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## **‘The Grand Question debated’: Jonathan Swift, Army Barracks, Parliament and Money<sup>1</sup>**

In September 1728 Jonathan Swift composed the poem ‘The Grand Question debated: Whether Hamilton’s Bawn should be turned into a Barrack or a Malt-House’.<sup>2</sup> On the face of it, and in Swift’s own words, it was written simply ‘by way of amusement, in

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented in abbreviated form to the 14th Dublin International Symposium on Jonathan Swift at St Patrick’s Cathedral Deanery, Dublin, on 17 October 2015. I am grateful to Professor Robert Mahony for inviting me to speak at that event, and to the audience and the respondent, Dr Clíona Ó Gallchoir, for their input. I am also grateful to the audience at the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies’ meeting in March 2016, where feedback on the full-length paper prompted further fine-tuning. I would also like to thank Dr Suzanne Forbes, Dr Timothy Watt, Dr Michael Kennedy, Neil McGleenon and Mary and Sam McHugh for their input during and after a field trip to Hamiltonsbawn, County Armagh, in August 2014 as part of the *Army Barracks of Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (<https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/>) project. I am also indebted to Dr Andreas Hess and Professor Christopher Fauske for comments on drafts of the paper, and to Dr Eoin Magennis and Livia Hurley for particular insights in relation to barley-growing and Maltheuses. My main debts of gratitude go to my co-principal investigator on the barracks project, Dr Patrick Walsh; to Professor James Woolley for reading a draft of the paper and providing a series of very helpful comments thereon; and to Professor David Hayton for providing me with a series of crucial Swift references on barracks and the national debt, and for his ever-insightful comments on the paper.

<sup>2</sup> James Woolley, ‘Swift’s “Skinnibonia”: A New Poem from Lady Acheson’s Manuscript’, in *Reading Swift: Papers from the Fifth Muenster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Hermann J. Real (Munich, 2008), p. 330. My thanks to Professor James Woolley for bringing the date of the poem’s composition to my attention. The date had previously been suggested as September 1729. See Harold Williams, ‘The Grand Question debated’, *Review of English Studies*, 15 (1939), 328-30; John Irwin Fisher, ‘Swift Writing Poetry: The Example of “The Grand Question debated”’, in *Swift: The Enigmatic Dean*, ed. by Rudolf Freiburg, Arno Löffler and Wolfgang Zach (Tübingen, 1998), p. 45.

the family of an honourable gentleman in the north of Ireland'.<sup>3</sup> The 'honourable gentleman' was Sir Arthur Acheson of Markethill in County Armagh, who hosted Swift for three lengthy visits from June 1728 to February 1729, June to October 1729 and June to September 1730.

Swift's apparent dismissal of the Hamiltonsbawn poem as light and frivolous may have been, at best, disingenuous. Instead, the poem appears to be one of the first salvoes in a series of engagements on Swift's part over several years with the connected issues of large-scale government expenditure on the military and the associated willingness of Irish MPs to facilitate increased levels of parliamentary taxation and a growing national debt. For Swift, these connected issues epitomised and crystalized what was fundamentally wrong, in his eyes, with the Hanoverian establishment in both England and Ireland, and the failure of politicians in both countries to look after what he believed were the true interests of Ireland.

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From the 1690s onwards Ireland maintained and paid for the single largest part of the British standing army – 12,000 men – in peacetime, and served as the first port of call for soldiers when the army was expanded in size whenever Britain went to war. At least three-quarters of Ireland's annual expenditure was on the military during the eighteenth century. This was mostly spent on the pay of the soldiers stationed in Ireland and, from 1701-2 onwards, on a smaller though slowly increasing number of regiments stationed overseas in various parts of the British empire. A significant sum was also spent from the late 1690s onwards on the building in Ireland of a country-wide network of residential army barracks which was an innovation not only within

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Grand Question Debated: whether Hamilton's Bawn should be turned into a Barracks or a Malt-House', in *Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford, 1984), p. 500.

the emerging British empire but also for the greater part within and beyond Europe.<sup>4</sup> Only France and to a lesser extent Spain had previously engaged with such a policy for housing soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, especially in England and later in the thirteen American colonies, the policy was fiercely and successfully resisted because of the association of standing armies, and in particular the barracks built to house them, with absolutism and tyranny.<sup>6</sup> In Ireland such tender sensibilities held little sway for a Protestant minority ruling elite surrounded by, as they perceived it after the war of 1689-91, a hostile, potentially rebellious, Catholic majority population. Thus the building of over 100 barracks in the late 1690s and early 1700s in various locations scattered around Ireland constituted a significant innovation both in terms of military practice in the wider empire but also in terms of Irish public expenditure.<sup>7</sup>

It was also the case that the building and ongoing maintenance of the barrack complexes had a significant economic impact through investment in localities: construction provided employment and circulation of money in the economy; and the presence of soldiers provided ongoing stimulus to trade and commerce and brought much-needed coinage into local circulation. The patronage associated with barrack-

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<sup>4</sup> C. I. McGrath, *Ireland and Empire, 1692-1770* (London, 2012), pp. 69-218.

<sup>5</sup> James Douet, *British Barracks 1600-1914: Their Architecture and Role in Society* (London, 1998), pp. 3-4, 17.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, L. G. Schworer, “No Standing Armies!”: *The Anti-Army Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Baltimore, 1974), passim; W. S. Fields and D. T. Hardy, ‘The Third Amendment and the Issue of the Maintenance of Standing Armies: A Legal History’, *The American Journal of Legal History*, 35 (1991), 393-431; C. E. Carter, ‘The Significance of the Military Office in America, 1763-1775’, *American Historical Review*, 28 (1923), 475-88; John Childs, *Armies and Warfare in Europe 1648-1789* (New York, 1982), pp. 185-6; McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 70-5.

<sup>7</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 69-218.

building also soon emerged, as it became apparent that having a barracks sited on your land was economically lucrative, whether in terms of rent from the government or stimulus to the local economy.<sup>8</sup> Barracks also sometimes served as a precursor to attempts at establishing settlements in sparsely populated areas and preceded the granting of licences for fairs and other trappings of settlement and community, all of which brought economic development in their train.<sup>9</sup>

Swift's light-hearted and humorous 1728 *Hamiltonsbawn* poem is clearly first and foremost a piece of social satire, but it is also his most sustained and explicit engagement with the innovative barrack-building project. Given Swift's own dismissal of it as an 'amusement' in the 'Preface' to the Dublin printing at the time of its belated publication in 1732, on the face of it the poem might not be construed as a significant comment upon the Irish government's barrack-building project and the connected issues of large-scale expenditure on the military and the associated willingness of Irish MPs to facilitate increased levels of parliamentary taxation and a growing national debt.

Two factors, however, suggest otherwise. First, Swift already had a well-established track-record for engaging with such matters. While a political writer for the Tory ministry in England in the years 1710-14, he expended significant time and effort in print in taking issue with England's / Britain's national debt and the Westminster parliament's role in facilitating it through taxation and other legislation, and with the

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<sup>8</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 89-92.

