

The Hamiltons of Jervis Street, and the name Rowan

by Anne van Weerden

In the [first volume](#) of his biography about Hamilton, 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](#), they found that the Hamiltons did not come from the North of Ireland as Hamilton 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 (.. - 23 May 1783) was from Dublin where he was an apothecary at [30 Jervis street](#), and that his grandmother [Grace McFerrand](#) (8 May 1743- ca 1808) came from Kirkmaiden, Scotland. In 1763, when she was twenty years old, her father died, and thereupon she was 'adopted' by Gawen Hamilton and Jane Rowan of Killileagh Castle because of the poorness of her widowed mother; she thus became an adoptive sister of Archibald Hamilton (1750/1751-1834), one of the founding members of the United Irishmen who added his mother's maiden name Rowan to his last name; Archibald Hamilton Rowan. This name played a role in the naming of three boys of the Dublin Hamilton family.

William Hamilton was no direct family of the Hamiltons of Killileagh Castle but they were acquainted, and Grace McFerrand was introduced to William Hamilton by Mrs. Jane Hamilton. It was an apparently happy introduction, and at their wedding Mrs. Hamilton gave her adoptive daughter a large dowry. William and Grace had five sons and a daughter, one of them being Archibald, Hamilton's father. His brother James, called by Hamilton 'uncle James' and sister Jane Sydney, called 'aunt Sydney', also played important roles in Hamilton's life. According to Graves the other three sons, Arthur, Robert and William, [died early](#); two of them died in infancy, one of them [died in a French prison](#). There is no online church record of Robert, but something can be inferred about who died in prison, and who was the youngest child.

¹This hitherto by me overlooked fact proves that Graves indeed read Tait's 1866 article as we suggested in our [article](#) 'A most gossiped about genius: Sir William Rowan Hamilton'.

An overview of the Hamilton children from Jervis Street

All birth dates are baptism dates, and because only of Archibald a death date is known, the others are burial dates. Arguments for these dates are given hereafter.

Arthur Rowan (5 July 1775-ca 1794?), this death date is a very crude guess
James (24 May 1776 - 3 July 1847), ‘uncle James’ of Trim²
William (24 May 1776 - 28 Feb 1778), twin brother of uncle James
Archibald (15 March 1778 - 10 Dec 1819), father of WR Hamilton
Jane Sydney (bef. 28 Oct 1779 - 28 Oct 1814), ‘aunt Sydney’ of Trim
Robert (after 1779 - 8 May 1784)

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. It was surprising to see his full name; it could mean that either the name Rowan was in the Hamilton family already or, which seems more logical, they either named Arthur after Archibald Hamilton Rowan, who was in fact his adoptive uncle, or they gave him his adoptive grandmother’s maiden name as the second given name, as was common then.

William’s baptism record shows that he was a [twin brother](#) of uncle James; they were baptized on the 24th of May 1776.

Archibald, Hamilton’s father, was born in March 1778. There seems to have been some doubt about when he was born. According to the church records he was baptized in [1779](#), but Graves sounds very certain that he was born in 1778, adding “according to the authority of a transcript from the Family Bible, and of another family document.” Graves will be right; of all the four sons whose birth records were found, the entries were inserted later. Yet the handwriting of Archibald’s record differs from the inserted entries of his brothers, and the name of his father is not written down. It is therefore entirely possible that the person who inserted Archibald’s name made an error.

Jane Sydney was born in [1779](#). She was 35 when she was buried on 28 October [1814](#), and it is very well possible that she was named after her adoptive grandmother, Jane Rowan; Grace will have been very thankful that she had made this life possible for her.

