

About Hamilton's second given name, Rowan

In the first volume of his biography about Hamilton, <https://archive.org/details/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft>, Graves describes the searches after Hamilton's parentage. Working with for instance Sir Bernard Burke, writer of the famous family tree books such as that of the Landed Gentry, <https://archive.org/details/genealogicalhera00burkuoft>, they found that Hamilton did not come from the North of Ireland as he had claimed in 1841, nor from Scotland as Peter Guthrie Tait had claimed in 1866.¹

Nowadays it is well-known that Hamilton's grandfather William Hamilton (.. -1783) was from Dublin where he was an apothecary, and that his grandmother Grace Mac Ferrand (.. - ..) came from Galloway, Scotland. She was adopted by Gawen Hamilton and Jane Hamilton Rowan of Killileagh Castle because of the poorness of her widowed mother; she thus became a sister of Archibald Hamilton Rowan (1750/1751-1834?), one of the founding members of the United Irishmen who added to his birth name, Archibald Hamilton, his mother's maiden name Rowan. Archibald Hamilton Rowan, hereafter called Archibald Rowan, apparently played a role in the naming of three boys of the Dublin Hamilton family.²

The eldest son of Hamilton's grandparents William and Grace was called Arthur Rowan Hamilton, and his baptism record is online: he was baptised on the 5th of July 1775, <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/display-pdf.jsp?pdfName=d-277-1-3-069>³ It was surprising to see his full name; it

¹This hitherto by me overlooked fact proves by the way that Graves indeed read Tait's 1866 article as we suggested in our article 'A most gossiped about genius: Sir William Rowan Hamilton', <https://doi.org/10.1080/17498430.2017.1400821>.

²Perhaps not generally known is Graves' remark that Gawen Hamilton "had visited his son with life-long displeasure" <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/12/mode/2up>. Graves did not explain this sentence.

³William and Grace Hamilton had five sons and a daughter, one of them being Archibald, Hamilton's father. James and Sydney also played important roles in Hamilton's life. According to Graves the other three sons, Arthur, Robert and William, died early, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/n25/mode/2up>. Two of them died in infancy, one of them died in a French prison. <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/8/mode/2up>. At this moment there is no online church record of Robert. William's baptism record shows that he was a twin brother of uncle James; they were baptized on the 24th of May 1776, <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/display-pdf.jsp?pdfName=d-277-1-3-074>. Graves remarks, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/8/mode/2up>, that in the TCD Entrance book, http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MUN-V-23-4_001, Jacobus (James) Hamilton is registered as having entered TCD on 2 May 1791 when 15 years old, and that Arthurus Hamilton entered on 7 Nov 1791, also registered as having been 15 years old, see p. 105 and 113, respectively, of the Entrance book. These ages are not entirely correct; James, who was born late in May 1776 still was 14, and Arthur, born in May 1775, was 16. Graves also mentions that Archibald Hamilton spoke of himself as the fourth son, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/8/mode/2up>, which means that Robert must have been younger than Archibald. Sydney was born in 1779, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/n25/mode/2up>, a year

could mean that either the name Rowan was in the Hamilton family already or, which seems more logical, they named Arthur after Archibald Rowan, who was in fact his uncle.

That is certainly a possibility; according to Graves, Hamilton's father Archibald claimed that his given name came from Archibald Rowan, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/4/mode/2up>, making it plausible that also Arthur had been named after him. It does seem to show in any case that William and Grace Hamilton regarded Archibald Rowan as close family, although only from Grace's side; on the same page Graves mentions to have found a 'narrative' written by Hamilton's father, Archibald Hamilton, showing that they, as Hamiltons, were not related.⁴

Graves also mentions that Archibald Rowan was Hamilton's godfather, which explains Hamilton's Rowan name, and that he wrote a letter to his godson just after Hamilton was knighted, and that is a problem. Hamilton was knighted in 1835, and Archibald Rowan seems to have died in 1834, <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/display-pdf.jsp?pdfName=d-277-5-4-050>. But Graves is so clear about the contents of the letter, in which Archibald Rowan 'claimed Hamilton as his godson, exhorted him to bow his intellect to religion, and to keep the Sabbath', <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/14/mode/2up>, that it would be interesting to further investigate this problem. Hankins mentions in his 1980 biography that Archibald Rowan's letter is kept in the Trinity College Library.

The Hamilton family having been so closely connected to Archibald Rowan for such a long time, it can easily be imagined that the dispute over money between the two Archibalds must have been very hard for both of them. The disagreement led to Archibald Hamilton's bankruptcy and was, after a trial, settled by a payment of 1500 pounds, in those days a very large amount of money, which Archibald Rowan had to pay to Archibald Hamilton but which ended their friendship, <https://archive.org/stream/lifeofsirwilliam01gravuoft#page/12/mode/2up>.⁵

after Archibald, and unless three children were born between May 1778 and 1780, which is unlikely, Robert must have been the youngest child. The children thus were, from oldest to youngest, Arthur, James & William, Archibald, Sydney, Robert.

⁴There is some doubt about when Hamilton's father Archibald was born. According to the church records he was baptized in 1779, <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/display-pdf.jsp?pdfName=d-277-1-3-093>, but Graves sounds very sure that he was born in 1778, and mentions that that could be seen in the family Bible and another family document. Graves may be right; in the church record Archibald's name is clearly inserted, the handwriting differs from the other entries, and the name of the father is not written down. It is therefore possible that the person who inserted Archibald's name made an error.

⁵Graves' passage about Archibald Rowan's letter to Hamilton, in which Archibald Rowan 'claimed' to be his godfather, can be read starting with the last sentence on page 13. That sentence contains Graves' opinion about Archibald Rowan; he wrote: "the son of the man whom he helped to ruin," <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/display-pdf.jsp?pdfName=d-277-1-3-093>, in which 'the son' was William Rowan Hamilton, 'the man' Archibald Hamilton, and 'he' Archibald Rowan. This sentence, together with the aforementioned sentence about Rowan's father's life-long displeasure about him, and Rowan's 'claim' to godfatherhood, paints a very negative picture about Rowan as a person. This is one of the examples of how much disdain Graves could show in only a few subordinate clauses without further explaining himself, something which later would ruin Lady Hamilton's reputation and became basic to Hamilton's alcoholic picture. Only when reading very carefully his clearly felt negative opinions can be placed in context.