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978-0-521-83747-7 - Britain and the Dutch Revolt 1560–1700

Hugh Dunthorne

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Britain and the Dutch Revolt 1560–1700

England's response to the Revolt of the Netherlands (1568–1648) has been studied hitherto mainly in terms of government policy, yet the Dutch struggle with Habsburg Spain affected a much wider community than just the English political elite. It attracted attention across Britain and drew not just statesmen and diplomats but also soldiers, merchants, religious refugees, journalists, travellers and students into the conflict. Hugh Dunthorne draws on pamphlet literature to reveal how British contemporaries viewed the progress of their near neighbours' rebellion, and assesses the lasting impact which the Revolt and the rise of the Dutch Republic had on Britain's domestic history. The book explores affinities between the Dutch Revolt and the British civil wars of the seventeenth century – the first major challenges to royal authority in modern times – showing how much Britain's changing commercial, religious and political culture owed to the country's involvement with events across the North Sea.

HUGH DUNTHORNE specializes in the history of the early modern period, the Dutch revolt and the Dutch republic and empire, the history of war, and the Enlightenment. He was formerly Senior Lecturer in History at Swansea University, and his previous publications include *The Enlightenment* (1991) and *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Low Countries* (edited with Michael Wintle, 2012).

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For Kirstine, Anna, Leah and Joe

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I thought it might be worth an idle man's time, to give some account of the rise and progress of this commonwealth, the causes of their greatness and the steps towards their fall ... Nor can I wholly lose my pains in this adventure, when I shall gain the ease of answering this way at once those many questions I have lately been used to upon this occasion: which made me first observe and wonder, how ignorant we were generally in the affairs and constitutions of a country so much in our eye, the common road of our travels, as well as subject of our talk.

Sir William Temple, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands*, 1673

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Preface

Spanning an eighty-year period from 1568 to 1648, the Revolt of the Netherlands is historically important for three reasons. It determined the political geography of the Low Countries as we know it today, dividing the region between north and south, between what are now the separate kingdoms of the Netherlands and Belgium. Secondly, it created in the north a new state, one which grew rapidly during the early seventeenth century to become a major European power with a worldwide trading empire. Thirdly, it mounted what in retrospect we can recognize as the first major challenge to absolute monarchy in modern times, a challenge whose repercussions went well beyond the Netherlands itself and well beyond the period of the revolt. It is with this third theme that the present book is concerned. It attempts to indicate the extent of Britain's involvement in the Low Countries upheaval and to assess the impact which that involvement and the Dutch Revolt more generally had on Britain down to the end of the seventeenth century.

That the Dutch Revolt would have wider repercussions was generally expected at the time. Surveying the situation at the turn of the seventeenth century, after more than thirty years of war, the German jurist Althusius commended Dutch efforts in defending their commonwealth against Spanish tyranny and anticipated that their success would 'overflow into neighbouring countries'. The countries he had in mind were France and Germany.¹ But forty years later another observer saw the repercussions on a broader scale. By 1645, according to the much-travelled James Howell, it was clear that 'since her revolt' from Spain the free Netherlands had been 'the incendiary, directly or collaterally, of all the combustions that have happened this side [of] the line' – in other words, across Europe as a whole.² There was plenty of

¹ *The politics of Johannes Althusius*, ed. and trs. F. S. Carney (London, 1964), pp. 10–11.

² J. Howell, *Dendrologia: Dodona's grove*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, 1645; STC Wing H3060), pp. 18–19.