<sup>9</sup> *Army Barracks*: see in particular Blackbank (<https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/blackbank/>); Fourmile House (<https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/fourmile-house/>); Johnston's Fews (<https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/johnstons-fews/>).

resulting maintenance of a standing army.<sup>10</sup> Writing in 1721 that he ‘had in those days a mortal antipathy against Standing Armies in times of peace’,<sup>11</sup> Swift publically revisited all of these connected matters with regard to England / Britain in *Gulliver’s Travels* in 1726, culminating with the King of Brobdingnag expressing his astonishment ‘to hear ... of a mercenary standing army in the midst of peace, and among a free people’.<sup>12</sup> Second, and more immediately, Swift’s engagement in a form of public subterfuge at the time of the publication in 1732 of the Hamiltonsbawn poem suggests that it was much more than a simple ‘amusement’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Key publications by Swift in this respect were pieces in *The Examiner*, in *The Examiner and Other Pieces Written in 1710-11*, ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1957), pp. 1-174, and *The Conduct of the Allies, and of the Late Ministry, in Beginning and Carrying on the Present War* (London, 1711), in *Political Tracts, 1711-13*, ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1951), pp. 1-66. Although published much later, Swift’s *The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* (Dublin, 1758), in *The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen*, ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1951), also addressed these matters. See Alan Downie, ‘Gulliver’s Travels, the Contemporary Debate on the Financial Revolution, and the Bourgeois Public Sphere’, in *Money, Power and Print: Interdisciplinary Studies on the Financial Revolution in the British Isles*, ed. by C. I. McGrath and Chris Fauske (Newark, 2008), pp. 118-28; Mathew Gertken, ‘Swift, Utrecht and Ireland’, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 30 (2015), pp. 43-4, 52-3, 59-60. On the later publication of *History of the Four Last Years*, see Ashley Marshall, *Swift and History: Politics and the English Past* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 127-8.

<sup>11</sup> Swift to Alexander Pope, 10 Jan. 1721, in *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.* ed. by David Woolley (5 vols, Frankfurt am Main, 1999-2014), ii, 360; Downie, ‘Contemporary Debate’, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (London, 1726), in *Gulliver’s Travels* ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 130-1; Downie, ‘Contemporary Debate’, pp. 115-18.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Grand Question’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 500.

Two almost simultaneous versions of the poem were published in 1732, in London<sup>14</sup> and Dublin.<sup>15</sup> The latter publication was erroneously yet purposefully presented as a reprint, even though significant differences existed between both versions.<sup>16</sup> Most obviously, the titles were completely different – the London poem was called *A Soldier and a Scholar: Or the Lady's Judgement Upon those two Characters In the Persons of Captain \_\_\_\_\_ and D\_\_n S\_\_T*. The real deceit lay elsewhere, however. There was no preamble of any sort to the London publication, while the Dublin version commenced with a fictitious 'Preface to the English Edition'. This falsified Preface served the purpose, *inter alia*, of informing the non-existent English reader that the footnotes to the poem had been included in order to elucidate 'some expressions peculiar to Ireland'. The deception was completed by the printing of a more extensive set of footnotes in the Dublin version, with very particular new additions covering bawns and barracks.<sup>17</sup>

Swift's purpose in all of this subterfuge seems ultimately to have been a desire to develop or explicate the barrack-related elements of the poem for his Irish audience. It is not known at what point between September 1728 and early 1732 Swift composed the footnotes, but the inclusion of those relating to bawns and barracks in the Dublin version demonstrates a continuity of concern and evolution of thought for Swift during

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<sup>14</sup> *A Soldier and a Scholar: Or the Lady's Judgement Upon those two Characters In the Persons of Captain \_\_\_\_\_ and D\_\_n S\_\_T* (London, 1732).

<sup>15</sup> *The Grand Question debated: Whether Hamilton's Bawn Should be turn'd into a Barrack or a Malt-House* (Dublin, 1732).

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Professor James Woolley for providing me with copies of the two 1732 versions of the poem, and highlighting the subterfuges at play.

<sup>17</sup> 'Grand Question', in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, pp. 500-1.

those years that was addressed in a number of apparently unconnected writings – published and unpublished – during that time. Such a perspective is further enhanced when viewed alongside an additional four lines towards the end of the poem which Swift added in manuscript in 1732, but which were only first published in 1735.<sup>18</sup>

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Referring in general to the poems Swift composed while staying at Markethill, Carole Fabricant points out that they ‘treat serious, potentially ominous matters and can no more be dismissed as mere bagatelles than any of the other seemingly only playful country house verses’.<sup>19</sup> With regard to the Hamiltonsbawn poem in particular, Irvin Ehrenpreis considers it to be one of Swift’s best endeavours at ‘genial satire’, in which the rationality of the male characters in wanting a Malthouse is contrasted with the frivolity of the female characters in wishing for a barracks, including the suggestion that ‘mindless frivolity lies behind anti-clericalism’.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1732 Dublin version of the poem, the first footnote is provided with reference to the title-word ‘Bawn’, which, as Fabricant points out, originates from an Irish word *Bábhun*.<sup>21</sup> Swift’s footnote describes a bawn ‘as a place near the house, enclosed with mud or stone walls, to keep the cattle from being stolen at night. They are now little used’.<sup>22</sup> This description however undersells the particular building being

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 504, lines 167-70; Williams, ‘The Grand Question debated’, pp. 328-9; Fisher, ‘Swift Writing Poetry’, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Carole Fabricant, *Swift’s Landscape* (Baltimore, 1982), p. 261.

<sup>20</sup> Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age* (3 vols, Cambridge, Mass., 1983), iii, 624-5.

<sup>21</sup> Fabricant, *Landscapes*, p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Grand Question’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 500.



addressed in the poem, which had been built originally in 1619 as part of the Ulster Plantation undertaking by the Scottish settler John Hamilton and constituted a sixty square foot defensive structure with flankers constructed out of lime and stone.<sup>23</sup> This building was in keeping with the stipulations in the original articles for the Ulster Plantation in 1610, whereby all English and Scottish ‘undertakers of a great proportion shall within three years to be accounted from Easter 1611 build thereupon a strong House, or Castle, with a strong Court, or Bawn, about it, and every undertaker of a middle proportion shall in the same time make thereupon a strong Court, or Bawn at least’.<sup>24</sup> By 1622 Hamilton’s bawn had been extended to ninety feet long and sixty-three feet broad. Hamilton was responsible for somewhere between twenty and twenty-six families in the area, and was able to arm thirty men as required by his undertaking. The bawn was almost completely destroyed during the 1641 Rising, but following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 John Hamilton’s son, Sir Hans Hamilton, built a three (or possibly five) chimney manor house on the ruins.<sup>25</sup> Because of the tall chimneys, the house was known locally as ‘the Castle’, which led to confusion in some nineteenth-century publications which recorded in error the existence of an actual castle at the site.<sup>26</sup> Owing to substantial family debts, the land on which the bawn and

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<sup>23</sup> C. F. McGleenon, ‘Patterns of Settlement in the Catholic Parishes of Ballymore and Mullaghbrack in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries’, *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, 15, no. 2 (1993), pp. 53-4; ‘Hamilton’s Bawn’, in Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1837), ii, 2.

