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# The Gordons and the North of Scotland

**Barry Robertson**

## I

In November 1690, General Patrick Gordon wrote a letter to his kinsman and head of the noble House of Huntly, George, 1st duke of Gordon. In it he expressed his sorrow at the outcome of the Williamite Revolution on 1688–9, in which the Catholic monarch, James VII and II, had been ousted from the thrones of Scotland, England and Ireland, and replaced with the Protestant Dutch Stadtholder, William of Orange, and his wife, Mary Stuart. He further intimated that he wished that he had been present in Scotland at the time to have given direct service to King James, and that he was 'ready still to hazard lyfe and all I have in his Majesties service'.[1] The following May he sent another letter to the Duke, this time referring more specifically to the efforts and sacrifices of the latter on behalf of the fledgling Jacobite cause. Again, he expressed a willingness to expend his life and fortune in pursuit of a Stuart restoration, as well as a hope 'that your Grace may enjoy your owne in tranquility'.[2] Of course, while he wrote these lines, General Gordon remained perfectly aware of how difficult it would have been for him to return to Scotland, or to travel to the exiled Stuart court in France, to make good on such offers. He had been an officer in the Russian army since the 1660s and knew from personal experience that obtaining a release from the service of the Tsars was a very hard thing to engineer.[3] However, this should not detract from the fact that he was evidently very concerned about recent political developments in Scotland and how they had impacted on the chief of the Gordon families.

Such a desire on the part of Patrick to keep in touch with affairs in his homeland, and amongst the Gordons, was also illustrated at a more intimate

[1] Gordon of Auchleuchries to the Duke of Gordon, 15 November 1690 in *Passages from the Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries, A.D. 1635–A.D. 1699*, ed. Joseph Robertson (Aberdeen, 1859), 170–1.

[2] Gordon of Auchleuchries to the Duke of Gordon, 22 May 1691 in Ibid., 173–4.

[3] Paul Dukes, 'Problems Concerning the Departure of Scottish Soldiers from Seventeenth-Century Muscovy' in T. C. Smout (ed.), *Scotland and Europe, 1200–1850* (Edinburgh, 1986), 143–56.

level in letters written at around the same time to members of his more immediate family circle in the north-east of Scotland. These were concerned primarily with matters relating to finances and his lands at Auchleuchries, and demonstrated just how fully he kept in touch with the minutiae of such intricate affairs. He can, for example, be found referring to money due to his cousin, John Gordon of Nethermuir, as well to the need for his son, James, to keep him more regularly informed of matters relating to his estate.[4]

Certain it is, then, that he remained highly attuned not only of his own household's position in local society, but also of the powerful position of the extended Gordon family as a whole in the north of Scotland. In particular he will have cherished the blood ties that were claimed to older and more illustrious branches of the name, households such as the Gordons of Haddo (by then ennobled as earls of Aberdeen), and beyond that to the Gordons of Huntly themselves. With this came the awareness of a common past, and of a long and proud heritage that ran through centuries of Scotland's history. Alongside this, however, he will have come to have known something of the grave trials and tribulations facing these same households during his own lifetime.

## II

The true origins of the Gordons are by no means easy to establish with any degree of certainty, particularly so given the level of 'myth and romanticism' peddled in a number of the family histories and genealogies circulating from the Middle Ages onwards.[5] Some sources, for example, posit the view that the family must have originated in France and would have come across to England at the time of William the Conqueror – a suitably romantic idea.[6] This seems largely fanciful and at most it seems safest to assert that they originally came from the north of England and eventually occupied the lands of Gordon in Berwickshire sometime between the years 1058 and 1153.[7]

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[4] Paul Dukes, 'Patrick Gordon and his Family Circle: Some Unpublished Letters', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 10 (Spring 1988), 19–49.

[5] As observed in Graeme Ross, *The Royal Lieutenancy: Case Studies of the Houses of Argyll and Huntly, 1475–1567* (M.Phil. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2002).

[6] William Gordon, *A Concise History of the Ancient and Illustrious Family of Gordon* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1726–7), I, 4; C. A. Gordon, *A Concise History of the Ancient and Illustrious House of Gordon* (Aberdeen, 1890), 2; Charles [Gordon], 11th marquis of Huntly, *The Records of Aboyne, 1230–1681* (Aberdeen, 1894). 353.

[7] Most sources venture the arrival of the Gordons in Scotland as having taken place

Arguably, the first member of the family to rise to any degree of note was Sir Adam Gordon during the early fourteenth century. After initially supporting the English Crown during the Wars of Independence he had latterly seen fit to side with Robert the Bruce, and as a Scottish ambassador to Pope John XXII he had been one of those responsible for the delivery of the letter that would become known to posterity as the Declaration of Arbroath. Through such loyal service, belated though it was, Sir Adam was rewarded with new lands, with the result that the recently forfeited North-East barony of Strathbogie fell to the family.[8] His descendents were to show similar levels of service.[9] Indeed, it seems that the steady rise of the household could not even be compromised by the fact that the line of male heirs died out in 1408. At this point the estates fell to a female, Elizabeth Gordon, and to her husband, Alexander Seton, second son of Sir William Seton of that Ilk. Seton had been happy to adopt the title, Lord Gordon, and the eldest son of this marriage, another Alexander, eventually forsook his given surname in favour of that of Gordon.[10]

It was this particular Alexander who found himself elevated by James II to the title of Earl of Huntly.[11] Essentially he had managed to make some shrewd political decisions during the 1440s and 1450s, first of all showing a degree of solidarity with the sometime ascendant Livingstone-Douglas faction, and then backing the Crown when the Black Douglases themselves were in rebellion. Indeed, Huntly had gone a long way to help ensure victory over the latter, not least of all with his success in battle against the Douglas-aligned Earl of Crawford at Brechin in 1452.[12] Clearly, the Gordons had by this time arrived as a major force in Scottish politics, a situation that they looked to build on and exploit.