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evidence to support Howell's view. In most of the anti-Habsburg rebellions of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were echoes of the Low Countries' struggle: in the uprisings in Naples in 1585 and 1647, with their repeated threats 'to outdo the rebels of Flanders'; in the revolt of Bohemia, where the formation of the *Confederatio Bohemica* in 1619 owed much to the federal constitution of the United Provinces; in the revolt of the Catalans of 1640, whose insurgents reminded an observer of the rebels of the Netherlands, except that 'the preachers are missing to make them lose their faith along with their obedience'.³ It was the same story in conflicts that occurred outside the Habsburg dominions. In France during the 1620s, Protestant strongholds like La Rochelle and Grenoble sought to emulate the free cities of the Netherlands, prompting the governor of Dauphiné to describe the semi-independent stance taken by one of their assemblies as an attempt 'to establish a new Holland in France'.⁴ And the same nearer home too. The Scottish Covenanters who took arms against Charles I in 1639 wanted, it was said, to transform their country 'into a free state like the estates of Holland'.⁵ So, apparently, did the Catholic Irish in their rebellion of 1641.⁶ And so, in the wake of six years of civil war, did England's radical parliamentarians. Announcing their decision in 1649 to abolish the monarchy and 'resolve into a free state', members of the Rump Parliament referred to the encouraging example of 'our neighbours in the United Provinces', who 'since their change of government have wonderfully increased in wealth, freedom, trade and strength'.⁷

A truly international history of the Revolt of the Netherlands would no doubt take account of all of this and more. It would show – as Geoffrey Parker has shown – that the war in the Low Countries was affected by events across Spain's empire and beyond.⁸ It would trace

³ R. Villari, *The revolt of Naples* (1967; Eng. trs., Cambridge, 1993), pp. 26–7, 33, 105, 179–80; S. Mastellone, 'Holland as a political model in Italy in the seventeenth century', *BMGN* 98 (1983), 578–9; V.-L. Tapié, *The rise and fall of the Habsburg monarchy* (1969; Eng. trs., London, 1971), pp. 88–9; J. H. Elliott, *The revolt of the Catalans* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 368.

⁴ D. Parker, 'The social foundations of French absolutism, 1610–1630', *PP* 53 (1971), 76–7.

⁵ C. Walker, *Relations and observations historical and politick* ([London], 1648; *STC* Wing W335), appendix, p. 8, quoted in D. Stevenson, *Revolution and counter-revolution in Scotland 1644–1651* (London, 1977), p. 237.

⁶ M. Perceval-Maxwell, 'Ireland and Scotland 1638 to 1648', in J. Morrill (ed.), *The Scottish National Covenant in its British context 1638–1651* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 207.

⁷ *A declaration of the parliament of England expressing the grounds of their late proceedings* (London, 1649; *STC* Wing E1499), p. 16.

⁸ G. Parker, 'Spain, her enemies and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1559–1648', *PP* 49 (1970), 72–95; reprinted in the author's *Spain and the Netherlands 1559–1659* (London, 1979).

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the waves flowing out from the Dutch Revolt during the seventeenth century. And it would look beyond the seventeenth century to the eighteenth and nineteenth. The American revolutionaries took inspiration from the Revolt of the Netherlands, ‘our great example’ in Benjamin Franklin’s phrase.⁹ So did romantics, nationalists and liberals of the nineteenth century, who rewrote its history for the benefit of a new age and came to see it as ‘one of the cardinal chapters in the history of modern liberty’.¹⁰

Such a wide-angle, long-term history would be a heroic undertaking. The aim of this book is more modest: to examine the Dutch Revolt from the point of view of British contemporaries who witnessed or were caught up in it, and to assess the impact that it had in Britain. There are, I believe, good reasons for looking at the subject from this perspective. Not only did much of the printed literature of the Dutch Revolt circulate in Britain, the bulk of it was written from the rebels’ point of view. It was a conflict fought out in what many regarded as Britain’s outer defences. And there were people from all over Britain who had knowledge of events and conditions in the Netherlands. Generations of British soldiers served in the Low Country wars. British merchants witnessed the economic transformation of the region, just as Puritan refugees benefited from its more liberal religious regime. British travellers were drawn to its growing cities, British students to its newly founded universities. Given their familiarity with the progress of the revolt and with the new state and society emerging from it, were not the British as likely as anyone to put that experience to use in the life of their own country?

