



**The Virtual Hamilton Palace: building a digital resource for local and family history**

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**Abstract:**

*This presentation describes an innovative project to reconstruct, from the resources of libraries, museums and archives worldwide, the lost Palace, and with it the local and family history, of one of the most important families in Scotland. Using novel technologies including Social Networking and Virtual Reality, the Virtual Hamilton Palace is a developing web service where enthusiasts can collaborate with professionals in building a digital body of knowledge as an enduring legacy for the next generation.*

*Members of the Hamilton family have been prominent over 5 centuries of history. But the family has gradually declined in influence and wealth, and Hamilton Palace was demolished 90 years ago.*

*The Virtual Hamilton Palace Trust is working with the estate of the current Duke of Hamilton to try and recreate a digital version of Hamilton Palace and make 500 years worth of family letters, inventories etc available online to scholars and other interested parties throughout the world in a collaborative project to document the private history of this very political family, including the furniture and collections they assembled during their ascendancy.*

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## The Dukes of Hamilton

Members of the Hamilton family (Figure 1) have held prominent roles through 5 centuries of European history. James Hamilton (d.1575) ruled Scotland on behalf of the child Mary Queen of Scots. His grandson the first Duke of Hamilton, was bodyguard to Charles I, and was executed in the English Revolution. Right to the present day, the Dukes of Hamilton remain the hereditary Keepers of Holyroodhouse, official royal residence in Scotland.

The fourth Duke had a controversial role in the Union of the parliaments of Scotland and England, but went on to be British Ambassador to France. The eighth Duke raised a regiment to fight in the American War of Independence.

The family's prominence continued into the Second World War, when Deputy Fuehrer Rudolf Hesse crash-landed in Scotland while trying to reach the fourteenth Duke in a bizarre attempt to get him to persuade Winston Churchill to switch sides and join the Axis. But by that time the family's fortunes had declined, and Hamilton Palace had been demolished 20 years before:

