rather than the king himself. But the criticism rebounded on a monarch who readily assumed a role of sole responsibility. Charles was especially intolerant of protest against his rule and – despite a poverty of means – was more eager to suppress than to listen to complaint. Principles tended to come before politics. This study sheds light on the processes whereby Charles, with counsel and yet often in spite of it, tried to uphold his case.

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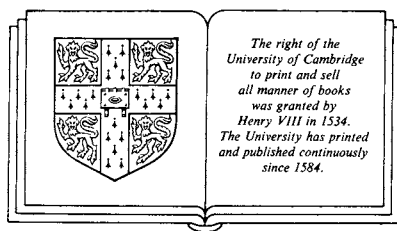
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AN UNCOUNSELLED KING

*Charles I and the Scottish
troubles, 1637–1641*

PETER DONALD

New College, University of Edinburgh



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PREFACE

Recent scholarship on the Scottish troubles, or ‘Scottish Revolution’ as it is often called, has tended to concentrate on those who became Covenanters, with only sidelong glances at the king whose ways of government they challenged. This book differs in making its sidelong glances from the opposite perspective and attempting to explore Charles I’s response to the troubles. Given the sequence of troubles met by Charles in three kingdoms, it is clearly desirable to be alert to a British story, which at the same time is a daunting prospect. Although the great narrative historian S. R. Gardiner attempted as much and was followed by C. V. Wedgwood, time and space in my first researches necessarily limited what was to be said concerning England and Ireland.¹ In expectation now of the Earl Russell’s major study of the 1637–42 period, it has seemed prudent to confine remarks on English and Irish history still to a minimum. Nevertheless the importance of Charles’s handling of the Scottish troubles extended far beyond Scotland, and any assessment of the high politics of the reign must seriously engage with this fact.

In itself the narrative here provides a particularly well-documented account of Charles and his counsel, a subject which partly on account of Charles’s liking for privacy historians have little dealt with beyond passing remarks. Professor Hibbard’s account of the reality of the popish plot which animated so many contemporaries has informed us of the extent to which Catholics and Catholic sympathisers surrounded the king and sought to influence him. Dr Cust’s recent study of the history of the forced loan in England has tried courageously and with good success to delineate lines of counsel around the king in the 1620s.² Many questions remain with regard to the Scottish troubles, but the copious survival of hitherto unexploited manuscript evidence permits, relatively speaking, a very good insight into the workings of the king and his counsel.

¹ S. R. Gardiner, *A History of England . . . 1603–1642* (10 vols., 1883–4); C. V. Wedgwood, *The King’s Peace 1637–1641* (1955).

² C. Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1983); R. Cust, *The Forced Loan and English Politics 1626–1628* (Oxford, 1987).

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The king ruled, but criticisms and attacks on his government were directed against his counsel. People expected the king to be counselled, and Charles for his part was often prepared to talk and listen, but problems arose when he was thought to be inadequately or badly counselled. The form of complaint avoided casting direct aspersions since it was proper to accept the king's determined pleasure without question, but people would be aiming, whether indirectly or diplomatically, to steer his tracks. Charles's government was rarely standing still but care was needed if questions were to be asked; he was a king especially prone to take offence, all too ready to denounce sincere objections. A determination to have the rights of majesty vindicated brought him near the position of being beyond counsel. Principle threatened to overwhelm the necessary considerations of practice.

Narrative has seemed the only way possible to trace the ambiguities, double intentions and intrigue that were as much part of the Scottish troubles as major episodes of conflict. I am indebted to the work of Drs Stevenson and Makey for providing such stimulating, different approaches to the history of the period.³ To some extent the narrative follows familiar ground yet at almost all points the use of unexploited primary sources has brought new things to light. I have sought to provide a readable account which does not presuppose knowledge of this other work; much is made here of chronology but I have mostly desisted from signalling differences, particularly with Dr Stevenson's narrative account, *The Scottish Revolution 1637–1644*.