In what follows no attempt is made to offer a new narrative of the Revolt of the Netherlands, though in Chapter 2 I have tried to summarize its story as British observers of the earlier seventeenth century might have understood it. (A chronology of its main events will be found on pp. xxii–xxv below.) Nor have I attempted to recount in detail the history of Anglo-Dutch diplomacy from Queen Elizabeth’s time to Charles I’s, though Chapter 3 attempts to weave the most important strands of that history into an account of British soldiering in the revolt. Subsequent chapters deal in turn with the revolt as an economic transformation, a religious struggle and a political revolution, in each

⁹ G. J. Schutte, “‘A subject of admiration and encomium’: the history of the Dutch Republic as interpreted by non-Dutch authors in the second half of the eighteenth century”, in A. C. Duke and C. A. Tamse (eds.), *Clio’s mirror: historiography in Britain and the Netherlands* (BN, 8; Zutphen, 1985), p. 127 n. 47.

¹⁰ G. P. Gooch, *History and historians in the nineteenth century*, 3rd edn (London, 1920), p. 417.

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case trying to judge the effect that it had on Britain. The Epilogue to the book takes as its starting point the foundation of the University of Leiden at the conclusion of the Spanish siege of that city in 1575 and seeks to trace the influence which Dutch universities and other forms of education had on the educational ideas and practices of their British neighbours.

A word should be said finally about two terms used in the title of this book and frequently in the text: ‘Britain’ and ‘the Dutch Revolt’. Both might be considered anachronistic. Britain, it might be objected, did not exist as a political unit until the Anglo-Scottish parliamentary union of 1707. Yet in reality the term was quite frequently used in the century before that date, not least in the context of relations with the Low Countries. When Elizabeth I signed the treaty of Nonsuch with the Netherlands in 1585 she did so as queen of England, but her Stuart successors renewed the alliance forty years later as rulers of Great Britain. Using the term Britain may be justifiable in another, more practical way too. It helps to convey the fact that people from all over the British Isles were involved in one way or another in the upheaval of the Low Countries and that the upheaval had a diverse impact, not confined to any one part of these islands.

The term ‘Dutch Revolt’ is more difficult to justify. What happened in the Netherlands between 1568 and 1648 was a succession of ‘troubles’ and ‘wars’ (the terms which contemporaries most often applied to them) affecting the whole region of the Low Countries, not just that part of it which might be considered Dutch. Only in retrospect was the phrase ‘Revolt of the Netherlands’ applied to these events collectively: in English its first use dates from around 1660.¹¹ And only in our own time has the term Dutch Revolt become current. Provided we remember what it refers to, I think it is acceptable. It has the advantage of brevity, and in framing a title there is merit in that.

¹¹ Sir J. Reresby, *Travels and memoirs* (London, 1813), p. 155.

Acknowledgements

While this book naturally draws on my own research, it also rests heavily on the scholarship of others, as a glance at the footnotes will show. Reading the work of Sir George Clark, Charles Wilson, Christopher Hill, John Stoye and K. H. D. Haley first opened my eyes to the possibilities of this subject. And in further exploring the overlapping history of Britain and the Netherlands I have learned much from the varied contributions of Simon Adams, David Trim, Simon Groenveld, J. R. Jones, David Ormrod and Jonathan Scott. My colleagues in the Department of History and Classics at Swansea have been a constant source of ideas and information. I am particularly grateful to those with whom I have taught the history of early modern Europe: Stuart Clark, Regina Pörtner, John Spurr and Maurice Whitehead; and I am grateful also to Ceri Davies who kindly translated some medal inscriptions for me. Not least, my thanks go to the students who worked on this theme with me while taking it as their final year ‘special subject’. Trying myself to answer some of the essay questions which I blithely set them year after year has been a sobering experience.