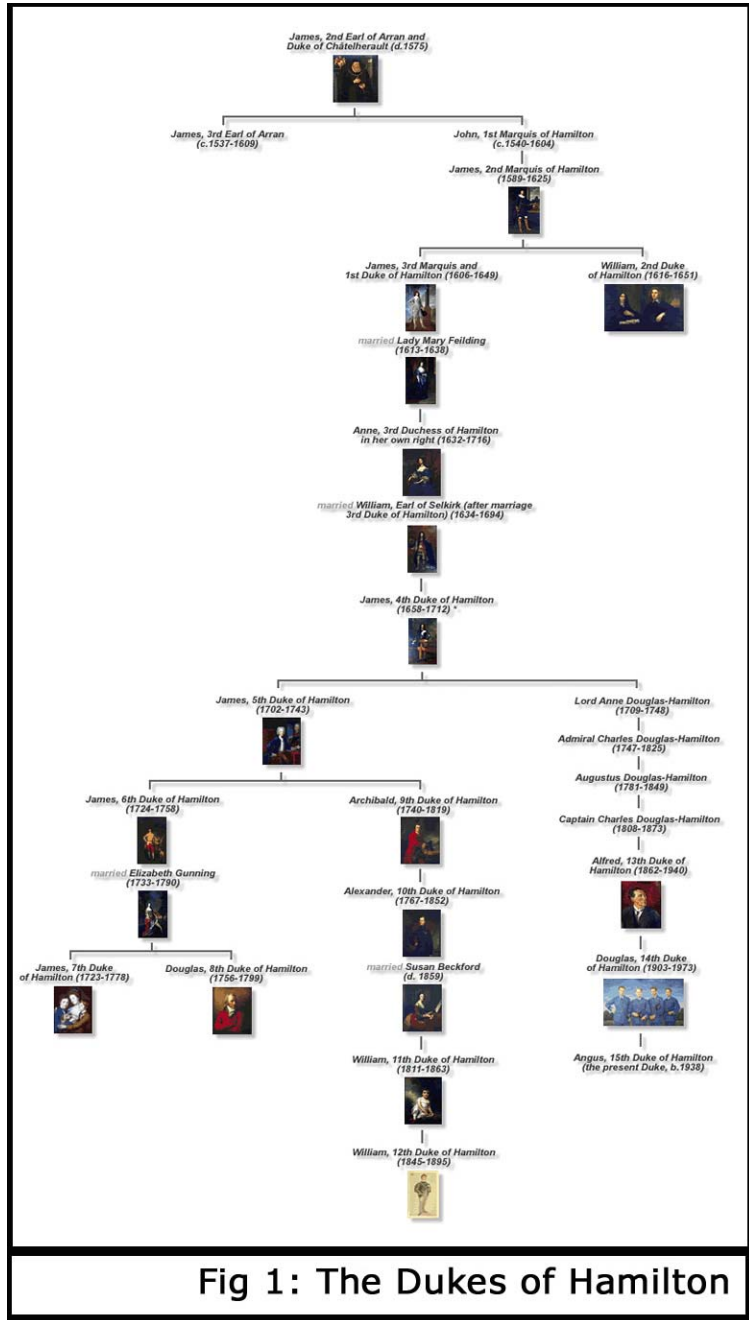


Fig 1: The Dukes of Hamilton

## **The aggrandisement of the Palace**

As a young man at the turn of the Nineteenth Century, before he became tenth Duke, Alexander 'El Magnifico' had travelled widely throughout Europe, including a term as British Ambassador to Russia, and it was he who set about the enlargement of Hamilton palace which was to lead to it's demise:

*“Alexander the tenth Duke was a very flamboyant character. He set about making the already magnificent Hamilton Palace even more opulent. He was tremendously proud of his own family, and his own position, and this connection with the Royal Family. He really wanted to make this the most grandiose house in Scotland, so that people could see exactly how important the Hamiltons were.*

*But the Duke's Grand Design didn't come cheap. Alexander wanted Hamilton Palace to have the equivalent of a Royal Collection. This was a task he threw himself into with great enthusiasm, travelling the world, seeking out rare and exotic pieces of art. It's said that during his lifetime he spent the equivalent of hundreds of millions of pounds, amassing an incredible collection of paintings, sculpture and furniture. The Duke's collection contained a number of now world-famous paintings. But he had one particular obsession: Napoleon. He even went to the extent of commissioning what has become one of the most iconic portraits of the Emperor – when Britain was still at war with France! I wouldn't be surprised if his obsession with Napoleon was in a way a reflection of his own view of himself in the world – they were both flamboyant characters who were projecting their personalities. Perhaps he felt an affinity...*

*Alexander's art collection at Hamilton Palace would have dwarfed the likes of the famous Burrell Collection. Sadly, it is now spread to the four winds, auctioned off to pay family debts. But even more tragic was the fate that befell the building that had housed his magnificent collection. This is the site of Hamilton Palace. Now for us today it is hard to believe the fate of this once vast and imposing building. But the Hamiltons were once heavily involved in the mining industry. Unfortunately, they undermined the foundations of the Palace itself, and in the early nineteen hundreds it began to subside badly. And in 1921 it had to be completely demolished. So today, the once grand house of the Hamiltons has become this sports centre and a retail park<sup>1</sup>.” (Figure 2)*



**Fig 2: Hamilton Palace Retail Park**

### **The Virtual Hamilton Palace Trust**

The Virtual Hamilton Palace Trust (VHPT)<sup>2</sup> was set up to recreate a digital version of the lost Palace, and to make 500 years worth of family letters, inventories and other material available online to scholars and other interested parties throughout the world in a collaborative project to document the private history of this very political family, including the furniture and collections they assembled during their ascendancy. The Trust is Chaired by the celebrated historian and biographer Dr Rosalind K. Marshall<sup>3</sup>, and its directors include Dr Godfrey H. Evans, Principal Curator of European Applied Art at National Museums Scotland; George P. Mackenzie, Director of the National Archives of Scotland; and Fraser Niven, CEO of Lennoxlove – the home of the current Duke of Hamilton<sup>4</sup>.

### **Reconstructing the Building**

VHPT's technology partner is the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN)<sup>5</sup>. With the collaboration of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), VHPT produced a Pilot<sup>6</sup> to demonstrate what might be possible, including simple Virtual Reality models of the lost Palace, based on the original architects' drawings (including those of William Adam c1730), 1920's plans, and photographs from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Virtual Reconstruction of the Palace**

## Revisoning the Parks

It was also possible to create an interactive aerial view of the palace gardens as they would have existed at the end of the nineteenth century (Figure 4),



Fig 4: Aerial View of Palace and Parks



Fig 5: Zoomed Aerial View with modern overlay

which allows the user to zoom in to see features in finer detail, and to overlay them with outlines of the building work that has taken place on the site in the ninety years since the demolition of the Palace (Figure 5).