The Gordon earls were certainly never to be found too far away from the political spotlight in the decades that followed. They were, for example, present at the battles of Flodden (1513) and Pinkie (1547).[13] They also, on occasion, occupied some of the highest offices in the land. Indeed, in 1497 George, 2nd

during the reign of Malcolm III. See Gordon, *Family of Gordon*, I, 2–5; Gordon, *House of Gordon*, 4; [Gordon], *Records of Aboyne*, 353. Graeme Ross has suggested that the family first moved from England during the reign of David I. See Ross, *Royal Lieutenancy*, 13–14.

[8] National Archives of Scotland (hereafter NAS), Gordon MSS, GD44/2/1/1–2.

[9] [Gordon], *Records of Aboyne*, 363–71.

[10] Ibid., 372–80.

[11] Norman Macdougall, *James III. A Political Study* (Edinburgh, 1982), 13.

[12] Ibid., 12–13, 23–28.

[13] Norman Macdougall, *James IV* (East Linton, 1997), 275; Marcus Merriman, *The Rough Wooings. Mary Queen of Scots, 1542–1551* (East Linton, 2000), 262.

earl of Huntly, was the first of the household to obtain the chancellorship of Scotland.[14] George, 4th earl of Huntly, also attained the same lofty position for periods during the 1540s and 1550s.[15] In addition, following the demise of James IV, Alexander, 3rd earl of Huntly, was one of the senior statesmen appointed as a councillor to the Queen Mother, Margaret Tudor, a position similar to that held by the 4th Earl upon the death of James V.[16] This latter earl had also been one of the regents of Scotland for a period of months from 1536 to 1537 when James V was in France in search of a bride.[17]

The Reformation of 1560 heralded a half-century of mixed fortunes for the family. In 1562 the Catholic 4th earl rose up in rebellion against the new Protestant regime and was defeated by Lord James Stewart (subsequently confirmed as Earl of Moray) at the Battle of Corrichie in October of that year. Huntly died of a seizure while being led off the field and his third son, John, was subsequently executed in Aberdeen.[18] The family, however, soon benefited from the fluid political situation that developed as the decade wore on, and in 1565, George, 5th earl of Huntly, found himself restored to his titles and to royal favour.[19] George, 6th earl of Huntly, became a great favourite of James VI during the 1580s, but did much to endanger his position on account of his status as a high-profile Catholic noble and his decision towards the end of the decade to establish and maintain contacts with the authorities in Spain. Huntly eventually found himself denounced a rebel, and in 1594 defeated a royal army under the command of Archibald Campbell, 7th earl of Argyll, at the Battle of Glenlivet (1594). He was lucky enough to be received back into favour in 1597 following a timely submission to the Crown and the Kirk, and as if to cap this newly regained loyalty, James VI elevated him to the title of Marquis of Huntly in 1599.[20]

[14] Macdougall, *James IV*, 152.

[15] Merriman, *Rough Wooings*, 202; Harry Potter, *Bloodfeud. The Stewarts and Gordons at War in the Age of Mary Queen of Scots* (Stroud, 2002), 39, 45; Pamela E. Ritchie, *Mary of Guise in Scotland, 1548–1560* (East Linton, 2002), 125.

[16] Richard D. Oram, 'Gordon, Alexander, third earl of Huntly (*d.* 1524)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, http://www.oxforddnb.com, accessed 27 August 2009; David Franklin, *The Scottish Regency of the Earl of Arran. A Study in the Failure of Anglo-Scottish Relations* (Lampeter, 1995), 9–10.

[17] Jamie Cameron, *James V. The Personal Rule, 1528–1542* (East Linton, 1998), 133.

[18] Jenny Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots. A Study in Failure* (London, 1988), 123–4.

[19] Gordon Donaldson, *All the Queen's Men. Power and Politics in Mary Stewart's Scotland* (London, 1983), 74–92.

[20] Ruth Grant, 'The Brig o' Dee Affair, the Sixth Earl of Huntly and the Politics of the Counter-Reformation' in Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (eds), *The Reign of James VI* (East Linton, 2000), 93–109; Barry Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish*

Over time the Gordons of Huntly had also managed to acquire large quantities of territory stretching across the north of Scotland. These included the lands of Strathbogie, Aboyne, Glentanner, Glenmuick, the Enzie, Auchindoun, as well as the Highland lordships of Badenoch and Lochaber. For the most part these had been accumulated piecemeal across the decades, usually in the form of gifts from successive monarchs.[21] On top of this the earls had also secured positions as the hereditary sheriffs of the shires of Inverness and Aberdeen.[22] These remained very important as it was through them and the associated courts that the Gordon earls established and maintained themselves as legitimate power-brokers and custodians of the law in the north of Scotland. Meanwhile, as major landowners, the earls retained the right to hold barony and regality courts. Added to this was their hold over successive commissions of royal lieutenancy for the north of the country and the additional power and legitimacy and power that this provided them with. Like other regional landowners the earls had also established themselves as key regulators of feuds and disputes in the locality.[23]

Perhaps most importantly the household could look to the support of an extended kin network in that part of the world. It has been postulated that by around the middle decades of the sixteenth century the number of families sporting the Gordon surname exceeded 150. Not all could claim a direct bloodline relationship to the House of Huntly; some had no doubt merely looked to affiliate themselves to the strongest power in the area, for protection if for no other reason. Successive Huntly earls, with an eye to their own expanding power and influence, had naturally been only too keen to welcome them.[24] For the most part, though, it seems that the majority of the Gordon cadet families – particularly the more important ones – looked to claim a link by blood. There were two main strands to this. Some families were of Seton-Gordon stock in that they claimed descent from the earls of Huntly themselves. These included such notable branches as the Gordons of

*Nobility: the House of Huntly, 1603–1690* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2007), 30–40.