Further afield, and on both sides of the North Sea, I have received help and advice from Raingard Esser, Graham Gibbs, the late Anna Simoni, Paul Slack, Robert Stradling, Ilja Veldman, Eddy Verbaan and, above all, Alastair Duke. An award under the invaluable research leave scheme of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now the AHRC) enabled me to write the earlier chapters of the book and to lay the foundations of the rest. My editors at Cambridge University Press, Michael Watson and Liz Friend-Smith, have been unfailingly supportive, at once patient and persistent. I have been sustained too by the shrewd and constructive comments of the press’s anonymous reader. My two maps were skilfully prepared by Anna Ratcliffe of the cartography unit at Swansea; and I am grateful to all the staff, in Cambridge and elsewhere, who have looked after the book during the process of production. Material from essays which I first published elsewhere is reproduced in parts of Chapters 4 and 6 with the permission of the

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Finally, a warm word of thanks must go to the members of my family, who have had to put up with this book as a cuckoo in the nest for far too long. Whether they feel inclined to read it or not, they will, I hope, be glad to see it finally sent on its way.

Conventions

Quotations and references. In quotations from sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts, spelling and capitalization and occasionally punctuation have been modernized. In citing titles of printed works from this period the conventions of the *Short-Title Catalogue* are followed, retaining the spelling of the original but not its capitalization.

Proper names. In referring to members of the house of Orange, the English form of their names is used: Maurice not Maurits, Frederick Henry not Frederik Hendrik. William of Orange, or simply Orange, refers to Prince William I ‘the Silent’; his great grandson, the stadholder-king, is referred to as William III. Place names are generally given in the form most familiar to English readers: The Hague, not ‘s-Gravenhage or Den Haag.

Dates. For most of the period with which this book is concerned two calendars were in use in north-western Europe: the ‘old style’ or Julian calendar, used in Britain until 1752, and – ten days ahead of it – the ‘new style’ or Gregorian calendar, used from 1582/83 onwards in the provinces of the southern Netherlands as well as in Holland and Zeeland. (The new Gregorian calendar was not adopted in the other provinces of the northern Netherlands until 1700.) As a rule, dates of events and writings originating in Britain are given in the old style (OS), those originating in the Netherlands in the new style (NS). Occasionally letters or treaties were dated in the double form 7/17 September 1625 and this has been retained. The year is taken as beginning on 1 January, not 25 March as was customary in England.

Chronology: the Dutch Revolt and some related events

1555	Emperor Charles V abdicates; succeeded as ruler of the Low Countries by his son, Philip II of Spain.
1559	Philip II appoints Margaret, duchess of Parma, governess-general of the Netherlands, advised by ‘Consulta’ led by Cardinal Granvelle. Reorganization of bishoprics in the Netherlands intensifies persecution of Protestants. Prince William of Orange appointed stadholder of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht.
1566	(Apr.) Nobles’ petition presented to Margaret of Parma. (Aug.–Sep.) Iconoclastic riots.
1567	Duke of Alva and Spanish army arrive in the Netherlands. Alva succeeds Margaret as governor-general (to 1573).
1568	Abortive revolt in the Netherlands crushed by Alva.
1572	Sea Beggars capture port of Brill and other towns in Holland and Zeeland; first English volunteers arrive in the Netherlands.
1572–5	Spanish counter-offensive. States of Holland and of Zeeland become parliamentary regime.
1575	Leiden University founded. Earliest contemporary history of Dutch Revolt published in Basel.
1576	(Nov.) ‘Spanish Fury’: unpaid Spanish troops mutiny and sack Antwerp. On initiative of States of Brabant and of Hainault, States General meets and negotiates Pacification of Ghent.
1577–8	Urban rebellion: revolutionary Calvinist ‘democratic’ councils established in Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp and other towns of southern Netherlands.
1578	Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma, now governor-general of the Netherlands, embarks on successful campaign of reconquest (to 1589).
1579	Union of Arras in southern Netherlands, Union of Utrecht in northern Netherlands.