Though I have attempted to draw attention to the vitally important internal dynamic of the protest movement in Scotland, relatively little is said on the better-studied detail of Covenanting history. This with the pre-1637 period, moreover, has recently been the subject of more work, including a valuable effort at a local study. Our relative ignorance of local history generally in the field is a serious gap, certainly for analysis of motivation and organisation within Scotland, and for understanding of the interplay of local politics, issues and interests within the national scene.⁴

Given the British significance of the Scottish troubles, current English historiography raises many important questions which could be better followed up with regard to Scotland and it will be clear that I have attempted to address some of these at least in a preliminary way. I remain unhappy

³ D. Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution 1637–1644* (Newton Abbot, 1974); W. Makey, *The Church of the Covenant 1637–1651* (Edinburgh, 1979). Dr Stevenson has also published numerous articles and other relevant books. M. Lee, Jr, *The Road to Revolution: Scotland under Charles I, 1625–1637* (Urbana and Chicago, 1985) is the only narrative account in print of the early part of Charles's reign in Scotland.

⁴ A. I. Macinnes, 'The origin and organization of the Covenanting movement during the reign of Charles I, 1625–1641; with a particular reference to the west of Scotland' (unpublished University of Glasgow Ph.D. dissertation, 1988). See too K. M. Brown, 'Aristocratic finances and the origins of the Scottish Revolution', *EHR*, 104 (1989), 46–87.

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about usage of the term ‘Scottish Revolution’ because of the problems in tying down when and what revolution occurred. There are questions about religion and politics which make it not at all straightforward to look always for a separation of the two, or for the sharp dichotomy between ministers and all laymen which has usually been suggested. Some distinctions may be made, but a root concern must be with the very heated politics of the church – which Charles certainly regarded as his main struggle; though the field of tensions became large, there was a very particular starting-point. Anti-popery, on which such excellent work has appeared in England, was a phenomenon which obviously was not merely or even mainly directed to studies of comparative religion. There was a concern in Scotland for ‘religion and liberties’, which included a patriotic element while not being exclusively Scottish. Propaganda for an internal as well as in time external readership offers helpful insight here, although a limited central perspective.⁵ In this period of crisis – or opportunity – religious people could be skilful politicians with more than religious aims, and Johnston of Wariston is the prime example.

On the main theme, the account here presented extends and modifies our knowledge concerning the role of king and counsel in the handling of the troubles. The option of going with the king or at least not with the Covenant has too often been neglected in modern study of the period, though not all Scots eagerly came forward to be Covenanters. Again there is a need for further study of the local dimension, and some more direct work on various prominent individuals – although the evidence is not always available. But a focus on the swings of the king’s actions and the efforts of his leading counsellors enlarges our understanding of how the troubles grew to their considerable height in the crucial years of 1637–41. Indeed Charles had major problems with which to deal, and across a multiple-kingdom situation which for no European ruler in the seventeenth century was easy, but singlemindedness and a religious attachment to monarchical ideals multiplied difficulties; it is with this that we must try to grapple.

In large part this book is a revision of my doctoral dissertation completed in the University of Cambridge. Many debts were incurred there, in the friendly and stimulating research seminars, in my home college of Gonville and Caius, but above all through the enthusiasm and patient guidance of my supervisor Dr John Morrill. From before the beginnings of my research he has been a much appreciated friend and ally. North of the border I have had great encouragement and friendship from fellow Scottish historians; in London I

⁵ See especially P. Lake, ‘Anti-popery: the structure of a prejudice’, in R. Cust and A. Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England* (1989), pp. 72–106. I use the word ‘propaganda’ for its original meaning – without derogatory overtones.