[21] [Gordon], *Records of Aboyne*, 391, 417–418; Potter, *Bloodfeud*, 61.

[22] Macdougall, *James IV*, 190; *Records of the Sheriff Court of Aberdeenshire*, ed. David Littlejohn (3 vols, Aberdeen, 1904–7), I, 425.

[23] For a concise overview of these facets of regional power, see Ian D. Whyte, *Scotland's Society and Economy in Transition, c.1500–c.1760* (Basingstoke and London, 1997), 69–75. For in depth analysis of feuding and its regulation, see Keith M. Brown, *Blood feud in Scotland, 1573–1625. Violence, Justice and Politics in an Early Modern Society* (Edinburgh, 1986).

[24] Potter, *Bloodfeud*, 28.

Abergeldie, Gight, Letterfourie and Cluny.[25] Also influential in this grouping were the Gordons of Sutherland – a branch that stemmed from the marriage of Adam Gordon, a son of the 2nd earl of Huntly, to Elizabeth, heiress to the earldom of Sutherland, sometime prior to 1514. As a result of this union, the earls of Sutherland subsequently came to bear the Gordon surname.[26] Other cadet families looked to claim kinship stretching back further to the pre-Seton Gordon lords. Notable branches in this instance included the Gordons of Haddo, Caitnburrow, Lesmore, Craig, and Buckie.[27] The Gordons of Auchleuchries claimed descent from the Haddo line.

What all this amounted to was a situation where, for the most part, such families remained willing and able to take the part of the House of Huntly should this be required. This support was, for example, to be seen in abundance at the battles of Flodden and Pinkie.[28] It was likewise highly evident during a period of confrontation between the House of Huntly and another notable regional family, the House of Forbes, in the early 1570s.[29] With the full and undivided support of the cadet lines, the Gordon earls could field a considerable show of strength, particularly so in comparison with neighbouring households. In particular it can be claimed that with regards to the quality and potential quantity of horsemen, not even the mighty earls of Argyll could look to compete.[30] This was made starkly evident at the 6th earl of Huntly's victory over the 7th earl of Argyll at Glenlivet in 1594.

## III

By the time of the birth of Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries in March 1635 the House of Huntly remained the major force in the north of the country.

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[25] See 'The Balbithan MS', ed. John Malcolm Bulloch in John Malcolm Bulloch (ed.), *The House of Gordon*, (3 vols, Aberdeen, 1903–12) I, 9, 15, 18–19.

[26] Ibid., 14; 'Tables compiled and collected together by the great paines and industrie of Sir Robert Gordon, Knight Baronett of Gordonstoun sone to Alexander, Earl of Southerland, copied out of his papers and continued be Maister Robert Gordon, his son', 1659, ed. J. M. Joass in Bulloch (ed.), *House of Gordon*, II, 130–1.

[27] 'Balbithan MS', 26–68.

[28] Ibid., 15, 31, 33, 42, 50, 59–61; John Malcolm Bulloch, 'Abergeldie' in Bulloch (ed.), *House of Gordon*, I, 78.

[29] 'Balbithan MS', 22, 46, 57; John Malcolm Bulloch, 'Gight' in Bulloch (ed.), *House of Gordon*, I, 192.

[30] Jane E. A. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary Queen of Scots. The Earl of Argyll and the Struggle for Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002), 53.

But this position had certainly not gone unchallenged in the intervening years. The 6th Earl (now the 1st marquis) of Huntly had continued to find himself in trouble over his abiding adherence to the Catholic faith. This had resulted in brief periods of imprisonment during the first two decades of the century and in 1629 had brought about a decision on his part to surrender his hereditary sheriffships of Aberdeen and Inverness to the Crown in order to avoid having personally to pursue and prosecute his co-religionists in the North. Furthermore, between 1625 and 1632 the new king, Charles I, had looked to enhance the power of James Stewart, 3rd earl of Moray by conferring upon him a lieutenancy of the North, an honour that the Gordons had held monopoly over for decades. Huntly and his eldest son, George, earl of Enzie, had also struggled to enforce their will in the Highland lordships of Badenoch and Lochaber, particularly in the face of sporadic resistance from powerful clans such as the Camerons and the Mackintoshes. This in turn had impacted on the ability of the Gordons to serve the king as agents of royal power in the western Highlands and Islands and duly opened up opportunities for others to enhance their own power-broking credentials, most notably the Mackenzie earls of Seaforth.[31] Perhaps most damaging to Huntly's domestic position was the bitter feud that broke out between the Gordons and another local noble household, the Crichtons of Frendraught, in the early 1630s. This ultimately resulted in Huntly being imprisoned once again, this time for covertly encouraging the violent actions of some of the younger and wilder Gordon lairds and other Highland associates.[32]

The House of Huntly and the extended Gordon kin network was to face an even sterner test of strength with the coming of the Civil Wars of the mid-seventeenth century. From the outset of the Covenanting revolt against Charles I, George, 2nd marquis of Huntly and the Gordon lairds of the North-East remained steadfast supporters of the royalist cause. As early as June 1638 Huntly involved himself in discussions on how best to counter the Covenanting threat, and from October became highly active in obtaining subscriptions to what became known as the King's Covenant. This was essentially a royal-approved alternative to the National Covenant through

[31] Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish Nobility*, 46–87; Barry Robertson, 'Changing Layers of Jurisdiction: the Crown, the House of Huntly and Local Governance in the North of Scotland during the Early Seventeenth Century' in Juan Pan-Montojo and Frederik Pedersen (eds), *Communities in European History: Representations, Jurisdictions, Conflicts* (Pisa, 2007), 203–23.