<sup>24</sup> BL, Add. MS 4756, ff 97-8.

<sup>25</sup> Mary McHugh, *Mullabrack: A Parish of Great Antiquity* (Armagh, 2012), pp. 11, 100-1, and further information provided by correspondence in August 2014; McGleenon, ‘Patterns of Settlement’, pp 53-4; ‘Hamilton’s Bawn’, in Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary*, ii, 2.

<sup>26</sup> See for example ‘Hamilton’s Bawn’, in Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary*, ii, 2.

house stood was sold by Sir Hans Hamilton's grandson (also Sir Hans) in the early eighteenth century and by the 1720s it had come into the possession of Acheson.<sup>27</sup>

It is therefore evident that Hamilton's original bawn was for more than keeping cattle safe at night and instead constituted a defensive structure for settler security in the face of a potentially hostile displaced indigenous population. Such questions of local internal security remained apposite in early eighteenth-century Armagh, though Swift's first footnote on the title-word bawn would seem to suggest otherwise. His purposeful avoidance of such security issues is best explained by the poem's evident hostility to army barracks.

At the outset of the poem, Acheson seeks advice on a 'weighty affair' from his wife, Lady Anne Acheson, who herself was a particular focus of Swift's attentions during his time at Markethill, a factor which, it has been suggested, may have contributed to the separation of the Achesons in the early 1730s and the demise of the friendship between Sir Arthur and Swift.<sup>28</sup> In the poem, Acheson commences by informing his wife that 'This Hamilton's *bawn*, whilst it sticks on my hand / I lose by the house, what I get by the land'. He then inquires of her 'But how to dispose of it to the best bidder, / For a *barrack* or *malt-house*, we now must consider'.<sup>29</sup> A footnote at this point in the poem, only included in the Dublin version in 1732, informs the reader that 'The army in Ireland, is lodged in strong buildings over the whole kingdom, called barracks'. That Swift ostensibly deemed it necessary to explain what a 'barracks' was

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<sup>27</sup> McHugh, *Mullabrack*, p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Joseph McMinn, *Jonathan's Travels: Swift and Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), pp. 119-32; Brean Hammond, *Jonathan Swift* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 26, 105-6; Victoria Glendenning, *Jonathan Swift* (London, 1998), pp. 156-8.

<sup>29</sup> 'Grand Question', in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 500.

to the reader (regardless of their country of origin), acknowledges that the building of a countrywide network of them was innovatory. But was his real purpose in so doing actually to confront the Irish reader with a reminder of the stark reality that since the 1690s Ireland had become the home to a permanent standing army housed in a permanent and country-wide network of military complexes?

Despite, or more probably because of, this fact, Swift immediately preferences the idea of turning the bawn into a Malthouse: 'First, let me suppose I make it a *malt-house*, / Here I have computed the profit will fall t' us: / There's nine hundred pounds for labour and grain, / I increase it to twelve, so three hundred remain'. This profit would thereby facilitate 'a handsome addition' to the Markethill household of 'wine and good cheer', with 'three dishes a day, ... three Hogsheads a year', and a 'dozen large Vessels' stored in the vault. The profit would also mean that Lady Acheson and Swift would no longer have reason to restrict Sir Arthur to only one bottle of wine a night.<sup>30</sup>

It is not evident whether or not Acheson actually ever considered turning the Bawn into a Malthouse. Such buildings were for turning barley grain into malt for brewing beer and whiskey. They were long and low-lying with two or three storeys at most and were useful for employing agricultural labourers during the winter, when the temperatures were more conducive to the malting process. There were many small malting enterprises in eighteenth-century Ireland, with about 2,216 in existence in 1785. Breweries and distilleries favoured urban locations for access to transport, water and customers, so accessibility to those urban markets was important for the location

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 500-1.

of Maltings.<sup>31</sup> Livia Hurley has noted that ‘early eighteenth-century maltings ... were usually contained within brewery and distillery complexes’, but independent Maltings did exist also. It was also the case that such undertakings tended to be located in barley-growing regions.<sup>32</sup> In that respect, in County Armagh barley was mostly grown in the baronies of Armagh, O’Neilland and Lower Orior, in relatively close proximity to Hamiltonsbawn village.<sup>33</sup> So it would seem that a small undertaking of the kind imagined by Swift could have been viable in Hamiltonsbawn in 1728-9. However, little more is heard of the Malting thereafter in the poem.

The option of a barracks is quickly dismissed because it will mean that ‘the crown is my tenant. / My dear, I have ponder’d again and again on’t: / In poundage and drawbacks I lose half my rent, / And whatever they give me, I must be content, / Or join with the court in ev’ry debate; / and rather than that, I would lose my estate’.<sup>34</sup> Swift’s suggestion that poundage and drawbacks will reduce the rent in half is disingenuous to say the least, given that poundage was a customs and excise duty of a certain percentage in the pound sterling or pound weight paid by importers, exporters or retailers, while drawbacks were usually paid to merchants by the revenue service on the re-exportation of previously imported goods or goods manufactured from previous imports. Presumably, Swift was actually making reference to the fact that government

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<sup>31</sup> Colin Rynne, *Industrial Ireland 1750-1930: An Archaeology* (Cork, 2006), pp. 236-9, 241, 244, 248-9, 251.

<sup>32</sup> *Art and Architecture of Ireland* (5 vols, New Haven, 2014), iv, 253.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Charles Coote, Bart., *Statistical Survey of County Armagh, with observations on the means of improvement: Drawn up in the years 1802, and 1803, for the consideration, and under the direction of, the Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1804), p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Grand Question’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 501.

officials took fees when making payments to the public out of government funds. But in reality such fees accounted for a very small percentage of the overall rent being paid. It was also the case that since an act of the Irish parliament at the end of 1717, no government fees or deductions of any kind were to be taken from the rents paid for barrack lands and buildings.<sup>35</sup> And it was certainly the case that the significant competition for having barracks located on people's estates at the time suggested that the rents were deemed more than sufficient in terms of profit to the landowner.<sup>36</sup>

But the crux of Swift's opposition to a barracks at this point is that it will make Acheson a courtier in parliament: in order to ensure a reasonable rent, he will have to vote with the government on all occasions. However, the idealised Sir Arthur is apparently prepared to lose his estate rather than be bought off by the government.

No such scruples are assigned to Lady Acheson, the '*meek* wife' who straight away reposts that it '*must, and it shall be a barrack, my life*'. Country-house living is then attacked:

I'm grown a mere mopus; no company comes  
 But a rabble of tenants, and rusty dull *rums*.  
 With *parsons* what lady can keep herself clean?  
 I'm all over daub'd when I sit by the *Dean*.  
 But if you give us a *barrack*, my dear,  
 The *captain*, I'm sure, will always come here;  
 I then shall not value his Deanship a straw,  
 For the Captain, I warrant, will keep him in awe ...

