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MLitt Technical Art History

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Introduction

This placement supplements a wider research project exploring the posthumous representations of Mary, Queen of Scots. *The Abdication of Mary, Queen of Scots* was commissioned by James Boswell, Lord of Auchinleck, when he met painter Gavin Hamilton in 1765. It is a crucial moment in the timeline of Marian objects, as this is the first known instance of an artwork that tends toward a romanticised and historical image of the queen. Previous depictions were heavily politicised in the context of Jacobitism.



Viewing *The Abdication of Mary, Queen of Scots* (GLAHA:43874), Gavin Hamilton, 1765-1775.

Why provenance?

Little is known about the location of the painting over the past centuries. The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776 and the latest recorded instance of the painting was a Sotheby's auction in 1972 where it was purchased by the Hunterian. Hence, one aspect of the placement was to research more material that references the painting at any point in its lifetime. The history of the painting is of interest because its current dimensions do not match that of an engraving made in 1786, suggesting that the painting had been cropped relatively soon after its making.

1. Myograph & bow	6	
1. Myograph	5	
3. Table cover	1 10	
1. Peasants	15 5	
2. East Wall	4	
1. Myograph	1 5	
35. Paintings of G. H. Hamilton	15	
Johnson's books	600	6 8 5
Passage books	3	
1. Myograph chest	1 5	
1. Portraits	10	
2. Paintings in the case	3	
Hair curl of eight day blink	5 10	14 5
		13 5 12 6

1822 Auchinleck inventory stating 35 paintings in the library, an example of the lack of information in these documents.
© Beinecke Library, Yale University

MARI

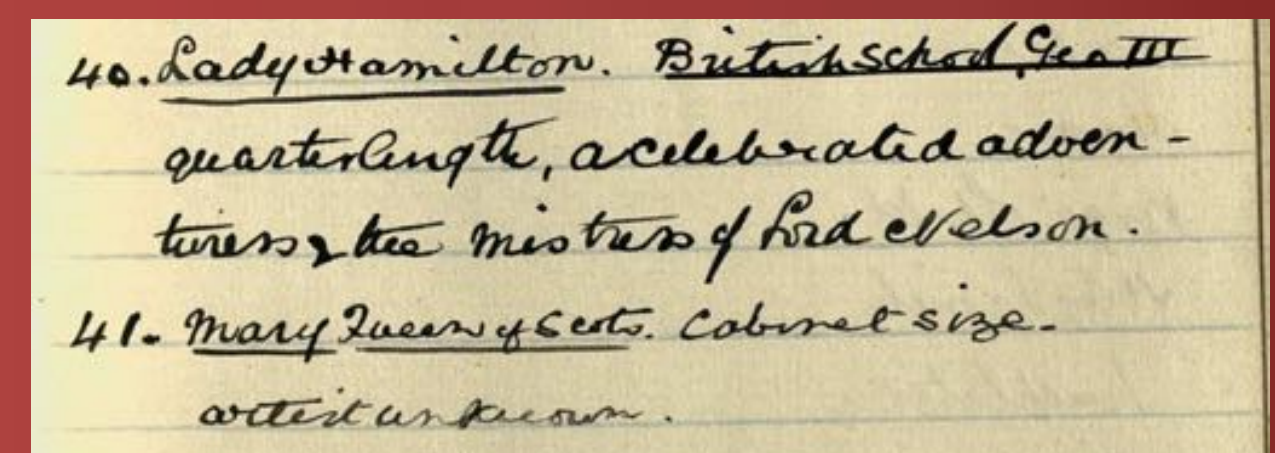
Research

An understanding of the history of the Boswell family must also be considered as any significant event may have determined the future of the painting. The Boswell family merged with the Talbots de Malahide in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century, and the contents of Auchinleck were transported to the Irish castle in the early twentieth century.

The following databases and sources were consulted:

- ❖ Getty Provenance Index
- ❖ Glasgow Newspapers
- ❖ Sotheby's sale articles in British newspapers
- ❖ Auchinleck inventories 1795, 1805, and 1822
- ❖ Malahide Castle inventory 1909

The Auchinleck documents are digitised and available online, whereas the Talbot archives, held in the Bodleian Library, had to be requested for digitisation.



1909 inventory of Malahide Castle describes one of several paintings of Mary, but no mention of her abdicating.
© Bodleian Libraries

Results and Discussion

The former three sources did not highlight anything of interest, but GPI contained records of another painting showing the same historical event by artist William Hamilton, created after *The Abdication*. This demonstrates the possibility of falsely identifying the painting during archival research and emphasises the thoroughness required of provenance research.

Boswell's seat of Auchinleck had three inventories that could have signposted the location of *The Abdication*. However, in all three inventories all paintings were merely counted, with no title or description to identify individual artworks. The inventories of Malahide Castle also provided vague and unfulfilling results. Although there were several portraits of Mary present in the inventories, the dimensions and descriptions did not correlate with Hamilton's painting, factoring in the reductions made.

Conclusion

Despite a seemingly fruitless result, this has been a very successful exercise in provenance research. The information obtained above was incorporated into an updated and more detailed object file for the Hunterian painting. It was useful to explain where the painting had not been as much as where it had been, to show the logic of the research method. The identification of highly similar contemporary paintings reinforced the intellectual rigour necessary for archival research of this painting.

References

1. Inventories (A 2.6), Boswell Collection. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
2. MS. Talbot c. 87, Archive of the Talbot family, Barons Talbot de Malahide, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.