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1581	(Jan.) Northern provinces accept Duke of Anjou as ‘prince and lord of the Netherlands’. (Feb.) William of Orange’s <i>Apology</i> published. (July) Act of Abjuration: States General renounces allegiance to Philip II.	
1584	(June) Death of Anjou. (July) Assassination of William of Orange.	
1585	(Aug.) Fall of Antwerp to Spanish forces. Anglo-Dutch treaty of Nonsuch: Queen Elizabeth promises northern Netherlands money and troops, justifying policy in a published <i>Declaration</i> . ‘Cautionary towns’ of Flushing and Brill held by English forces as security (to 1616). (Nov.) Maurice of Nassau, second son of William of Orange, appointed stadholder of Holland and Zeeland.	
1585–8	Earl of Leicester’s expedition to the Netherlands: English royal army remains in the Netherlands until 1598.	
1586	(Feb.) Leicester appointed governor-general of the United Provinces. (March) Oldenbarnevelt appointed advocate of Holland.	
1587	Republican regime emerges in the northern Netherlands, justified by François Vranck’s <i>Short exposition</i> .	
1588	Anglo-Dutch defeat of Spanish Armada.	
1589–90	Spain intervenes in French Wars of Religion: Parma withdraws Spanish troops from Netherlands.	
1590–1607	Commanded by Maurice of Nassau, forces of States General reconquer north-eastern Netherlands and some towns in south. Dutch commercial expansion.	
1596	(May) Anglo-French treaty of Greenwich, defensive-offensive league against Spain; (Oct.) Dutch accede to treaty. (June–July) Anglo-Dutch raid on Cadiz.	
1598	Queen Elizabeth withdraws from treaty of Nonsuch: English forces in the Netherlands incorporated into Dutch army.	
1601–4	Siege of Ostend by Spanish forces.	
1603	Death of Elizabeth; James VI of Scotland succeeds as James I of England.	
1604	James I makes peace with Spain.	
1607	Illustrated drill book, <i>The exercise of arms</i> , published at The Hague.	

xxii	Chronology: the Dutch Revolt and some related events
1609	Twelve Years Truce signed by United Provinces and Spain.
1610	Grotius's <i>On the antiquity of the Batavian republic</i> published at Leiden.
1610–19	Religious and political conflict in the United Provinces, culminating in Synod of Dordt (1618–19) and trial and execution of Oldenbarnevelt (1619). Intensifying commercial conflict with England.
1616	Cautionary towns of Flushing and Brill restored to the Netherlands.
1618–20	Revolt of Bohemia crushed; Frederick V and Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I, seek refuge in Holland. Outbreak of Thirty Years War in Germany.
1620	Secret treaty for Charles, Prince of Wales, to marry Spanish infanta.
1621	Dutch-Spanish war resumed. Parliament criticizes James I's foreign policy.
1622	Habsburg forces complete conquest of Lower Palatinate.
1623	Massacre of Amboyna: Dutch colonists execute English merchants.
1623–4	Anglo-Spanish marriage negotiations broken off.
1624	Parliament calls for war with Spain. Treaty of London: England provides 6,000 troops for two years to defend United Provinces.
1625	English expedition to the Palatinate fails. (Mar.) Death of James I, accession of Charles I. England at war with Spain. (Apr.) Death of Maurice of Nassau; his younger brother Frederick Henry stadholder in the Netherlands. (June) Spanish forces commanded by Spínola take Breda. (Sep.) Treaty of Southampton, offensive-defensive alliance between Britain and United Provinces. (Oct.) Unsuccessful Anglo-Dutch attack on Cadiz.
1627	England at war with France (to 1629): expedition to Île de Ré fails.
1627–31	Mantuan succession war between France and Spain: Spanish troops withdrawn from Netherlands.
1628	Dutch capture Spanish silver fleet near Cuba.
1629	(Mar.) Parliament dissolved; Charles I rules without Parliament (to 1640). (Sep.) Dutch take 's-Hertogenbosch.
1630	Dutch occupy Pernambuco (Portuguese Brazil).