[32] Barry Robertson, 'Fire and Sword: the Gordon-Crichton Feud, 1630–36', *History Scotland*, 9, no. 6 (November/December 2009), 28–33.

which the king looked to regain the political initiative in Scotland and shore up support. Huntly's efforts in this regard met with some marked success in the shires of Aberdeen and Banff, particularly in areas where his personal influence was strong.[33]

Leading on from this the Gordons were central to royal plans to regain control of Scotland by force. Charles I envisioned an ambitious multi-pronged plan of attack that would unleash forces from all three of his kingdoms. While the king would march to the border at the head of an English army, Randall MacDonnell, 1st earl of Antrim, would invade the west of Scotland with an Irish force, while James, 3rd marquis of Hamilton, the overall commander of the royal forces in Scotland, would land a seaborne army at Aberdeen with the intention of linking up with a force under the command of Huntly. It was also mooted that the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Thomas Wentworth, should look to land troops at Dumbarton.[34]

However, before this plan could be put into operation Huntly came under increasing pressure from the Covenanters in the North. On 7 February 1639 a Covenanting force captured the castle of Inverness in the face of an attempt by William Gordon of Knockespock to garrison it on Huntly's behalf.[35] A week later Huntly marched on Turriff with a view to overawing a Covenanting delegation that had gathered there, but when the prominently-placed local kirkyard was defended against him Huntly declined to fall to arms. Similarly, on 30 March, upon the approach of a Covenanting army under the command of James Graham, 5th earl (later 1st marquis) of Montrose, Huntly saw fit to retreat and give up Aberdeen rather than to stand and fight. Moreover, some days later he negotiated a cease-fire with Montrose and signed an oath acknowledging his submission.[36]

A number of contemporaries roundly condemned Huntly for his inaction at this time, but they failed to appreciate many of the difficulties that he had

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[33] John Spalding, *Memorialls of the Trubles in Scotland and in England, A.D. 1624–A.D. 1645*, ed. J. Stuart (2 vols, Aberdeen, 1850–1), I, 89, 112; John Row and John Row, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland from the Year 1558 to August 1637 … with a Continuation to July 1639*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1842), 500–1.

[34] Jane H. Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms: the Career of Randal MacDonnell, Marquis of Antrim* (Second edn., Dublin, 2001), 82–3; Mark Charles Fissel, *The Bishops' Wars: Charles I's Campaigns against Scotland, 1638–1640* (Cambridge, 1994), 3–6.

[35] Huntly to Hamilton, 25 February 1639, NAS, Hamilton MSS, GD406/1/756; same to same, 7 March 1639, NAS, GD406/1/758.

[36] Barry Robertson, 'The House of Huntly and the First Bishops' War', *Northern Scotland*, 24 (2004), 3.

to contend with. He clearly suffered from a lack of experienced troops and officers and from the fact that neither Aberdeen nor his own castles were particularly defensible in light of the standards of warfare of the time. Huntly was also weighed down with crippling levels of debt which restricted him in terms of how long he could afford to keep an army in the field. On top of this, neither Hamilton nor the king provided Huntly with any clear warrant or idea of when, or if, they wanted him to take offensive action. He was also aware that his forces would be outnumbered by those of his enemies by a considerable margin. With this in mind it seems that Huntly concluded that the best course would be to seek a temporary accommodation with the Covenanters and sign a short and vaguely-worded oath of submission. He may even have been thinking tactically when he made his submission, hoping it would leave him free from Covenanting aggression and enable to wait for the expected arrival of Hamilton and his army. If so, this quickly backfired as shortly afterwards the Covenanters took Huntly and his eldest son George, lord Gordon, prisoner in Aberdeen and transported them south to be interred in Edinburgh Castle.[37]

By this time the grand royalist plan had not been progressing well on other fronts. Antrim had been unsuccessful in his attempts to raise an Irish army and at the same time the king experienced similar problems. Meanwhile, Hamilton and his seaborne army had been held up in the port of Yarmouth and had been unable to provide timely assistance to Huntly and his supporters.[38] Despite this, a number of the Gordons and other royalist lairds rose up in the North-East in May and succeeded in defeating a Covenanting force at Turriff on the 14th. They afterwards occupied Aberdeen but were soon beset by problems similar to those experienced by Huntly in March. By 23 May they had duly disbanded their army and Aberdeen had been recaptured.[39]

Royalist fortunes in the North-East briefly rose again with the arrival of Huntly's second son, James, Lord Aboyne, from England sporting a warrant of royal lieutenancy. He reoccupied Aberdeen and succeeded in marshalling the traditional Gordon support base once again. It was to be a short-lived success. On 15 June the Gordon foot – most of them ill-trained Highlanders – melted away in the face of enemy cannon fire at Megray Hill near Stonehaven. Shortly

[37] Ibid., 3–7.

[38] Fissel, *Bishops' Wars*, 10–22; Aidan Clarke, 'The Earl of Antrim and the First Bishops' War', *Irish Sword*, 6, no. 23 (1963), 108–15.

