

Archbishop Ussher and Old Testament Chronology

By Benjamin Shaw

INTRODUCTION

One of the oddities of biblical research in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a fascination with biblical and world chronology. Scholars produced chronologies of the world based on data from biblical and classical resources. Perhaps the most influential of the sixteenth century works on chronology was that of Joseph Scaliger, the Dutch polymath.¹ Though the best-known, Scaliger's work was not the only production of the period. Treatises on chronology appeared in Latin and English (and probably French and German) throughout the late sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth century. A friend who had access to Early English Books Online acquired thirty-eight treatises on chronology that were published in English between 1580 and 1620. All of these, Scaliger's included, have largely been lost to history.

The one production on the topic that has remained to some extent in the public eye is that of Archbishop James Ussher. Ussher's work appeared in the 1650s, almost a century after Scaliger's work was published. It has remained known because at some point, the dates from Ussher's *Annals of the World* began to be printed in

the margins of King James Bibles. It is not certain when the practice began, but it is still possible to buy editions of the KJV with Ussher's dates in the margin. It is, perhaps, commonly assumed that Ussher just drew his data from the Bible. This fails to take into account the fact that biblical data cannot be directly connected with our modern Gregorian calendar except through providing connections and correlations with other chronological sources. In the recently published English version of Ussher's work, the list of authors cited by Ussher takes up ten full columns of small print.² The work was the result of some twenty years of Ussher's labors.

USSHER'S ASSUMPTIONS

Any such work must make several assumptions in dealing with the data at hand. For Ussher, some of these assumptions are: He assumed that the first day of creation was a Sunday, making that first Saturday the first Sabbath day. He assumed that creation took place in the fall of the year, which was the beginning of the year in the ancient Israelite non-liturgical calendar.³ He assumed that creation began at the fall equinox. Since Ussher was using the Julian calendar, that put the beginning of creation in October. Ussher also appears to have preferred the Hebrew Masoretic text of the Old Testament to that of the Greek Septuagint. There are many differences between the two texts related to dates. These differences appear most obviously in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, but there are also differences in dates and ages of kings in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

USSHER'S CONCLUSIONS

Ussher's correlations between the biblical timeline and classical works on history provided him the material to connect the biblical data to the Julian calendar. His most

THE AUTHOR: Benjamin Shaw is Professor of Old Testament at Reformation Bible College, Sanford Florida. He is a frequent contributor to *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal.

1. For a thorough study of Scaliger and his work, see Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship; Volume II: Historical Chronology*, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

2. James Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, revised and updated by Larry and Marion Pierce (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003).

3. God said to Moses, "This month shall be for you the beginning of months" (Ex 12:1-2). It is assumed that this pronouncement then changed the calendar for Israel, putting the beginning of the year in the spring, at least for the ritual calendar. Even today, modern Judaism celebrates the new year in the fall.

notorious conclusion (though it would be correct, given the data with which he worked and the assumptions he made about that data) was that “The beginning of time, according to our chronology, happened at the start of the evening preceding the 23rd day of October, 4004 BC.”⁴ That, in Ussher’s reckoning, was the beginning of the first age of the world. Thus, on Friday, October 28, Adam and Eve were created. Ussher does not speculate on how much time passed before the fall. The next date that he provided was 3874 BC, when Seth was born.

In what follows, I am only selecting from Ussher’s dating of biblical events. He also tied in events from around the known world, based on the writings he had consulted and correlated with chronological data. The reader should also note that Ussher specifies occurrences of Sabbath years and Jubilee years, even though there is no evidence in the Old Testament that either of these was regularly observed throughout the Old Testament period.

The second age of the world began after the flood in the year 2348 BC. On Thursday, December 18 of that year Noah and all that were with him left the ark. The second age of the world continued from Noah down to the time of Abraham.

The third age of the world began with the call of Abram: Thursday, May 5, 1921 BC. The birth of Isaac occurred in 1896 BC. Shem, the son of Noah, died in 1846 BC. This reflects the numbers in the Masoretic text. According to the Septuagint data, Shem died before the birth of Abram. The death of Jacob in Egypt at the age of 147 occurred in 1689 BC and the death of Joseph in 1635 BC. In 1571 BC, Moses was born.

The fourth age of the world began in 1491 BC on the fifteenth day of the first month (Tuesday, May 5, Julian calendar) with the beginning of the exodus of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The tabernacle was first erected on Wednesday, April 21 of the year 1490 BC. In 1451 BC, the Israelites began their move into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. The period of the judges began after the death of Joshua in 1413 BC. Almost two centuries later, Samson died (1117 BC). Saul was anointed king by Samuel in 1095 BC. In 1048 BC David became king over all Israel, making his capital in Jerusalem. In 1015 BC David was succeeded by Solomon.