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<sup>35</sup> *The Statutes at Large passed in the Parliaments held in Ireland* (21 vols, Dublin, 1765-1804), iv, 455-

6. I am grateful to Professor James Woolley for directing my attention to this reference.

<sup>36</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 89-90.

[and tell him] that men of his coat should be minding their pray'rs,  
And, not among ladies to give themselves airs.<sup>37</sup>

Swift seems to be implying that army officers spend much of their time among ladies, an implication that takes the poem into the more problematic associations with the military and barracks. In the face of Sir Arthur's continuing resolve to build a Malthouse, Lady Acheson's waiting woman, Hannah, enters the fray and fantasises about life with the barrack close by. She imagines the day of the arrival of the first horse troop at Hamiltonsbawn, which in itself suggests that the actual proposal for a barracks was already well advanced when the poem was written, given that the barracks brought into commission at Hamiltonsbawn in 1731-2 was indeed for a horse troop (the vast majority of Irish barracks were for infantry). Sir Arthur waits upon the nameless Captain at the barracks the next morning with the two men being immediately on the best of terms, though there seem to be less agreeable inferences or undercurrents in lines such as Sir Arthur stating 'My wife's at your service' or 'I hope you will use my house as your own', which is in reply to the Captain's 'humble respects to my lady unknown'.<sup>38</sup>

Focus then turns to the glitz and glamour of the military: the trumpets and drums, gold lace and other finery as the Captain marches his troop to the Acheson home. The Captain 'rides like a lord of the land, / with the fine flaming sword that he holds in his hand'. His apparent resemblance or impersonation of a peer of the realm places him higher in society than Sir Arthur, but also introduces a litany of compromising and inappropriate behaviour by both Lady Acheson and the Captain laden with, to the modern ear at least, serious innuendoes of sexual impropriety and

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<sup>37</sup> 'Grand Question', in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 501.

<sup>38</sup> 'Grand Question', in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 502.

intercourse. As the Captain draws up his troop outside the house, Lady Acheson ‘lifts up the sash to be seen’. In response

The Captain, to show he is proud of the favour,  
 Looks up to your *window*, and cocks up his beaver.  
 (His beaver is cock’d: pray madam, mark that,  
 For, a captain of horse never takes off his hat;  
 Because he has never a hand that is idle,  
 For the right holds his sword, and the left holds his bridle.)  
 Then flourishes thrice his sword in the air,  
 As a compliment due to a lady so fair;  
 (How I tremble to think of the blood it hath spilt!);  
 Then he low’rs down the point, and kisses the hilt.

By way of reply Lady Acheson invites the Captain into the house. It is only then made apparent that all of this has taken place in the absence of Sir Arthur, who is sent for while Lady Acheson takes it upon herself to invite the Captain to stay for dinner, an invitation that it would seem, for propriety’s sake, should have come from the absent Sir Arthur.<sup>39</sup>

Come dinner time, Swift and a local clergyman, Henry Jenney, are displaced at Lady Acheson’s side by the Captain. The female servants are all topsy turvy as well with the fine-looking Captain, while much fun is made of the clergymen. The Captain accuses Swift of having amorous intentions towards Lady Acheson’s maid, whom he wishes ‘would lend you her pretty white hand / In mending your gown, and smoothing

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<sup>39</sup> ‘Grand Question’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 503.

your band'.<sup>40</sup> As the poem approaches its climax in a series of lines possibly added by Swift at some point between 1729 and 1731, violence and ignorance are presented as a better option than learning and civilized living, as the Captain dismisses a classical education and claims

The army's the only good school in the nation:  
 My schoolmaster call'd me a dunce and a fool,  
 But at cuffs I was always the cock of the school.  
 I never could take to my book for the blood o' me,  
 And the puppy confess'd he expected no good o' me.

An even darker vision, which warns of the real dangers Lady Acheson and the women of the household actually may face, is provided in the ensuing four lines, added by hand by Swift to a copy of the printed 1732 version and first published in 1735, which recount how the schoolmaster caught the Captain 'one morning coquetting his wife, / But he maul'd me, I ne'er was so maul'd in my life: / So I took to the road and, what's very odd, / The first man I robb'd, was a parson, by G--.' This then is what really awaits the Acheson household if a barracks is built at Hamiltonsbawn: Lady Acheson disgraced and the female servants exposed to the licentiousness of soldiers who are ignorant bullies and thieves.<sup>41</sup>

For Swift to imply such an outcome from building a barracks nearby was not new. In the first published salvo of the anti-standing army debate in England in 1697, John Trenchard had warned of 'the insolence of the officers, and the debaucheries that

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 504; Leo Damrosch, *Jonathan Swift: his life and his world* (New Haven, 2013), p. 436.

<sup>41</sup> 'Grand Question', in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 504. For discussion of the addition of lines 153-66 at some point between 1729 and 1731 and of lines 167-70 in 1732 see Fisher, 'Swift Writing Poetry', pp 44-6; Williams, 'The Grand Question debated', pp. 328-9.



are committed both by them and their soldiers in all the towns they come in, to the ruin of multitudes of women, dishonour of their families, and ill example to others'.<sup>42</sup>

However, despite the warnings of such things in the *Hamiltonsbawn* poem, the frivolity of the female characters has the final say as Lady Acheson ultimately declares 'Give me but a *barrack*, a fig for the clergy'.<sup>43</sup>

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Swift returned to the theme of the proposed *Hamiltonsbawn* barracks in April 1730 in the satirical *Vindication of His Excellency ... Lord Carteret*, which among other things purported to demonstrate that Irish Tories such as Acheson had not been preferred under the outgoing lord lieutenant. Swift portrayed Carteret's pending patronage of Acheson by locating a barracks on his land as being in reality of little financial benefit. He argued that the intended annual lease income of £60 would be off-set by the initial investment Acheson would have to make of £500 to build the barracks and stables, upon which he would then pay interest of £30 per annum, while also incurring costs of £19 more for poultry, 'stragglings sheep' and 'game destroyed five miles round' by the troopers. All that would be left thereafter as a net annual profit to help Acheson 'in entertaining the officers, and making provision for his younger children', was £11. In light of the earlier *Hamiltonsbawn* poem, the phrase 'entertaining the officers' has a more ominous resonance for the women of *Markethill* than may at first appear in the *Vindication*. In a final stabbing remark, Swift stated that the loss of cattle and poultry would, however, be fully compensated for because the barracks would multiply 'the

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<sup>42</sup> John Trenchard, *An Argument Shewing, that a Standing Army Is inconsistent with A Free Government, and absolutely destructive to the Constitution of the English Monarchy* (London, 1697), pp. 28-9.

<sup>43</sup> 'Grand Question', in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, p. 505; Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, iii, 624-5.

Breed of Mankind, and particularly that of good Protestants [i.e. Whigs], in a Part of the Kingdom half depopulated by the wild Humour among the Farmers thereof, leaving their Country. But I am not so skilful in Arithmetick, as to compute the Value'.<sup>44</sup> Swift left it unsaid as to whether or not the increase in the local Protestant population would result from children born to the Markethill women following their dishonour and disgrace at the hands of the licentious soldiers.