[39] Spalding, *Memorialls*, I, 185–91; Gentlemen of Aberdeenshire to Hamilton, 21 May 1639, NAS, GD406/1/837.

afterwards Aboyne was defeated by Montrose at the two-day battle of Brig' o' Dee (18–19 June). As had been the case in March and May, many blamed Hamilton for failing to reinforce the royalist lairds with the men that had been under his command. However, by the time of Aboyne's defeat that matter had in any case become largely academic. By 18 June the king had already agreed to negotiate with the Covenanters in what became known as the Pacification of Berwick. With hindsight it seems clear that Charles I had missed his best opportunity to bring the Covenanters to heel through force and thereby prevent the disintegration of his rule in the three Stuart kingdoms. Little advantage had been taken of the active support granted him by the Gordons and their allies. Instead, the Covenanters found themselves with free rein to mobilise on a significant scale in order to cope with the situation.[40]

The implications would be profound for both Charles I and his subjects over the years that followed. During the Second Bishops' War of 1640 the Covenanters inflicted a decisive defeat upon the English forces of the king, and by the end of 1641 had brought about a revolution in the governance of Scotland.[41] This also had a more wide-ranging impact on the three Stuart kingdoms as a whole, being instrumental in creating the conditions that allowed for a break-down in royal government in Ireland and in England.[42]

For the Gordons the impact was no less devastating. The strains of the First Bishops' War had evidently taken their toll, with the result that little further resistance was offered to the Covenanters. Huntly was present at the Scottish Parliament that commenced in September 1639 and formed part of a faction which sought unsuccessfully to halt the revolutionary process and defend the prerogative of the king.[43] But over the course of 1640, and for much of 1641, he removed himself to London, while in the North-East any hopes that the Gordons would rise again remained unrealised.[44] Meanwhile, during the course of 1640, Covenanting armies managed to overawe those areas which remained royalist in sympathy, the North-East being thoroughly subdued by Colonel

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[40] Robertson, 'House of Huntly and the First Bishops' War', 8–12.

[41] John R. Young, *The Scottish Parliament, 1639–1661: a Political and Constitutional Analysis* (Edinburgh, 1996), 1–53; Allan I. Macinnes, *The British Revolution, 1629–1660* (Basingstoke and New York, 2005), 125–41.

[42] Allan I. Macinnes, 'The 'Scottish Moment', 1638–45' in John Adamson (ed.), *The English Civil War: Conflict and Contexts, 1640–49* (Basingstoke, 2009), 125–52.

[43] Jaffray to [New] Aberdeen Council, 2 September 1639 in *Aberdeen Council Letters*, ed. Louise B. Taylor (4 vols, London, 1942–54), II, 135; *The Historical Works of Sir James Balfour*, ed. James Haig (4 vols, London, 1825), II, 360.

[44] Spalding, *Memorialls*, I, 240.

Robert Monro over the summer months. Huntly's castle of Strathbogie was occupied and the immediate Gordon hinterland was plundered for livestock, horses and oatmeal.[45] More seriously for Huntly personally, his backing of the royalist cause only added to his already chronic state of indebtedness, and left him at the mercy of major creditors like his brother-in-law, Archibald Campbell, 8th earl (later marquis) of Argyll. Indeed, Huntly's plight became so extreme that he was forced to relinquish control of the Highland lordships of Badenoch and Lochaber to Argyll in return for the latter's aid in paying the extensive dowries due upon the marriages of his three eldest daughters.[46]

There is nothing in Patrick Gordon's diary entry for the year 1640 that refers to the trials and tribulations of Huntly and his adherents during the Covenanting Revolution. The extent to which his father, John Gordon of Auchleuchries, may have been involved is not even hinted at, and Patrick merely notes the fact that he went to school at the kirk of Cruden, and was to be lodged in the vicinity along with his elder brother for the space of four years.[47] Little can be traced in written records of his father's activities at the time, although it is fairly likely that he would have taken his place in the Gordon forces alongside other men of his standing. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that he is mentioned along with many others of the surname Gordon in a roll of delinquents dating from 1641.[48] It very much stands as testament to Gordon commitment to the royalist cause.

Many Gordon lairds once again took the side of the king when civil war broke out in Scotland in 1644. This was very much a reaction against attempts by the government to enforce subscription to the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, as well as its decision to send an army into England in support of the king's enemies, the Parliamentarians. As had been the case in 1639, the hostilities in 1644 broke out in the North-East first. On 19 March Sir John Gordon of Haddo led a raid on Aberdeen and succeeded in capturing a number of prominent local Covenanters. Following on from this, Huntly raised a larger force and for the space of just over a month from late March to late April he occupied Aberdeen for the king.[49] On this occasion, the involvement of John Gordon of Auchleuchries on the royalist side is unquestionable. It

[45] Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs*, III, 210–1; Spalding, *Memorialls*, I, 280–305.

[46] Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish Nobility*, 118–22.

[47] *Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries 1635–1699, Volume 1: 1635–1659*, ed. Dmitry Fedosov (Aberdeen, 2009), 4.

[48] *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* (hereafter *RPCS*)*, 1638–1643*, ed. P. Hume Brown (Edinburgh, 1906), 510–12.

[49] Spalding, *Memorialls*, II, 324–53.

is clear that he formed part of Haddo's retinue, and in particular he is noted to have taken part in a raid on the house of Auchnagatt pertaining to the Covenanter, Alexander Strachan of Glenkindie.[50]

In the end the rising achieved little. Huntly made no real attempt to engage in arms with the Covenanters and upon the approach of a stronger army under the command of Argyll he felt obliged to disband and flee to Strathnaver in the far north of Scotland. The main rationale behind this decision was similar to what it had been in March 1639: the lack of support from elsewhere. He had also not yet received a commission authorising him to take up arms. Once again this left the North-East open to Covenanting domination and Argyll duly crushed all remaining resistance. Perhaps the most shocking outcome for the Gordons was the capture of Haddo and his subsequent execution in Edinburgh in July.[51] He had undoubtedly been a key force behind the rising and had paid a heavy price as a result.