For Ussher, the fifth age of the world began with the laying of the foundation of the temple in 1012 BC. In 975 BC, the year of Solomon’s death, Ussher adds the following note: “Toward the end of his life, Solomon forsook the lusts and vanities to which he was addicted in his latter years. He testified of his deep repentance in his book called *The Preacher* and made his peace with

God.”⁵ Thus the kingdom was divided in 975 BC. Ahab began his reign in the northern kingdom in 918 BC and Jehoshaphat began his reign in the southern kingdom in 915 BC. The interregnum of Athaliah lasted from 884 BC to 878 BC. 759 BC was the year of the fourteenth Jubilee. In that same year, Isaiah had his call vision of the glory of the Lord (Isaiah 6). Hezekiah began his reign in 726 BC. Samaria was taken by Shalmaneser in 721 BC. Josiah became king of Judah in 641 BC. In 588 BC, the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar, ending the fifth age of the world.

The sixth age of the world began with the destruction of Jerusalem. In 539 BC Babylon fell to Cyrus. In 537 BC, Cyrus issued the decree that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The Jews who returned to Jerusalem, being prodded by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, began the rebuilding of the temple in 520 BC. The temple was completed in 515 BC. In 467 BC Ezra received permission to return to Jerusalem with any who wanted to go. In 454 BC Nehemiah went to Jerusalem.

Ussher did not end his sixth age of the world until 176 BC, before the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. But we will end here with the end of the Old Testament period. For Ussher, Malachi was the last of the prophets, a younger contemporary of Nehemiah. Ussher attached the date of 416 BC to the last words of Malachi’s prophecy: “And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6).

MODERN CHRONOLOGIES COMPARED WITH USSHER

In the modern period, the study of biblical chronology has not been ignored. Much of the more recent discussion is due to the fact that Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources, that were unknown in the seventeenth century, are now available. Different sets of correlations between biblical and extra-biblical sources are now being used in the calculation of Old Testament dates. There remain, however, significant areas of disagreement.

First, most modern scholars are hesitant to trace dates back beyond the time of Abraham. Others are hesitant to trace dates back before the rise of the Israelite monarchy. In both cases, the problem is that there is no extrabiblical material to compare with the biblical data. The scholars seem to be reticent to take the biblical data, all by itself, too seriously.

Second, there is disagreement among even evangelical scholars on the date of the exodus. The more

4. *Annals of the World*, 17.

5. *Annals*, 67.

conservative view is that the exodus occurred in the fifteenth century BC. A commonly accepted date for the fourth year of Solomon’s reign is 966 BC. The four hundred eighty years mention in 1 Kings 6:1 takes the exodus back to 1446 BC. For some, the archaeological data, and the standard chronology of the Egyptian kingdoms, prohibits the idea of that fifteenth century exodus. To argue for a later date (thirteenth century) however, requires a figurative reading of the chronological notes in Judges 11:26 and 1 Kings 6:1.

Third, there is a disagreement about the length of time that Israel was in Egypt. If Exodus 12:40 (Hebrew text) is taken at face value, it would seem to indicate that from the time of Jacob’s going down to Egypt to the time of the exodus was 430 years. However, the New Testament data (Acts 7:6 and Galatians 3:17) seem to indicate that the 430 years was from the time of Abram’s entry into Canaan until the time of the Exodus. The Septuagint also renders Exodus 12:40 as follows: “And the sojourning of the children of Israel, while they sojourned in the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan, four hundred and thirty years.” This tends to confirm the New Testament data. Ussher says of the beginning of the exodus, “It was exactly four hundred and thirty years from the first pilgrimage of Abraham’s departure from Canaan to the day they were set free from bondage.”⁶

Fourth, there is disagreement about the chronology of the kings of Israel during the divided monarchy. The relative chronology that is given in the biblical text is not transparent and has given rise to a few proposed ways of making sense of the numbers. As with the numbers in Genesis 5 and 11, there is disagreement between the Hebrew Masoretic text and the Septuagint Greek text at several points.

The result is that even today there is no consensus chronology of the Old Testament period. The following chart shows three modern proposals compared to Ussher. Two of these sets of dates are from evangelical sources, while the third is from a non-evangelical source.

The reader should note the following things. First, there is the obvious reticence to date anything in the Old Testament prior to the time of Abraham. This is primarily because modern interpreters, even the evangelical

Event/Person	Ussher	NBD ⁷	ESVSB ⁸	AYBD ⁹
Flood	2348			
Call of Abraham	1921	1925	2091	
Isaac born	1896	1900	2066	
Jacob died	1689	1700	1859	
Joseph died	1635	1640	1805	
Exodus	1491	1270	1446	
Conquest	1451	1230	1406	
Saul	1095	1050	1050	
David	1048	1011	1010	
Solomon	1015	971	971	
Temple begun	1012	967	967	
Rehoboam	975	931	931	929
Ahab	918	874	875	
Jehoshaphat	915	870	871	870
Athaliah	884–878	841–835	841–835	842–836
Hezekiah	726	716	715	727
Samaria falls	721	722	722	722
Josiah	641	640	640	639
Jerusalem falls	588	587	586	586
Cyrus	539	538	539	539
Second temple	520–515	520–516	520–516	520–516
Ezra	467	458	458	458
Nehemiah	454	445	445	445
Malachi	416	460		

6. *Annals*, 39.