²In Graves’ family tree the death date of uncle James is given as June, but he was buried on [3 July](#). About his birth day, Graves [remarks](#) that (on p. 105) of the [TCD Entrance books](#) Jacobus (James) Hamilton is registered as having entered TCD on 2 May 1791, 15 years old. His entry further mentions that he was the son of Gulielmus (William), Pharmacopolo difuncti (deceased pharmacist), see also p. 363 of the [Alumni Dublinenses](#). James’ age is not entirely correct; he was born late in May 1776, and thus still was 14. The Arthurus Hamilton who entered on 7 Nov 1791 was James’ cousin, son of Franciscus Hamilton, see p. 113 of the Entrance book. Hamilton called him ‘Cousin Arthur’, and next to Hamilton’s father, uncle James, and aunt Sydney, he was the fourth of the Hamiltons who played an important role in Hamilton’s life.

There are various arguments to conclude that Robert was the youngest child. The first is that having been born between James & William and Archibald, thus around April 1777, is possible but unlikely; James & William were born less than eleven months after Arthur, but that hardly will have happened three times in a row, and after twins.

A stronger argument to assume that Robert was the youngest brother is that there are two burial records of Hamilton children from Jervis street: one of 28 February 1778, “Wm Hamilton’s Child, Jervis Street, and one of 8 May 1784, “Mrs Hamilton’s child Jervis street.” The difference, “Wm” and “Mrs Hamilton” is in accord with the death of William Hamilton on 23 May 1783. Not giving the names of the children indicates that they were very young, and the three possibilities for these two deaths in 1778 and 1784 thus are Arthur, William and Robert.

That the 1778 burial was William can be concluded from a remark Graves makes about the twins, “It has been thought by some members of the family that James and Archibald were twins. The foregoing facts [Archibald’s birth in 1778] disprove this supposition, but lead to the conclusion that James had a twin brother, or that two born between him and Archibald were twins, and hence the incorrect supposition probably arose.”³

Because the second child died in 1784, and William then would have been almost eight, uncle James, and most likely also other family members, would have remembered him. It thus will have been William who died in 1778; he then would have been almost two. James would have been too young to remember, and Archibald and Sydney would not have been born yet and thus not have known him at all.

Likewise, if either Arthur or William would have died in 1784, they would have been almost nine and eight respectively, and would hardly have been described as “Mrs Hamilton’s child.” Of Robert it is not known when he was born, but if he was born later than Sydney in 1779, and less than nine months after the death of his father on 23 May 1783, he may have died as a baby, and at the most four years old. That would be in agreement with not having his name in the death record.

The close ties between the family of Grace McFerrand and the Hamiltons of Killileagh Castle had been very strong indeed; according to Graves, Hamilton’s father Archibald claimed that [his given name](#) came from Archibald Hamilton Rowan, making it plausible that also Arthur had been named after him, or after his mother, as also Jane Sydney may have been named after her.⁴ It does seem to show in any case that William and Grace Hamilton regarded Archibald Hamilton

³ It must be noted here that it can be seen in Graves’ family tree that he did not know when Arthur had been born, or when he died. He lists Arthur as the eldest of the three boys who “died early,” but he calls uncle James the [eldest son](#). Still, that may have had to do with the custom that early deceased brothers were not counted. Likewise, Archibald spoke of himself as the [fourth son](#), which would mean that either Robert was older than Archibald but indeed very early deceased brothers, in this case William, were not counted, or that Archibald knew about William having been the third brother, and Robert thus was younger.

⁴ Grace’s parents [were called](#) James McFerrand and Elizabeth McEwan.

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. The friendship lasted for a long time; still in 1805 Archibald Hamilton asked Hamilton Rowan to be godfather to his son, which explains Hamilton's second given name Rowan.⁵

The first troubles appear to stem from the time that Grace [refused](#) her adoptive mother to take upon her the charges of the university career of her son Archibald, "thereby losing the favour of Mrs. Hamilton." Her husband then had died already, and life was not easy for her; she had become a haberdasher, and will have earned much less than her husband had done. But Graves does not give any explanation for why Grace, having been taken into the family, having received a dowry, having named children after the family, and having allowed Archibald to be at the Castle very regularly, suddenly would have become so "independent", that she declined the offer. There does seem to be one coincidence though, connected to Graves' appearing to have been unaware of the role of Arthur Rowan Hamilton, the eldest son, which would be worth to be researched further.