When the Marquis of Montrose (now a royalist) eventually arrived in the North-East with his army in September 1644, few Gordons joined his banner. Partly this was due to the fact that Huntly was still in Strathnaver, and partly because his eldest son, Lord Gordon, was at that time a top-ranking Covenanter in the shires of Aberdeen and Banff. Lord Gordon had subscribed the National Covenant in April 1641, doubtless convincing himself that this was the best means of securing the future well-being of his family. However, with the mounting success of Montrose's campaign, he soon began to reconsider his position. Finally, in February 1645 he defected to the royalist side, thus providing Montrose with the opportunity to gain significant numbers of recruits from the Gordon heartlands. Montrose took full advantage of this and the Gordon formations duly played a prominent part in the royalist victories at Auldearn (9 May), Alford (2 July), and Kilsyth (15 August).[52]

However, the relationship between Montrose and the Gordons was rarely a smooth one. Lord Gordon was killed at the battle of Alford, and Montrose seems to have got along less well with James, lord Aboyne. In early September 1645, instead of marching south with Montrose towards England, Aboyne chose to put family priorities in the North-East first, and withdrew with the

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[50] Ibid., II, 342; K. M. Brown *et al.* (eds), *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707* (St Andrews, 2007–2009), 1649/1/383, http://www.rps.ac.uk, accessed: 26 August 2009 (hereafter *RPS*).

[51] Spalding, *Memorialls*, II, 337–90.

[52] Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish Nobility*, 121, 133–6.

Gordon forces. Most of the Highlanders chose a similar course, thus resulting in a serious weakening of Montrose's army. Montrose soon found himself defeated at Philiphaugh (13 September) by a superior Covenanting force under the command of Lieutenant-General David Leslie.[53]

The relationship reached a further low following Huntly's return to the North-East at around that time. Over the course of the first half of 1646, he and Montrose failed to mount a co-ordinated campaign with the result that no revival of royalist fortunes in Scotland was forthcoming. Huntly did continue to engage in sporadic campaigning into 1647 but by that time the cause was lost. A Covenanting search party captured him in the Highlands of Strathavon in either late November or early December of that year and dispatched him to Edinburgh for imprisonment.[54] He was beheaded on 22 March 1649.[55]

An ongoing commitment to the royalist cause had clearly continued to exact a heavy toll of the Gordons. It had resulted in military defeat and much devastation to their landholdings. Moreover, the need to furnish armies did much to exhaust the remaining funds and credit of the House of Huntly and added significantly to the overall problem of burgeoning debt. Most serious was the manner in which this allowed the chief creditor, Argyll, to gain full legal control of the Huntly estates. Argyll had spent much of the 1640s looking to secure this claim by methodically buying up as many of Huntly's debts as he could.[56] In 1653 he obtained a bond from Lewis Gordon, 3rd marquis of Huntly, confirming this. By that time the Scottish armies of Charles II had been defeated by Cromwell's New Model Army and the Gordons had been left with no one to turn to for help. Lewis died in December 1653 leaving his widow, Mary Grant, with four young children to support.[57]

The entries in Patrick Gordon's diary for the second half of the 1640s have little to say on the momentous events of the time or on how they affected his father and immediate family circle. Patrick does refer to the fact that all public schools were closed in 1644 'because of the great troubles' and so he

[53] Ibid., 137–41.

[54] Ibid., 141–9.

[55] *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, 1642–1655*, ed. Marguerite Wood (Edinburgh, 1931), 192.

[56] *The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland* (hereafter *RGSS*), *1634–1651*, ed. John Maitland Thomson (Edinburgh, 1897), 450; Inveraray Castle Archives, miscellaneous bundle 173/9; Gordon, *Family of Gordon*, II, 547–8; Argyll to Gordon of Straloch, 20 February 1650 in *The Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, ed. John Stuart (5 vols, Aberdeen, 1841–52), I, 21–2; *The Last Proceedings of the Parliament in Scotland, against the Marquesse of Argyle* (London, 1661), 7–8.

[57] Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish Nobility*, 156–8.

was certainly not unaware of what was going on. He also mentions how his father changed his place of residence on a number of occasions, something which in itself may reflect the uncertainties of the time. 1651 turned out to be a key year in Patrick's life. With Scotland in the midst of the war against England, and being unable to go to university in Scotland due to his Roman Catholicism, he resolved to leave the country. He took ship from Aberdeen on 12 June, starting out on what would become a great and profitable adventure.[58]

## IV

Like most other royalist households, the Gordons of Huntly benefited greatly from the restoration of Charles II to the thrones of Scotland, England and Ireland in 1660. September 1660 saw the elevation of Lord Charles Gordon, fourth son of the 2nd marquis, to the peerage as Earl of Aboyne.[59] Even more spectacular were the gains made by the family following the forfeiture and execution of the Marquis of Argyll in May 1661 for having complied with the Cromwellian regime. What this brought to the House of Huntly was the sudden windfall of the return of all the estates that had fallen into Argyll's hands during the 1640s and 1650s. The household would also not be held liable for all the debts that Argyll and his heir, Lord Lorne, had built up on the lands in the meantime, a situation that left the latter under considerable financial duress.[60]

Nonetheless, George Gordon, 4th marquis of Huntly made hardly any political impact at a national level during the 1660s and 1670s, largely on account of his young age and emphatic devotion to the Roman Catholic faith. He spent much of his time during these years travelling on the Continent and pursuing a bitter dispute with his uncle, Aboyne, over some of the family lands that had been granted the latter as part of the new earldom. This was not finally resolved until 1672 when a decision was arrived at whereby Aboyne had to renounce title to many of the holdings in favour of Huntly.[61] It was only

[58] *Diary of General Patrick* Gordon, 5–7.