Despite stating otherwise, Swift also clearly saw little value in increasing the number of Whiggish Protestants, who for him were of no better use or intellect than cows and chickens. Likewise, the *Vindication*'s reference to the destruction of game reflected the long-standing argument of those opposed to standing armies about the dangers of soldiers living at free-quarter and taking whatever they wanted without paying for it.<sup>45</sup>

The question therefore arises as to whether Swift was genuinely trying to influence Acheson on the matter of a barracks in the Hamiltonsbawn poem and the *Vindication*. Acheson was, at the time, a relative newcomer to the Irish parliament, having been elected as an MP for the first time in the general election of 1727. For many years before, however, he had been in the political wilderness, like Swift himself. Indeed for Swift it may have seemed a shared political exile, exemplified in the 1730 poem 'The Revolution at Market-Hill', in which, according to Fabricant,

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<sup>44</sup> *A Vindication of His Excellency the Lord Carteret, From the Charge of favouring none but Tories, High-Church-men, and Jacobites* (1730), in *Jonathan Swift: Irish Tracts 1728-1733*, ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1971), pp. 166-7; James S. Malek, 'Swift's "Vindication of Lord Carteret": Authorial Intention and Historical Context', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 29, no. 1 (1975), 16, 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Vindication*, in Davis, *Irish Tracts*, p. 167; McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 70-7.

Swift presented Markethill as a place where ‘unpopular and persecuted companions ... can shut out the dissensions of a corrupt public world and form a noble community of their own’.<sup>46</sup> And Acheson’s political exile, like Swift’s, stemmed from his Toryism, which had at times been equated with Jacobitism. In 1716 Acheson’s father-in-law, Philip Savage, had tried to transfer by purchase his office of chancellor of the exchequer to Acheson, but had been foiled by the Irish lords justices on the grounds that Acheson was ‘esteemed a professed Jacobite’,<sup>47</sup> an assertion that must be treated with caution and understood in the context of Whig attitudes towards strong Tories in the lead up to, and immediate years after, the Hanoverian succession.<sup>48</sup>

However, this one-time exile had only attended one session of parliament in 1727-8 before the government began considering bestowing obvious patronage upon him by locating a barracks on his land. That session had ended in May 1728, the month before Swift arrived for his first visit to Markethill. Seeing as the poem was composed in September 1728, matters had clearly moved quickly. In this respect, it is instructive to know that in early 1715, when the government was planning eight new barracks, William Conolly, who was then emerging as one of Ireland’s leading political undertakers, advised the lord lieutenant that he should wait until after parliament had sat that year before deciding which of the many proposals before him for siting barracks would be successful. The logic was that many MPs who had submitted such proposals would do the government’s bidding in parliament in the hope of being

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<sup>46</sup> Fabricant, *Landscapes*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>47</sup> E. M. Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament 1692-1800: Commons, Constituencies and Statutes* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), iii, 52-3.

<sup>48</sup> See for example David Hayton, *Ruling Ireland, 1685-1742: Politics, Politicians and Parties* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 145-6.

successful in their applications for a barracks.<sup>49</sup> Was it the case that in 1728 Swift feared that Acheson was just another such MP, willing to do the government's bidding in return for a barrack on his land? And was the poem therefore just a first, slightly obscure forerunner of the evident parting of the ways for Swift and Acheson that was revisited in more explicit terms in 'The Revolution at Markethill' when divisions began to appear in the 'noble community' of exiles, with Acheson becoming a personification of the establishment and Swift and Henry Leslie the revolutionaries.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, was Swift's later great disappointment with Acheson, as expressed in the 1730 poem 'The Dean's Reasons for not building at Drapier's Hill',<sup>51</sup> because Acheson had agreed to become part of the Hanoverian establishment: to sell his vote (as warned of in the Hamiltonsbawn poem); to become a courtier; to accept and facilitate the existence in Ireland of a permanent standing army; and to no longer be a political exile like Swift himself.

The timing of the publication of the *Vindication* to coincide with the proroguing on 15 April 1730 of the second parliamentary session in Acheson's fledgling career as an MP also seems apposite. Seemingly in keeping with William Conolly's 1715 policy for awarding barracks to MPs only after parliament finished sitting, a lease for 31 years was agreed one day later, on 16 April 1730, between Acheson and the Trustees for the Barracks of Ireland for Hamiltonsbawn at a rent of £60.<sup>52</sup> There is no proof that Acheson's good behaviour in parliament had been bought

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<sup>49</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, p. 89.

<sup>50</sup> Fabricant, *Landscape*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>51</sup> See *Ibid*, pp. 167-70.

<sup>52</sup> A lease for 31 years from Sir Arthur Acheson, 16 April 1730 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), TSD/1/11). The lease was renewed in April 1762 for a further 31 years at the

with the 31-year lease, but Marmaduke Coghill's comment the previous October in the early weeks of the session that Carteret 'has found means to stop [the] mouths' of some Tory MPs who might otherwise have made trouble for the government confirmed that such a policy of buying off MPs did at any rate exist.<sup>53</sup> Had the *Vindication* therefore in part been a last attempt by Swift to convince Acheson to turn away from the government ranks – or indeed, to try to protect his erstwhile friend from accusations of becoming a courtier and of having sold his vote? Certainly, it immediately pre-dated Swift's third and final visit to Markethill in the summer of 1730 during which he composed 'The Dean's Reasons'.<sup>54</sup> The disenchantment expressed therein, as he wondered how he could have believed that he could 'seek, in deserts, Fields Elysian?' suggests he may have finally given up on Acheson, because in the end there was no meeting of minds between the two men: 'But, here I differ from the Knight / In every point, like black and white'.<sup>55</sup> And certainly the evidence that remains of Acheson's political career thereafter indicates that he fully embraced being part of the Hanoverian establishment.<sup>56</sup>

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same rent. See Lease for 31 years from Sir Archibald Acheson, 28 April 1762 (PRONI, TSD/1/16). My thanks to Dr Patrick Walsh for these two references.

<sup>53</sup> Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southwell, sr, 23 Oct. 1729, in *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill, 1722-1738*, ed. by David Hayton (Dublin, 2005), p. 75. See also L. M. Cullen, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal* (1729): historical context and political purpose', in *Ourselves Alone? Religion, society and politics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland. Essays presented to S. J. Connolly*, ed. by D. W. Hayton and A. R. Holmes (Dublin, 2016), p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, iii, 666-7.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Fabricant, *Landscape*, p. 169.

<sup>56</sup> HMC, *Various Collections MSS*, vi, 64-5, 66, 67-8.