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was no less fortunate, but especially around my year as Scouloudi research fellow in the Institute of Historical Research. Acknowledgement of the benefits conferred by the seminars, facilities and people of that Institute seem now almost to be commonplace: I can only add my own heartfelt thanks. Professor Conrad Russell, now the Earl Russell, arrived back in this country after I had begun my work, but even before that, and in great measure afterwards, he has been a constant inspiration and guide. It seems hard beyond this to single out names, because it has been to me a joy of historical research that for the most part we do all share and help each other, whether in small ways or large, known and unknown. May that long continue. I am especially grateful to those who have opened up to me their unpublished work, short papers and doctoral dissertations. Responsibility for this text is of course entirely my own.

In the course of my research I have been excellently served by the staff of record offices and libraries in Scotland and England, but especially in the Scottish Record Office, the National Library of Scotland, Cambridge University Library and New College, Edinburgh. I am grateful to the Director of Libraries and Information Services, Sheffield City Libraries and Olive, Countess Fitzwilliam's Wentworth Settlement Trustees for access to the Strafford papers, and to the Duke of Northumberland, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, the Earl of Dalhousie, the Viscount De L'Isle and Major-General Sir Humphry Tollemache, 6th Bt, for permission to cite from their family collections. The late Peter Maxwell Stuart was especially generous in enabling me to consult the Traquair manuscripts; my thanks go also to His Grace the Duke of Argyll for the use of his archives and The Argyll Historical Project. The costs of research and publication were aided by a grant from the Twenty-Seven Foundation.

Latterly a move to Edinburgh has changed my life in many ways, and I am grateful for the forbearance of many in and around New College who have tolerated an academic concern continuing outside my present training. Professor Anthony Fletcher has given generously of his time to help me through the processes of publication; Raymond Brown and Violet Sim have assisted most ably in reading through the typescript. I owe much to my family, some of whom are no longer with us, but my greatest debt is to my wife who has been alongside me, supporting me in all kinds of ways in these last three years; the dedication can be but a token acknowledgement of this.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Aldis	Aldis, H. G., <i>A List of Books Printed in Scotland before 1700</i> (rev. edn, Edinburgh, 1970)
AO	Archives Office
APS	<i>The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland</i>
AUL	Aberdeen University Library
BC	Bannatyne Club
BIHR	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
BL	British Library, London
Bod.	Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
CC	Christ Church College, Oxford
CJ	<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i>
CSPD	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series</i> (note: references are to printed volume by year, then to manuscript volume and item)
CSPI	<i>Calendar of State Papers . . . Ireland</i>
CSPV	<i>Calendar of State Papers . . . Venice</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library
D'Ewes (C)	Coates, W. H. (ed.), <i>The Journal of Sir Simonds D'Ewes</i> (Yale, 1942)
D'Ewes (N)	Notestein, W. (ed.), <i>The Journal of Sir Simonds D'Ewes</i> (Yale, 1923)
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EUL	Edinburgh University Library
GD	Gifts and Deposits, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office, London
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
LJ	<i>Journals of the House of Lords</i>
MC	Maitland Club
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

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Abbreviations

NRA (S)	National Register of Archives (Scotland), Survey
<i>P and P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
PCR	<i>Privy Council Registers in Facsimile</i> (1967–8)
PRO	Public Record Office, London
RO	Record Office
RPCS	<i>The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland</i>
RSCHS	<i>Records of the Scottish Church History Society</i>
SHR	<i>Scottish Historical Review</i>
SHS	Scottish History Society
SRA	Strathclyde Regional Archives, Glasgow
SRO	Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh
STC	Pollard, A. W., and G. R. Redgrave, <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640</i> , 2 vols. (2nd edn, eds. W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and K. A. Pantzer, 1976–86)
STS	Scottish Text Society
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
Wing	Wing, D., <i>Short-Title Catalogue 1641–1700</i> , 3 vols. (2nd edn, New York, 1951–88)
WS	Wodrow Society
WWM	Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, Sheffield Central Library

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All dates are Old Style, with calendar year beginning on 1 January, as was the style in Scotland.

Spelling and capitalisation, and sometimes punctuation have been modernised in all quotations.

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