If Robert indeed had been the youngest child, it must have been Arthur who "died in a French prison," and it may be wondered whether it had anything to do with the escape of Archibald Hamilton Rowan to France in 1794, when Arthur was nineteen years old. Also Hamilton Rowan had been in a French prison,⁶ and if Arthur Hamilton had in any way joined him, he may have been in prison with him. But then somehow Arthur died, while Hamilton Rowan stayed alive. Whether or not Hamilton Rowan was to blame, Grace as a mother and his adoptive sister may have felt he could have done more. This idea does not seem too far-fetched, because it is a remarkable coincidence that also in 1794 Archibald was on the verge of entering University, when his mother suddenly refused the meddlings and cares, which had been going on for years already, of the Hamiltons of Killileagh Castle, and apprenticed her son to an attorney.

Somehow, this could also shed further light on the schism in the family which Hamilton much later [alluded to](#); his father being a "[liberal](#), almost a rebel," sympathising with Rowan Hamilton, and uncle James being a staunch [defender](#) of the Ascendancy, a "Tory to the back-bone." Political differences which however did not withhold the brothers to have warm and strong family ties.

⁵ Graves mentions that Hamilton Rowan wrote a letter to his godson just after Hamilton was knighted, but that is a problem. Hamilton was knighted in 1835, and Archibald Hamilton Rowan [died in 1834](#). But Graves is so clear about the [contents of the letter](#), in which Archibald Hamilton Rowan 'claimed Hamilton as his godson, exhorted him to bow his intellect to religion, and to keep the Sabbath,' that it would be interesting to further investigate this problem.

⁶ "In 1794 Rowan landed on the French coast in the run-up to the naval slaughter that became known to history as the 'Glorious First of June'. Such was the tense disposition of the French forces at this time that he was immediately imprisoned as a suspected English spy. From his cell window he watched many men with their hands pinioned carted to the guillotine. At the height of the Terror he was fortunate to escape the guillotine himself. Within days of his release his boots were stained with the blood of revolutionaries guillotined by their erstwhile comrades. [The Irish Times, 7 September 2015](#)

From the uncertainties about the twin brother of uncle James it might be suggested, yet this really is speculation, that Grace did not often force her opinions on her sons, as in those times women often did not even have the opportunities for, or that she did not want to speak badly about the family who after all had saved her. But living in Trim with her son and daughter she may have become more open towards her daughter, and through her towards James, and they may have learned about her feelings towards her former adoptive family. That was different from Archibald; perhaps not knowing about her feelings, or not agreeing that Hamilton Rowan was to blame for anything, he worked very hard for Hamilton Rowan, until he went bankrupt in 1807.

The ensuing dispute over money between the two Archibalds may have been the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back; it is very well possible that his family then told him how they felt about the matter. Whatever happened, after a trial the dispute was settled through a payment of £1500, in those days a very large amount of money, by Archibald Hamilton Rowan to Archibald Hamilton, but which [ended their friendship](#).⁷

⁷Graves' passage about Archibald Hamilton Rowan's letter to Hamilton, in which Archibald Hamilton Rowan 'claimed' to be his godfather, can be read starting with the last sentence on [page 13](#). That sentence contains Graves' opinion about Archibald Hamilton Rowan; he wrote: "the son of the man whom he helped to ruin," in which 'the son' was William Rowan Hamilton, 'the man' Archibald Hamilton, and 'he' Archibald Hamilton Rowan. Perhaps not generally known is [Graves' remark](#) that according to Graves Gawen Hamilton "had visited his son with life-long displeasure," a sentence Graves did not explain. This sentence, together with what Graves called the 'claim' to godfathership, paints a very negative picture about Hamilton Rowan as a person. It 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 reputation. Only when reading very carefully his clearly felt negative opinions can be placed in context.