[59] *RGSS, 1660–1668*, ed. John Home Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1914), 3.

[60] John Malcolm Bulloch, *The First Duke of Gordon* (Huntly, 1908), 5; *A Supplement to Burnet's History of My Own Time*, ed. H. C. Foxcroft (Oxford, 1902), 6; Inveraray Castle Archives, miscellaneous bundle 173/9; NAS, GD44/55/1/46, ff. 73–5.

[61] Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish Nobility*, 164–9. For more detail on Huntly's grand tour of the continent, and for the family's contacts with mainland Europe more generally, see Barry Robertson, 'The Gordons of Huntly: a Scottish

in 1684 with the elevation of James Drummond, 4th earl of Perth, (himself soon to convert to Catholicism) to the post of Chancellor of Scotland that Huntly's national profile began to improve. The former headed a group of powerbrokers that would look to dominate Scottish political life for the remainder of the decade, and he evidently saw Huntly as a useful ally. Indeed, it was largely due to Perth's influence that Huntly found himself elevated to the title of Duke of Gordon in 1684.[62]

Huntly did work hard during the reign of Charles II to retain or rebuild meaningful links with some of the Gordon cadet families. This was particularly the case with the Gordons of Sutherland, who had been steadfast Covenanters during the Civil Wars. By the 1670s there had been talk of that family changing its surname to Sutherland, an act that doubtless would have further distanced them from the House of Huntly. However, from the early 1680s relations between the two households began to improve. In 1682 Huntly and the heir to the Sutherland earldom, John, lord Strathnaver, drew up a bond of amity promising mutual friendship and assistance. At the same time Strathnaver also obliged himself and his heirs to retain the surname of Gordon.[63] The fact that Gordon lairds, such as Lesmore, Knockespock, Cocklarachy and Artloch, were employed by Huntly as baillies also points towards the desire of the latter to build and retain a support network based on kinship.[64]

Not all cadet families remained closely allied to the main Huntly line. The relationship between Huntly and Aboyne certainly deteriorated during the 1660s and early 1670s over the landholding dispute. The second case in point was that of the Gordons of Haddo. From the time of his joining the ranks of the Privy Council in 1678, the political star of Sir George Gordon of Haddo had gone on to rise with startling ascendancy. This culminated with his elevation to the peerage as Earl of Aberdeen as well as to the position of Lord Chancellor of Scotland in 1682.[65] This left Haddo in a position whereby he

Noble Household and its European Connections, 1603–1688' in David Worthington (ed.), *Emigrants and Exiles from the Three Kingdoms in Europe, 1603–1688* (Leiden, 2010), 181–94.

[62] Ronald Hutton, *Charles the Second. King of England, Scotland and Ireland* (Oxford, 1989), 431.

[63] William Fraser, *The Sutherland Book* (3 vols, Edinburgh, 1892), III, 213–5; G. Gordon to [Huntly], 4 December 1682, Chichester, West Sussex Record Office (hereafter WSRO), The Gordon Letters, Goodwood/1166/8.

[64] *RPCS, 1678–80*, ed. P. Hume Brown (Edinburgh, 1914), 311.

[65] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series* (hereafter *CSPD*), *1678*, ed. F. H. Blackburne Daniell (London, 1913), 461; *CSPD, 1680–1*, ed. F. H. Blackburne Daniell (London, 1921), 537; *CSPD, 1682*, ed. F. H. Blackburne Daniell (London, 1932), 557.

could assume a dominant role and seek to do favours for Huntly, instead of the other way around.[66] Huntly later described how the Earl of Aberdeen began to act coldly towards him and at one point sought to persuade him to resign superiority of some lands so that they could be held by the Haddo Gordons directly from the Crown.[67] In short, Haddo's rise, like that of Aboyne, was indicative of a subtle change in the balance of power in the North-East. The Gordons of Huntly had always had to contend with rival households, but now such challenges were emerging from within the Gordon kin network. The new dynasties of Aboyne and Aberdeen conducted themselves with an independency that had rarely been seen prior to the Restoration. Such families could look to forge their own political destiny and not necessarily have to toe the Huntly line.

To a large extent this was facilitated by the fact that by the 1680s the House of Huntly could no longer be regarded as the pre-eminent powerhouse of the North that it had once been. Much power still remained but the family had less currency than at the time of the Union of the Crowns in 1603. Where once the Huntly lords had been leaders of the northern pack, they were now arguably merely part of the pack; the fact that families such as the Haddo Gordons had arisen to become fellow members of that pack was symptomatic of the change. Another key indicator was the fate of the lost sheriffships of Aberdeen and Banff. Where they had once been the sole hereditary preserve of the Gordons, they were, by the second half of the seventeenth century, falling into the hands of other key rival families. In 1661, William Keith, 6th earl Marischal, was granted the sheriffship of Aberdeen during his lifetime.[68] The Earl of Aberdeen also later gained this title for a time, as did John Hay, 12th earl of Errol.[69]

In a similar fashion, the Gordons of Huntly had lost ground as Highland powerbrokers. Particularly indicative of this new reality were the commissions granted by the government in 1680 for keeping the peace in the Highlands. Huntly, Archibald, 9th earl of Argyll, John, 1st marquis of Atholl, and Kenneth, 4th earl of Seaforth, were each conveyed an annual sum of £500 sterling in return for maintaining order in areas that had been designated to them. However, in Huntly's case there was a catch. His jurisdiction being deemed

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[66] Paul Hopkins, *Glencoe and the End of the Highland War* (revised edn., Edinburgh, 1998), 90, 112.