## Repatriating the Collections

The great Hamilton collections have been dispersed all over the world, but there exists, in Hamilton Public Library, in the National Archives of Scotland, and in the family's own collection, a remarkably complete series of inventories and other documents relating to the collections, dating back 500 years. The Trust has now embarked on making available online digitised versions of each of the historic Hamilton inventories, with clickable links (on a line by line basis) to literal transcripts and modernised versions of every item description. These then click through to digital images and full captions for every item identified. Each object record refers back in its turn to any other relevant inventories, so that researchers can trace that object's provenance, any changes in physical location through the years, and eventually what happened to it once it left the family. At every point in the system, there is a sort of "moderated Wiki" facility, so that researchers can identify new objects, add further information, correct errors etc.

## A worked example

Perhaps a good introduction to the system would be to run through the following demo. The user selects the inventory they are interested in, eg 1643 c. Paintings (M4/21). They browse through each page till they find something interesting – say on the third line up from the bottom of page 10 – so they click on it. A text box will open up at top of screen, displaying both a Literal and a Modernised transcript of the entry, ie "A litle pece w[i]th Lott [&] his 3 daughters"(Figure 6).

Fig 6 - Display of Transcripts

At this point they can click on "View Object" to display the actual painting.

They could then scroll down to read a brief description and a list of other known mentions in the inventories (Figure 8). Scrolling further down would reveal the Metadata for this digital object; under the heading Record Details (Figure 9)

### Lot and His Family Leaving Sodom

Attributed to Hendrik Van Steenwyck

Lot and his family leaving Sodom, attributed to Hendrik van Steenwyck (1550-1603) The picture illustrates the moment when two angels lead Lot and his two daughters from the burning city of Sodom, destroyed by God on account of the wickedness of its inhabitants. His wife stands gazing at the destruction, before she is turned into a pillar of salt as a punishment for looking back.

Due to religious persecution Hendrik van Steenwyck the Elder was forced to flee his native Holland for Aix-la-Chapelle where he trained under Hans de Vries. After a period in Antwerp he eventually settled in Frankfurt. This picture illustrates the artists talent at depicting light in night scenes. It is also a good example of the type of (almost) contemporary Dutch or Flemish painting found in the 1st Duke of Hamilton's collection. It was probably acquired earlier in the 1630s when Hamilton was abroad in Germany and the Netherlands before he acquired his prestigious additional Venetian painting collections between 1636-1638. For fifteen months from 1631-32 he was a volunteer with the army of Gustavus Adolphus and was in Frankfurt in 1631.

The painting may be listed in the following inventories:

Hamilton Inventory M4/20 Entry 215  
Hamilton Inventory M4/21 - Case 32 or Case 38  
Hamilton Inventory M4/22 - Case 38 or 'In the Closet'  
It is definitely listed in M4/48/p.18 (1759) and M4/51.p.12 (1793), numbered in both as 327 and in the 1882 Illustrated Priced catalogue

This painting has the number 327 on the reverse. The number can clearly be matched to inventories (M4/48/p.18) "The burning of Sodom on Timber" of 1759 and 1793 (M4/51.p.12) where it is described as being in the billiard room. It is also mentioned in a number of inventories of the late 1630s and early 1640s belonging to the 3rd Marquis, later 1st Duke of Hamilton. For example, there are four pictures of this subject in an inventory dating from after 1638 (M4/20 entries 10, 11, 12, and 215). Entry 215 attributes the picture to Steenwycke and describes the painting as, "One little peice of lott and his 2 daughters, with Sodom afarre of burning, of Stenwicke:/" This is probably the painting described in this inventory.

Fig 8 - Object Description

### Record details

To search on related items, click any linked text below.

Scan ID: 000-000-000-435-C  
Image Copyright: Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, New York  
Project: 0967: Project description | View all records in project  
Ref: Virtual Hamilton Palace: Arnot Art Museum (Bequest of Matthias H Arnot, 1910)  
Date: Hamilton Inventory c. 1643  
Hamilton Inventory c.1638  
Material: Oil on panel  
Dimensions: 7"x 8 7/16"  
What: Collection: James 3rd Marquis and 1st Duke of Hamilton  
Painting: Lot and His Family leaving Sodom  
Subject: Fine Art - Paintings  
Who: Hendrik van Steenwyck (Painter)  
James 3rd Marquis and 1st Duke of Hamilton(Owner)  
Where: Arnot Art Museum, 235 Lake Street, Elmira, New York.  
| Search & Replace  
Event: Hamilton Inventory M4/20/  
Hamilton Inventory M4/21/  
Description: Painting of Lot and His Family leaving Sodom  
References:  
• Arnot Art Museum [Website]  
• Rachael Sadinsky, *A Collector's Vision - The 1910 bequest of Matthias H. Arnot* Arnot Art Museum, 1989, p. 46  
Find in NLS: Title, Author, Title+ Author or British Library: Title, Author, Title+Author

Fig 9 - Object Metadata

Clicking on "James 3rd Marquis and 1st Duke of Hamilton (Owner)" would display thumbnails of 5 further paintings from his collection (Figure 10).