Acheson was not however the first friend that Swift gave up on in such circumstances. Another County Armagh landowner, Robert Cope of Loughgall, had been a Tory MP in Anne's reign and was one of three ex-MPs taken into the custody of the serjeant at arms by order of the House of Commons in December 1715. The three men were arrested because they had signed county addresses in 1714 against the Commons' address of 1713, which had called for the removal from office of the Tory lord chancellor, Sir Constantine Phipps. In 1715 nine ex-MPs and seventeen sitting MPs had been ordered to attend the Commons for the same reason, including Acheson's father-in-law, Philip Savage, who along with the other ex-MPs avoided arrest by making a satisfactory submission and apology to the Commons.<sup>57</sup> Cope's excuse was however voted unsatisfactory, and he remained in political exile in County Armagh when Swift visited Loughgall in 1717 and 1722. Yet despite a further invitation in 1723, Swift never returned to Loughgall thereafter because Cope had finally made his peace with the Hanoverian establishment, eventually returning to parliament as MP for County Armagh following the general election of 1727.<sup>58</sup>

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The Hamiltonsbawn poem and the *Vindication* were not however the only examples of Swift's animus towards the building of army barracks. He had already expressed such

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<sup>57</sup> *The Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland* (third edition, 21 vols, Dublin, 1796-1800) [hereafter *CJI*], iii, 32-3, 49-50, 70.

<sup>58</sup> J. G. Simms, 'Dean Swift and County Armagh', *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, 6, no. 1 (1971), 131-3; Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, iii, 505-6. Cope was a fairly active MP from 1727 onwards. He also acted as a teller with Acheson on one occasion. He was a government creditor as well, subscribing £500 of army debentures in the 1729 loan of £150,000 and £700 in the 1731 loan of £100,000. See *CJI*, iii, 637-8; iii, pt. ii, app., pp. cccxcvi-cccxcvii; iv, app., pp. xvii-xix.

views on paper – if not in print – prior to 1728. His *Considerations about Maintaining the Poor*, probably written sometime between 1726 and 1728 but only published posthumously, set out some of the many ‘public absurdities, by which this kingdom hath suffered within the compass of my own memory, such as could not be believed of any nation, among whom folly was not established as a law’. First among them was the building of barracks, ‘whereof I have seen above one half, and have heard enough of the rest, to affirm that the public hath been cheated of at least two thirds of the money raised for that use by the plain fraud of the undertakers’.<sup>59</sup> Again, in May 1728, the barracks came under attack in the first issue of the *Intelligencer*. In itemising those places and people in Dublin that the journal’s sources would visit each week to gather information on ‘all Important Events and Singularities’ occurring in the city, only the Royal Barracks and the parliament house were excepted, ‘because we have yet found no *enfants perdus* bold enough to venture their Persons at either’.<sup>60</sup> In the *Intelligencer*’s explicitly detailed quest to uncover vice and folly in Dublin, the barracks and parliament were deemed too dangerous for well-meaning folk to enter into, or possibly indeed were already places that were beyond redemption.

It is therefore evident that Swift by the late 1720s viewed the barracks as a prime target when expressing his hostility towards the Hanoverian establishment. The

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<sup>59</sup> *Considerations about Maintaining the Poor*, in *Jonathan Swift: Directions to Servants and Miscellaneous Pieces 1733-1742*, ed. by Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 174-5. My thanks to Professor David Hayton for bringing this and several ensuing crucial Swift references to barracks and the national debt to my attention, as well as the probable date of composition for the *Considerations* (see Jonathan Swift, *Irish Political Writings after 1725: A Modest Proposal and other Works*, ed. by D. W. Hayton and Adam Rounce (Cambridge, forthcoming 2017)).

<sup>60</sup> *Jonathan Swift and Thomas Sheridan: The Intelligencer*, ed. by James Woolley (Oxford, 1992), pp. 47-8.

fact that people wanted barracks sited on their land for both personal and community economic gain clearly rankled with him. It was also the case that the regular expression of discontent in the Irish parliament with continuing over-expenditure from the annual barrack fund made it easy to throw about accusations of fraud and deceit, of which there may well have been some real examples – more often than not, however, it was incompetence that resulted in such financial wastage.<sup>61</sup>

These combined concerns – with barracks, public taxes and expenditure – coalesced once again in the poem, ‘Verses on the Death of Dr Swift’. Although not published till much later, the poem appears to have been composed in November 1731. Towards the end of the ‘Verses’, Swift turned his attention to the ‘rural squires, that kingdom’s bane’ upon whom ‘He vented oft his wrath in vain:’

Biennial squires, to market brought,  
 Who sell their souls and votes for naught;  
 The nation stripp’d, go joyful back  
 To rob the Church, their tenants rack,  
 Go snacks with thieves and rapparees  
 And keep the peace, to pick up fees:  
 In every job to have a share,  
 A jail or barrack to repair;  
 And turn the ways for public roads  
 Commodious to their own abodes.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> On these issues in general from the 1710s to the 1760s see McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 92-106.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Verses on the Death of Dr Swift, D.S.P.D., Occasioned by reading a Maxim in Rochefoucault’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, pp. 528-9.



Was Acheson in mind here once again as the archetypal rural squire who, in his particular case, had still allowed himself to be ‘to market brought’ in order to sell his soul and vote in the biennial meetings of the Irish parliament despite Swift’s wrath having been previously vented in the *Hamiltonsbawn* poem and the *Vindication*? In the footnotes to the ‘Verses’, Swift claimed that in selling their souls and votes such MPs had voted taxes five times more than Ireland could afford, thereby stripping the country of its wealth. Thereafter, those same MPs returned to their estates ‘to reimburse themselves by all country jobs and oppressions’, including taking up contracts for repairing local jails and barracks, the latter of which, Swift claimed in the footnotes, had ‘cost a prodigious sum to that unhappy kingdom’.<sup>63</sup>

That Sir Arthur might now be, in Swift’s view, just another one of these money-grabbing, self-serving rural squires who had no care for the true interests of Ireland seems evident. Writing to the Rev. John Towers in 1735 with reference to Sir Arthur and his eldest son, Archibald, Swift dismissively included them among the ‘Ten thousand sackfuls of such knights and such sons’ who were, in his mind, ‘neither worth rearing nor preserving. I count upon it that the boy is good for nothing’.<sup>64</sup>

The time of composition of the ‘Verses’ and the claim in the footnotes that the Irish parliament had voted taxes ‘five times more than they can afford’ also suggests that Swift was raising the issue of Ireland’s national debt and representing it as being unaffordable. In November 1731, the month in which the ‘Verses’ were composed, the

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Verses’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, pp. 528-9, 683; Stephen Karian, ‘Reading the Material Text of Swift’s “Verses on the Death”’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 41, no. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (2001), 525, 530. For barrack repairs see McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 91-106.

<sup>64</sup> Swift to Rev. John Towers, [c. Aug. 1735], in *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Woolley, iv, 156.

Irish parliament agreed an additional loan to government of £100,000, which constituted the final stage in a six-fold increase in that debt since late 1729: in other words, between November 1729 and November 1731 the Irish parliament had agreed to increase the principal of the national debt from £50,000 to £300,000, which in Swift's terminology was five times more than it had originally been.<sup>65</sup>

It may be a coincidence that the national debt had been increased by five times its original amount between 1729 and 1731, but if so, then there is a discordance within Swift's assertion that taxes were voted five times more than the country could afford. One of the ostensible reasons for the increase in the national debt in 1729 was in order to avoid overtaxing the populace at a time of economic hardship. It was also the case that the additional duties voted in the biennial supply acts were always imposed in a manner that ensured that the government remained a bit short on cash and therefore dependent upon the regular reconvening of parliament. For parliament to vote taxes five times more than the country could afford would have made no sense in such a scenario, and would have constituted voting taxes far in excess of those normally and traditionally voted every two years.<sup>66</sup> Either Swift was making it up or implicitly referring to the increase in the national debt.