[67] WSRO, Incomplete memoir of the 1st duke of Gordon, Goodwood/1428, ff. 6, 12.

[68] *RPS*, 1661/1/127. accessed: 27 August 2009.

[69] *CSPD, 1682*, 479.

too large for one man alone, the decision was made that it should be split in two, with Alexander, 5th earl of Moray, being given control of the other half. Huntly's bounds would include the Mearns, Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and the areas of Badenoch and Lochaber lying within the shire of Inverness. Moray was to oversee the shire of Nairn and those parts of the Inverness-shire not granted to Huntly.[70] Traditionally, Huntly and Argyll had been the two main Highland powerbrokers to be granted lieutenancies, but over the course of the seventeenth century Seaforth, Atholl, and to a lesser extent, Moray, had also succeeded in jostling for position.

With the accession of the Catholic James VII and II to the Stuart thrones, Huntly (now Duke of Gordon) did begin to garner more favour at Court as well as rewards such as the governorship of Edinburgh Castle. However, the Williamite Revolution of 1688–9 soon reversed this situation. Gordon did defend the castle during a three-month siege in 1689, but with supplies running low, and with no sign of the approach of a Jacobite army, he saw fit to surrender on 13 June. The option had been there for him to hold out somewhat longer but it seems that he was determined not completely to ruin himself and his family as his grandfather had done during the 1640s. In this, at least, he was successful. For the most part his titles, estates and landed privileges remained intact.[71]

He did continue to come under pressure from the government over his Jacobite sympathies during the years that followed. In this he laid himself open to attack, particularly on account of his visit in 1690 to the exiled Stuart court at St. Germains-en-Laye. His decision to make this journey remains a curious one, particularly given that the opportunity was there for him to retire to his estates and lead as quiet a life as could be managed. But he had been confined to Edinburgh for much of the latter half of 1689 and, no doubt, had built up a degree of resentment as a result. Moreover, in February 1690 he had had an audience with the new king, William III and II, in London, a meeting which, according to one contemporary source, did not go to the Gordon's liking, he 'not being received as he thought his family deserved'. On top of this he also felt compelled to regain James's favour through justifying his surrender of Edinburgh Castle. In this he met with little success. The counsel of Gordon's enemy, John Drummond, 1st earl of Melfort, held sway at St. Germains at

[70] *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs selected from the Manuscripts of Sir John Lauder of Fountainhall*, ed. David Laing (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1848), I, 261; *RPCS, 1678–80*, 428–9.

[71] Robertson, *Continuity and Change in the Scottish Nobility*, 176–81.

the time, and the former eventually departed on being told by James that his services were no longer required. He was subsequently arrested in the town of Willingen and by November 1692 was languishing in prison in The Hague.[72] Despite this, his domestic position remained little affected upon his return to Scotland and, although under suspicion from time to time, he remained coolly disposed towards the Jacobite cause for the remainder of his life.[73]

The day to day running of the family went on, but in a number of ways the noble House of Huntly was a shadow of its former self. The days when the Gordon lords had exercised a commanding power across the north of Scotland and within the corridors of government were long gone. The independence of branches such as the Gordons of Aboyne and the Gordons of Haddo had become all too apparent. There had been temporary splits in the extended family in the previous century but by the late 1600s these were becoming much more permanent and fundamental in nature. The best years of the household were clearly becoming a thing of the past.

## V

To what extent Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries would have known the details of the fluctuating fortunes of the House of Huntly is hard to say. By the early 1690s he had seen many years distinguished service as a soldier and occasional diplomat in Russia, but at the same time he had clearly tried to keep himself as informed on Gordon affairs as possible. During a diplomatic mission to the court of James VII and II in 1686, Patrick made a point of making a trip from London to Scotland where he visited the Duke of Gordon in Edinburgh Castle. He then journeyed north to Aberdeen to settle some family affairs, and from there took ship for his return journey to Moscow.[74] Patrick's concern and

[72] John Macky, *Memoirs of the Secret Services … during the reigns of King William, Oueen Anne, and George I* (London, 1733), 194; *CSPD, 1689–90*, ed. William John Hardy (London, 1895), 442; Historical Manuscripts Commission (hereafter HMC), Tenth Report, Appendix, part IV, *The Manuscripts of the Earl of Westmorland, Captain Stewart, Lord Strafford, Lord Muncaster and others* (London, 1885), 375; WSRO, Goodwood/1428, f. 17; Blathwayt to Nottingham, 27 September 1692, same to same, 29 September 1692 in HMC, *Report on the Manuscripts of the late Allan George Finch esq. of Burley on the Hill, Rutland. Vol. IV 1692 with Addenda 1690 and 1691* (London, 1965), 474–5; *Papers illustrative of the Political condition of the Highlands of Scotland from the Year 1689 to 1696*, ed. John Gordon (Glasgow, 1845), 88–9; Bulloch, *First Duke of Gordon*, 91–3.

[73] Ibid., 93–105. He died on 7 December 1716.

[74] Paul Dukes, Graeme P. Herd, and Jarmo Kotilaine, *Stuarts and Romanovs. The Rise and*

support for the head of the House of Huntly remained apparent in his letters to him of 1690 and 1691. Alongside this Patrick worked hard to promote the Jacobite cause within Russia. What is noticeable, however, is that when the Duke of Gordon lost out in the power struggles at the exiled Stuart court, Patrick's loyalties were first and foremost with his kinsman rather than with James and ministers such as Melfort. His efforts on behalf of the Jacobites tailed off markedly from that point.[75] It stands as testament to the fact that, for some at least, the links of Gordon kinship could still be very strong.

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*Fall of a Special Relationship* (Dundee, 2009), 144–8.

[75] Ibid., 172–84.