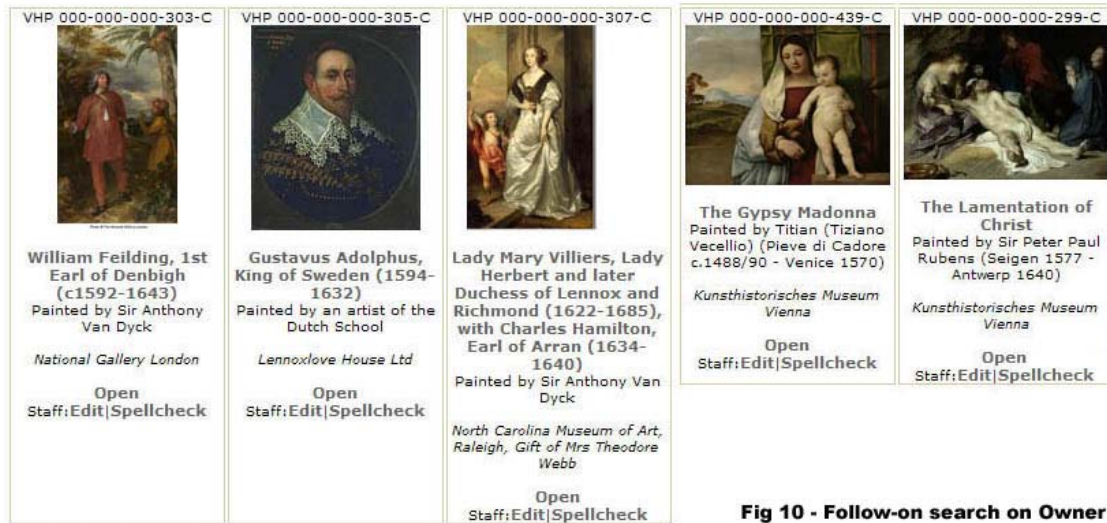


Fig 10 - Follow-on search on Owner

Again, this Record also contains a bibliographic reference to a book about the Arnott collection, and by clicking on "Title" within this reference you can search the National Library of Scotland catalogue to find the shelfmark of an available copy (Figure 11).

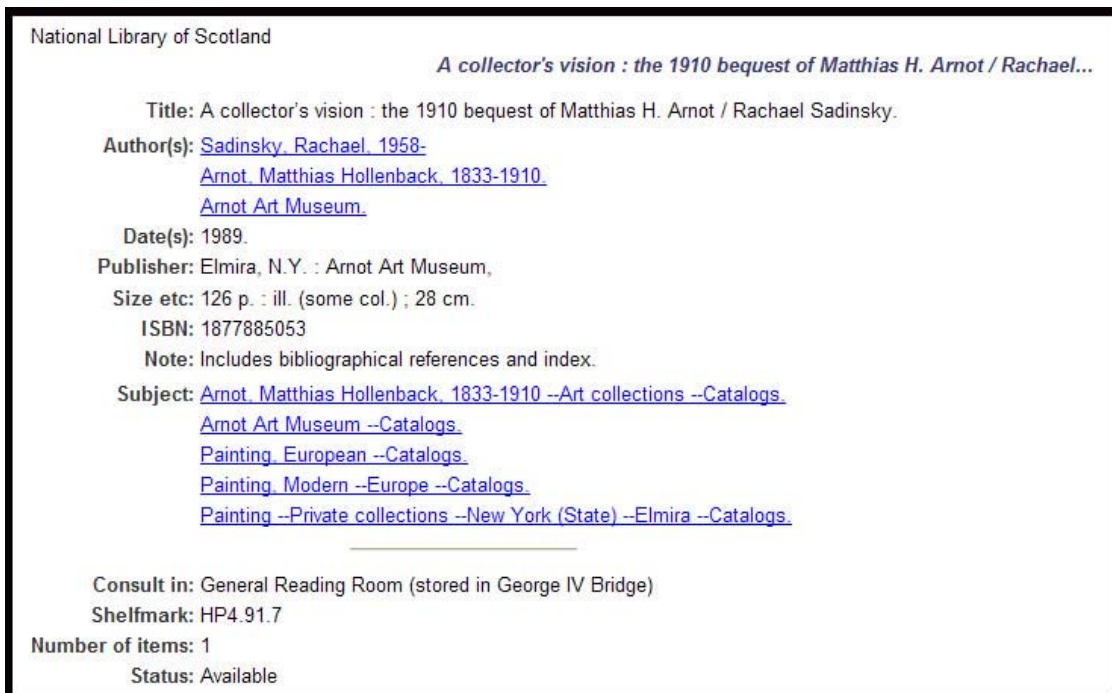


Fig 11 - External Bibliographic Search Result

We have chosen to include in this prototype a range of different kinds of "inventory", including letters, receipts, sale catalogues, and even David Teniers the younger's painting of the Gallery of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm c1651. If you selected that, and then clicked on the painting on the top row centre left of the gallery wall, you would access the details of Giorgione's "Three Philosophers", which is also listed in four other inventories. And so on...