That the latter may be the case is supported by two factors. First, Swift engaged explicitly with the Irish national debt in other writings in 1729 and 1732. Those writings suggest that the debt constituted a significant financial concern for him at the

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<sup>65</sup> C. I. McGrath, "'The Public Wealth is the Sinew, the Life, of every Public Measure': The Creation and Maintenance of a National Debt in Ireland, 1716-45", in *The Empire of Credit: The Financial Revolution in the British Atlantic World, 1700-1800*, ed. by Daniel Carey and Christopher Finlay (Dublin,, 2011), p. 192.

<sup>66</sup> See McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 172-9; idem, 'Public wealth', pp. 178-84, 192-3.

time and that he viewed it as a similar vice and folly to that of building barracks. Second, he had a significant prior track record in this respect. As already alluded to, in the last years of Queen Anne's reign and again in 1726 in *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift had taken issue with Britain's national debt and the maintenance of a standing army in peace time.<sup>67</sup>

At the end of 1729 in *A Proposal that all the Ladies and Women of Ireland should appear constantly in Irish Manufactures*, Swift noted that 'our national debt (and God knows how we wretches came by that fashionable thing a national debt) is about 250,000 l.' This he equated to about a third of all the rents in Ireland 'after our absentees and other foreign drains are paid', and £50,000 more than the cash current in the kingdom. He further noted that 'there are several schemes for raising a fund to pay the interest of this formidable sum, (not the principal, for this is allowed impossible)'.<sup>68</sup>

The writing of the pamphlet coincided with the Irish parliament's decision to allow the government to take the first step in the longer process of raising the national debt six-fold. That first step in late 1729 involved increasing the principal from £50,000 to £200,000. Herbert Davis has suggested Swift started the piece at the end of November 1729 following publication in the *Old Dublin Intelligence* of a report that heads of a loan bill had recently been agreed in the Commons allowing for this new loan and imposing new taxes for debt maintenance.<sup>69</sup> The pamphlet may have been in

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<sup>67</sup> See Downie, 'Contemporary Debate', pp. 115-28; Gertken, 'Swift, Utrecht and Ireland', pp 43-4, 52-3, 59-60.

<sup>68</sup> *A Proposal that all the Ladies and Women of Ireland should appear constantly in Irish Manufactures*, in *Directions to Servants*, ed. by Davis, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup> *Irish Tracts*, ed. by Davis, pp. xxi-xxii.

gestation however since Swift's second trip to Markethill in the summer of 1729. Writing to Alexander Pope from there on 11 August, Swift had asked him to 'Imagine a nation the two-thirds of whose revenues are spent out of it, and who are not permitted to trade the other third, and where the pride of the women will not suffer them to wear their own manufactures even when they excel what come from abroad'.<sup>70</sup> In the end, Swift ultimately decided against publication when the new loan bill, having been quickly processed through London in accordance with Poyning's Law, was speedily passed by the Irish parliament and received the Royal Assent on 22 December.<sup>71</sup>

Swift's primary concern in *A Proposal that all the Ladies ... appear constantly in Irish Manufactures* was ostensibly with opposing an increased duty on French wine. However, the pamphlet also engaged with more serious 'patriot' or economic concerns such as the loss of money from Ireland to absentees and the desire for free trade, both of which were issues Swift had already raised in his August correspondence with Pope.<sup>72</sup> In keeping with such sentiments, though in a broader reflection on Swift's writings in general in 1728-9, L. M. Cullen has recently argued that Swift was responding to the growing economic crisis in Ireland and that he was prompted to do so out of 'real and immediate concern'. In so doing, 'Swift was one of several writers

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<sup>70</sup> Swift to Pope, 11 Aug. 1729, in *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Woolley, iii, 245.

<sup>71</sup> *Irish Tracts*, ed. by Davis, pp. xxi-xxii. See also Sean Moore, *Swift, the Book and the Irish Financial Revolution: Satire and Sovereignty in Colonial Ireland* (Baltimore, 2010), p. 187.

<sup>72</sup> Swift to Pope, 11 Aug. 1729, in Woolley, *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, iii, 245; *Irish Tracts*, ed. by Davis, p. xxi; Ehnrepreis, *Swift*, iii, 645-6; Oliver W. Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (Urbana, 1962), pp. 156-7.

who created an economic literature in the late 1720s which was intended to influence public opinion, and especially opinion within the Irish parliament'.<sup>73</sup>

The primary purpose of Cullen's argument is to present Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, published in late October-early November 1729 following the convening of parliament, as the 'climax of a literary barrage' of 'patriot' economic writings by several writers targeted at that institution.<sup>74</sup> There is of course no mention of the national debt in *A Modest Proposal*, even though Sean Moore has suggested the pamphlet is an allegory for Ireland being consumed by that self-same debt.<sup>75</sup> Moore has also argued more generally that Swift was very engaged with the issue of the national debt in 1729, and that this engagement originated in part from his time spent in Acheson's company during that second visit to Markethill in the summer of 1729, a suggestion that arises from Davis's belief that *A Modest Proposal* was begun during that trip.<sup>76</sup> In that light, it is of note that at least one of the 'other expedients' that Swift ironically asked no one to talk to him about towards the end of *A Modest Proposal* seemed to echo his apparent concern with regard to Acheson at that time. The 'expedient' 'Of being a little cautious not to sell our Country and Consciences for nothing' was reminiscent of the concerns expressed earlier in the *Hamiltonsbawn*

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<sup>73</sup> Cullen, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*', p. 46.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 57. Among the other writers was Thomas Prior, whose key pamphlet in the canon of eighteenth-century Irish patriot literature, *A List of the Absentees of Ireland, and the yearly Value of their Estates and Incomes spent abroad. With Observations on the Present State and Condition of that kingdom* (Dublin, 1729), was published in early October 1729.

<sup>75</sup> Moore, *Swift*, p. 173. An implied caution in this regard seems to be suggested in Cullen, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*', pp. 44-5.

