
The historiography of the British Civil Wars, Barry Robertson tells us in *Royalists at War in Scotland and Ireland, 1638–50*, has traditionally emphasized the progressive, the well-documented, and the national. This means that royalists, whose cause was judged to be archaic, whose presses were less prolific, and whose purpose was to serve the king rather than the kingdom, were consigned to secondary status. And what is true for the study of English royalism is even more the case for the Scottish and Irish brands. Robertson presents his book, then, as “the first comprehensive study of royalism in Scotland and Ireland for the period 1638–1650” (19).

Basic to the book is a distinction between “royalism” and “monarchism.” Royalists were those who “identified themselves as supporters of the king’s cause and were accepted as such by the Stuart kings themselves” (20). Monarchists, by contrast, were those “whose loyalty to the concept of kingship did not necessarily stretch to a personal support of Charles I and Charles II during the Civil Wars” (21). Movement from one to the other was common, and indeed the changing fortunes of royal authority under arms meant that few royalists could remain wedded to a single position throughout the period. James Graham, earl of Montrose, for example, was a monarchist in 1639 when he opposed Charles I under the Covenant, but an unabashed royalist in 1644 when he went to war for the king’s cause in Scotland. Likewise, Randall MacDonnell, marquis of Antrim, was outspoken in his royalism until 1646, but with the eclipse of the king’s military fortunes aligned with the Irish Catholic cause to better pursue his ancient feud with Argyll and the Campbells as a traditional Gaelic chieftain. It should also be added that Ireland was a shifting cauldron of religious, clan, and political loyalties. It was a place where English military reputations were destroyed, where armies melted away to disease and desertion, and a place where international Catholicism and militant Protestantism clashed under arms.
Royalism in the subordinate kingdoms emerged as an issue in the
1630s. In Scotland, Charles I’s use of prerogative powers in matters
of religion gave rise to the National Covenant. The Covenant was
itself a monarchist manifesto, promising support for royal authority
provided that the king “uphold the religion, laws and liberties of the
land” (27). Royalist resistance to the Covenant appeared in the region
of Aberdeen and in the persons of several royalist lords, most notably
Traquair, Hamilton, and Huntly, but the overwhelming popularity of
the movement and effective leadership within it decided the issue. “The
Covenanters were decisive while the Royalists dithered” (76). Charles’s
attempts to restore his authority proved fruitless; the monarchist re-
bellion became a revolution, and royal control in Scotland collapsed.

One of the strengths of Robertson’s account is the connections
he makes between Scotland and Ireland. With the triumph of the
Covenant in Scotland, he says, unrest spread to Ireland. Thomas
Wentworth, earl of Strafford and lord deputy of Ireland, hoped to use
Irish resources to mount a military response to events in Scotland.
Wentworth was compelled, however, to keep one eye trained on the
Ulster Scots, potential recruits to the Covenant themselves. Strafford’s
impeachment and execution in 1641 left a vacuum of authority and
in October 1641 a rebellion broke out among the Catholics of Ulster,
spreading into much of the island. King and Parliament were not at
issue. The Irish rebellion was instead “a religious war, bitterly fought
between monarchist Catholics and monarchist Protestants,” both
of whom could make a plausible case that they were fighting in the
king’s interest (95).

Events in England added another layer to the already complex
situation in Ireland. Pressed by the Long Parliament, Charles I al-
lowed his leading Protestant Irish supporter James Butler, marquis of
Ormond, to negotiate a tenuous cessation of arms with the Catholic
Confederacy. Charles hoped to gain Irish recruits against Parliament,
but the uneasy peace produced little more than an armed polariza-
tion. Protestants gravitated towards a parliamentary alliance under the
Solemn League and Covenant while Catholics increasingly aligned
with the Confederacy as their best defense from Scots in Ulster and
parliamentary forces in the south. As the king’s fortunes eroded in
England, Ormond’s mediating position in Ireland grew increasingly
untenable. In 1647, with the king’s cause apparently lost, Ormond arranged to yield the remaining royalist garrisons to Parliament, securing a guarantee of his estates and a generous bonus.

Robertson is at some pains to rehabilitate Ormond. The marquis, he says, stood “at the center of the [Irish] maelstrom” balancing a “dizzying” number of factions. (122, 104) Ultimately, his “highly principled position” of a “royalist middle ground” foundered on the entrenched hatred of centuries and the defections of several key supporters (107). In the end, Ormond’s machinations allowed him to take a ship to France and go on to a long career in the service of the restored Charles II, “the great survivor of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms” (192).

Though the defeat of the king had been a terrible blow to British royalism, revulsion against regicide brought about a new popular monarchism, especially in Scotland and Ireland. When Ormond’s coalition failed to control Ireland and Montrose’s last campaign ended in defeat, Charles II came to Scotland and accepted the humiliating conditions of the Kirk party government. He personally subscribed the Covenant and abjured “the spiritual weaknesses of his mother and father” (183). After enduring multiple purges in his household and army, he gave up any hope of a royalist restoration, throwing in his lot with the Scots. “Effectively, the king himself had abandoned the royalist cause and had turned his back on the efforts of all those who had fought and died for him and his father” (186).

Robertson’s narrative concludes with the defeat of Ormond and the adhesion of Charles II to the Covenant. “By the turn of 1651 … the Wars of the Three Kingdoms had largely become a matter of monarchist Ireland and monarchist Scotland versus republican England … Scottish and Irish royalism had been forced into eclipse” (196). He pays little attention to the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland and Scotland, and does not follow the fortunes of the monarchists into the wilderness of the Commonwealth.

Royalists at War is therefore a work of solid scholarship. Its most important contribution is to render comprehensible the opaque maelstrom that was Civil War-era Ireland. His emphasis on the connections between the two subordinate kingdoms is also refreshing, since these are often lost in national histories. On the other hand,
Robertson’s exclusive concentration on the royalist and monarchist nobility is unfortunate. Royalists lost on the battlefield, but they also lost among the minds and hearts of the people of Scotland and Ireland. Scottish royalists, like Huntly and Atholl, were not so much defeated as overwhelmed when the Covenant swept across Scotland in a wave of popular enthusiasm. Atholl backpedaled, but Huntly resisted and witnessed the destruction of his patrimony before his execution. Likewise, in Ireland, Ormond and Antrim were defeated in part because they failed to adequately supply their armies. This failure, however, resulted from their inability to requisition from a hostile Catholic population, whose loyalty lay with Papal Nuncio Giovanni Rinuccini and their priests rather than the Protestant Stuart interest. To include these subordinate groupings would be to write a different book, sacrificing clarity for nuance. To leave them out however, is to deny agency in the past to those who clearly wielded it.


The Hall Book of Grantham records the range and extent of local English government in a period of immense political change. This is the second volume in a series of Lincoln Record Society publications promoting the records of Grantham in the early modern period and providing access to the earliest known proceedings of the town’s alderman court. The first volume, confusingly titled Grantham during the Interregnum, focused on the years 1641 to 1649 (despite the Interregnum starting at the execution of Charles I in 1649), while the book under review explores the period from 1649 to 1662. The edition provides a thirty-page introduction that is divided thematically before diving into the original text. The edition also provides appendices listing all the period’s serving council members and their dates of office.

The Hall Book minutes are impressively transcribed. Much of this work was undertaken by volunteers from the University of the Third