	(Nov.) Charles I makes peace with Spain.
1632	Dutch take Venlo, Roermond and Maastricht.
1635	France declares war on Spain (to 1659).
1636	Spanish army withdraws from Netherlands to France.
1637	Dutch recapture Breda.
1637–40	Charles I imposes Laudian prayer book on Scotland, provoking violent opposition and (in 1639–40) armed rebellion.
1639	Battle of the Downs: Tromp destroys Spanish fleet.
1640	Long Parliament meets. Catalonia and Portugal in revolt against Spanish rule.
1641	(May) Orange–Stuart marriage between Mary, daughter of Charles I, and William, son of Frederick Henry. (Oct.) Irish rebellion breaks out.
1642	(Sep.) Civil war in England (to 1646). Parliament seeks ‘stricter union’ with United Provinces. (Nov.) States General declares itself neutral in the English conflict.
1646	Dutch–Spanish peace negotiations begin.
1647	Death of Frederick Henry; his son William II stadholder in the Netherlands.
1648	(Jan.) Peace of Münster ends Eighty Years War: Spain formally recognizes independence of northern Netherlands. (Apr.–Sep.) Second civil war in England. (Oct.) Peace of Westphalia ends Thirty Years War.
1649	Trial and execution of Charles I: England declared a commonwealth.
1650	Premature death of William II of Orange after failed <i>coup d’état</i> against States of Holland.
1651–72	Era of ‘true freedom’ in northern Netherlands: office of stadholder left vacant in majority of provinces.

Abbreviations

BMGN	<i>Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden</i>
BN	<i>Britain and the Netherlands</i>
CS	Camden Society (from 1900, Camden Series of the Royal Historical Society)
CSPDom	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</i>
CSPFor	<i>Calendar of State Papers Foreign</i>
CSPSpan	<i>Calendar of State Papers Spanish Elizabeth</i> , ed. M. A. S. Hume, 4 vols. (London, 1892–9)
CSPVen	<i>Calendar of State Papers Venetian</i> , ed. R. Brown <i>et al.</i> , 38 vols. (London, 1864–1947)
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
KL <i>Relations</i>	J. M. B. C. Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), <i>Relations politiques des Pays-Bas et de l'Angleterre sous le règne de Philippe II</i> , 11 vols. (Brussels, 1882–1900)
NS	New style, Gregorian calendar
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. H. C. G. Matthew and B. H. Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004)
OS	Old style, Julian calendar
PC <i>England</i>	<i>Acts of the Privy Council of England</i> , new series, ed. J. R. Dasent <i>et al.</i> , 46 vols. (London, 1890–1964)
PC <i>Scotland</i>	<i>Register of the Privy Council of Scotland</i> , ed. J. H. Burton <i>et al.</i> (Edinburgh, 1877–[in progress])
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>
SCED	<i>Seventeenth-century economic documents</i> , ed. J. Thirsk and J. P. Cooper (Oxford, 1972)
SHS	Scottish History Society
<i>Somers tracts</i>	Sir W. Scott (ed.), <i>Somers tracts</i> , 13 vols. (London, 1809–15)

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<i>STC</i>	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave (eds.), <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English books printed abroad 1475–1640</i> , 2nd edn, 3 vols. (London, 1976–91)
<i>STC Wing</i>	D. Wing (ed.), <i>Short-Title Catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British America and of English books printed in other countries 1641–1700</i> , 2nd edn, 4 vols. (New York, 1982–98)
<i>TED</i>	<i>Tudor economic documents</i> , ed. R. H. Tawney and E. Power, 3 vols. (London, 1924)
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>