<sup>76</sup> Moore, *Swift*, pp. 184-5; Davis, *Irish Tracts*, p. xix.

poem regarding the selling of votes to the government.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, the ‘expedient’ also seemed a forerunner of the more forthright accusation in the 1731 ‘Verses’ of the selling of ‘souls and votes for naught’ which resulted in the country being ‘stripp’d’ of its wealth.<sup>78</sup>

Swift re-visited the topic of the Irish national debt in February 1732 following parliament’s sanctioning of the final step in the six-fold increase of the principal debt to £300,000 in November 1731. Although ultimately targeted at the Church of Ireland hierarchy, the opening lines of *A Proposal for an Act of Parliament to pay off the Debt of the Nation* communicated Swift’s continuing representation of the debt as unsustainable: ‘The Debts contracted some Years past, for the Service and Safety of the Nation, are grown so great, that under our present distressed Condition, by the Want of Trade, the great Remittances to pay *Absentees*, Regiments serving abroad, and many other Drains on Money, well enough known and felt; the Kingdom seems altogether unable to discharge them by the common Methods of Payment’.<sup>79</sup> The key ‘patriot’ economic concerns are herein expressed once again by Swift, with the addition of the payment from Irish treasury funds of salaries for army regiments serving overseas. This was an ongoing bone of contention between the government and Irish parliament in the 1710s and 1720s, and matters had not been helped in early

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<sup>77</sup> *A Modest Proposal for preventing the Children of Poor People From being a Burthen to their Parents, or the Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Publick* (1729), in *Irish Tracts*, ed. by Davis, p. 116; Cullen, ‘Swift’s *Modest Proposal*’, p. 58.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Verses’, in Ross and Woolley, *Swift*, pp. 528-9.

<sup>79</sup> *A Proposal for an Act of Parliament, To pay off the Debt of the Nation, Without taxing the Subject ...* (1732), in *Irish Tracts*, ed. by Davis, p. 207; *Swift’s Irish Writings: Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. by Carole Fabricant and Robert Mahony (New York, 2010), p. 143; Moore, *Swift*, p. 195.

1730 when £40,000 in ready cash raised from the 1729 loan was remitted to pay the Irish establishment regiments stationed in Gibraltar. When parliament reconvened in late 1731 the government went to great lengths to reassure MPs that all money raised from Irish taxes would be spent in Ireland, but yet again part of the 1731 loan was sent abroad to pay Irish establishment regiments.<sup>80</sup>

Whether parodying others who expressed concerns about the national debt and the payment of regiments overseas at this time or expressing a genuine concern of his own, Swift's opening lines of *A Proposal for an Act of Parliament* served to refocus attention on questions prevalent at the time regarding perceived excessive military expenditure and its impact upon Ireland in terms of over-extending Irish finances and further increasing the burden of the national debt. But little was Swift to know that in fact the principal of the debt would actually start to be paid down from 1733 onwards, owing to a sinking fund legislated for in 1729 and 1731 by Acheson and those other MPs he had been so hard on in the *Hamiltonsbawn* and 'Verses' poems. That sinking fund would result in the reduction of the principal debt to only £5,000 by 1759, before the increasing financial pressures of the Seven Years' War upon the Irish government ensured that the logic of a national debt reasserted itself and the principal began to grow once more.<sup>81</sup>

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In 1733, in his *Advice to the Freemen and Freeholders of the city of Dublin in their choice of Representative in the ensuing Election*, Swift supported Humphrey French, the 'patriot' candidate, over his initial opponent John Macarrell. Swift's opposition to Macarrell stemmed from the fact that he was a placeman, being registrar of the

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<sup>80</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 188-95.

barracks, which Swift described as ‘a considerable Office under the Crown’.<sup>82</sup> Macarrell’s involvement with the barracks may have been inconsequential to Swift’s more general animosity towards office holders and other recipients of government patronage, especially those who sat in parliament. For Swift, they were all creatures in thrall to the Hanoverian establishment. Yet it still resonated with Swift’s portrayal in the *Hamiltonsbawn* poem of anyone who agreed to have a barracks sited on their land as thereafter being bound to vote with the government in parliament, and likewise in the ‘Verses’ of country squires selling the country’s posterity in parliament for their own personal gain.

It is not easy to know exactly why Swift chose to engage with these connected matters of barracks, MPs, taxes, and a national debt. But it seems clear that, in general, his anger with the Hanoverian establishment in both Britain and Ireland, and with its failure to look after what he believed were the true interests of Ireland, was reflected in these various satirical attacks upon parliament and its members, government patronage, the uses made of public revenues, and the means of raising the necessary revenue for maintaining a permanent standing army in Ireland, including the building of barracks.

Swift may also have inadvertently explained why it was actually necessary to build a barracks at *Hamiltonsbawn*, despite his best endeavours to convince Acheson otherwise. In the 1730 poem ‘*The Dean’s Reasons*’, Swift ultimately claimed he did not build his house in County Armagh because he did not want ‘To live in fear,

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<sup>82</sup> *Advice to the Freemen and Freeholders of the city of Dublin in their choice of Representative in the ensuing Election* (1733), in *Directions to Servants*, ed. by Davis, p. 77; *Swift’s Irish Writings*, ed. by Fabricant and Mahony, pp. 177-8.



suspicion, variance, / With Thieves, Fanatics, and Barbarians'.<sup>83</sup> Fearing the many outlaws active in the mountainous areas of Armagh, suspicious of the Presbyterian community and being at variance with Irish Catholics, Swift implicitly justified building an army barracks for internal security purposes. In 1728, County Armagh was already home to four barracks, two of which – Fourmilehouse and Blackbank – were redoubts, which were barracks built in inaccessible, sparsely populated and mountainous regions prone to outlaw activity. By the beginning of the 1730s a third redoubt had been established at Johnston's Fews on the site of a pre-existing house owned by John Johnston, a notorious outlaw- or tory-hunter. It may have been the case that Hamiltonsbawn was perceived as a good location to station horse troops as support to the infantry units in places like Fourmilehouse, Blackbank and Johnston's Fews.<sup>84</sup>

So it may well be that MPs such as Acheson were not as self-serving in having a barrack sited upon their land as Swift implied. They may well have been, in an eighteenth-century Irish context, a lot more civic-minded than he would care to have us believe. Ultimately, the proposal to build a barracks at Hamiltonsbawn, and the poem that accompanied it, were part of much bigger issues which taxed many minds during the 1720s and early 1730s. Swift's significant engagement with the question of barracks therefore must be set within the wider context of the Irish parliament's ongoing engagement during the 1710s, 1720s and 1730s with constant over-runs in the annual barrack fund and with that assembly's associated decision to increase the

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<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Fabricant, *Landscape*, p. 168.

<sup>84</sup> *Army Barracks*: Fourmilehouse <https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/fourmile-house/>; Blackbank <https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/blackbank/>; Johnston's Fews <https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/johnstons-fews/>; Hamiltonsbawn <https://barracks18c.ucd.ie/hamiltonsbawn/>.

national debt six-fold between November 1729 and November 1731.<sup>85</sup> As stated at the outset, the *Hamiltonsbawn* poem therefore can be seen as just one of the first salvos in a persistent and serious engagement on Swift's part over several years with the connected issues of large-scale government expenditure on a permanent standing army and the associated willingness of Irish MPs to facilitate increasing parliamentary taxation and a growing national debt. For Swift, these connected issues epitomised and crystalized what was fundamentally wrong, in his eyes, with the Hanoverian establishment in both Britain and Ireland, and the failure of politicians in both countries to look after what he believed were the true interests of Ireland. We should not be surprised to find it so, for in the final analysis, looking back to his time in London as a writer for the Tory ministry in 1710-14 and to *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726, Swift most evidently had prior form.

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<sup>85</sup> McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 91-2.