### **The Photographic Record**

The decline and destruction of the Palace and the dispersal of its contents took place over a period from the 1870s to the 1920s (including the Christie's sale of 2,213 lots of fine and decorative art items in 1882); that is not so long ago that photographic evidence is not available. The Trust has made a start on this by digitising several dozen high-quality photographs of the Palace (inside and out), taken in the early part of this period by Thomas Annan of Glasgow, and now held by Hamilton Town House Library. It is hoped, if funding can be found, to supplement these with old images (and perhaps even movies) contributed by the local inhabitants of South Lanarkshire, documenting not just the buildings, but the life of ordinary people working on the estate or in the collieries nearby.

### **Virtual Interiors**

Students in the Department of Computing Science at the University of Glasgow, supervised by the Multimedia Department of the Hunterian Museum, are currently building a full colour, 3D virtual reality version of the New Dining Room at the Palace, based upon floor plans, Annan photographs, inventories, memos to and from builders and interior decorators, and images of furniture, fittings and artworks known to have been present in the 1870s (Figure 12).



Fig 12 - Virtual New Dining Room

### **Major Project Partnership**

This can be seen as the first fruits of a partnership which the Trust is building with a number of institutions to gain the critical mass in expertise and access to materials necessary to develop projects worthy of major academic funding. Our first such partner is the University of Glasgow, with its top-rated research departments in Computing, Art History, and Cultural Informatics. We have also concluded agreements with the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Proposals for two funded PhDs (on Western ceramics in the collection, and on the background to the collection's dispersal) have already been successful, and work is in progress on a major bid for funding to publish the 6,445 entries in the great Hamilton Palace inventory of 1876, with illustrations of the items and full critical apparatus.



## **In Conclusion**

The Virtual Hamilton Palace Trust is a multidisciplinary, multi-institutional enterprise utilising the technologies of the future to facilitate access to the study of the past. It is developing a web service where enthusiasts in local and family history and the history of art can collaborate with professionals in building a digital body of knowledge as an enduring legacy for the next generation.

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## **About the Author**

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The Chairman of cultural informatics consultancy CCL, Bruce has managed the implementation of innovative services for British Telecom, a London Public Library, The British Library, the National Library of Scotland, and the Singapore Library Network. He set up the ground-breaking merger of Library, Media and Computing Services at the University of Stirling, and in 1996 he founded SCRAN, a pioneering web-based multimedia digital library service.

A regular contributor to IFLA events since 1992, last year Bruce Royan was awarded the IFLA scroll by Claudia Lux, “in grateful recognition for his invaluable contributions to IFLA.”



## References

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<sup>1</sup> Murton, P & Marshall, RK. *Clan Hamilton - Grand Designs*. Glasgow: BBC Scotland and Mentorn Media, Last broadcast on Mon, 2 Nov 2009, 20:00 on BBC Two (Scotland only).

<sup>2</sup> *The Virtual Hamilton Palace Trust [Website]*  
<http://www.vhpt.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, RK. *The days of Duchess Anne: life in the household of the Duchess of Hamilton, 1656-1716*. Collins, 1973

<sup>4</sup> [Sibbald J.] *Treasures from Lennoxlove: home of the Duke of Hamilton*. [Catalogue of an exhibition at Lyon & Turnbull, Edinburgh, 1-18 August 2006]. [Lennoxlove House Ltd], 2006  
[http://www.vhpt.org/news/news\\_images/Lennoxlove\\_cat.pdf?PHPSESSID=48u41fo24tjrnvcscbubs9cs03](http://www.vhpt.org/news/news_images/Lennoxlove_cat.pdf?PHPSESSID=48u41fo24tjrnvcscbubs9cs03)

<sup>5</sup> Royan B. "Cross-domain access to digitised cultural resources: the SCRAN project." *IFLA Journal*, 25:2, May 1999  
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla64/pdf/039-109e.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *Hamilton Palace: a Virtual Reconstruction [Website]*  
<http://sites.scran.ac.uk/vhp/index.html>