7. *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, 2nd ed (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1982), 194–198.

8. *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane Dennis, et al. (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 32, 622–623.

9. Michael Cogan, “Chronology (Hebrew Bible)” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*.

ones, do not take the genealogies of the patriarchs in Genesis 5 and 11 as chronologically useful. Since the late nineteenth century, under the influence of William Henry Green, evangelical have taken the view that there are gaps in these genealogies, quite possibly very large gaps.¹⁰ If that were the case, then these writers would be correct in their agnosticism about early dates. Ussher was obviously comfortable with using those genealogies in chronology, as they apparently were intended to be used.

Second, note that up to the death of Joseph, Ussher tracks well with the view of those who argue for a late Exodus. He does not track well with the “early exodus” view primarily because that chronology argues for four hundred thirty years between Jacob’s entry into Egypt and the exodus. After the death of Joseph, Ussher tracks better with those who argue for an early date for the exodus, though Ussher’s dates are about half a century earlier.

Third, from the time of the exodus to the conquest of Canaan, Ussher’s dates continue to be forty to fifty years earlier than the “early exodus” view. Of course, his dates are about two centuries earlier than the “late exodus” dates.

Fourth, from the time of Saul to the middle of the eighth century, Ussher’s dates remain about a half century before those of the modern chronologers. However, the modern chronologers by this point are all within a couple of years of each other.

Fifth, from the time of Hezekiah to the completion of the second temple, Ussher tracks very closely with his modern counterparts. On the dates of Ezra and Nehemiah, Ussher is about a decade earlier.

Finally, Ussher considered Malachi to be the last of the Old Testament prophets, near the end of the fifth century BC. Most modern treatments of Malachi date the book to the first half of the fifth century, just a little before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

CONCLUSIONS

The data presented above suggest several things. First, though people commonly consider Ussher something of a joke because of his precise dating of creation, he was, and is, a voice to be taken seriously. He made use of an immense amount of material in his labors. It is not clear to me that the modern chronologers have anything like the mastery of sources that Ussher had. Yes, there are resources available now that were not available to Ussher. Assuming for the sake of argument that Ussher was wrong in those areas in which his figures disagree

with the modern ones, his dates are still respectably close to those of the moderns.

Second, Ussher had a confidence in the biblical text that many moderns do not. The agnosticism regarding the history of Israel that is found among modern historical-critical scholars is also seen in the work of evangelical scholars who refuse to propose dates for Old Testament events before the time of Abraham. I have no doubt that they honestly believe that Genesis 5 and 11 are not useful for chronological purposes because there are gaps in the genealogies. But have they investigated the issue for themselves? I think most have not. In addition, it is clear in reading some of the moderns that there is a greater confidence in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian data than there is in the biblical data.

Third, there are still areas of biblical chronology that could provide a stimulus for fruitful research. The standard Egyptian chronology is perhaps not as certain as most seem to think. David Rohl may not be right in his explanations, but he shows that there are weaknesses in the standard chronology.¹¹ There is the related issue of archaeology and the dating of biblical events. Many archaeologists seem to be more confident of the results of their digs than they are of actual historical sources. Yet the chronology of archaeological material is always subject to reinterpretation.

The date of the exodus as well is a suitable subject for further research. Currently, the consensus of critical scholars is that there was no exodus. They propose different explanations of the origins of that biblical “legend.” The consensus among evangelical scholars seems to be that the exodus occurred in the thirteenth century, rather than the fifteenth century, as Ussher and some modern scholars would have it. For example, James Hoffmeier argues for a thirteenth-century exodus without acknowledging that defenders of a fifteenth century exodus exist.¹² This despite the fact of John Bimson’s *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* in which he argues for a fifteenth century exodus, proposing a date around 1470 BC (a work that Hoffmeier does not cite). This date is about halfway between that of Ussher and that of current fifteenth-century date defenders.¹³

There is also room for a reexamination of the chronology of the divided kingdom. The work of Edwin

10. William Henry Green, “Primeval Chronology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 47 (1890): 285–303.

11. David Rohl, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (Crown, 1996).

12. James Hoffmeier, “The Exodus and Wilderness Narratives,” in *Ancient Israel’s History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill Arnold and Richard Hess (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 46–90.

13. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, No. 5 (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), 222.

Thiele is currently the consensus in evangelical circles.¹⁴ But there are weaknesses in his treatment as well. It would be interesting to find out why there is a consistent forty to fifty year gap between Thiele's dates and those of Ussher for most of the period of the divided kingdom.

Finally, though Ussher does not directly deal with this, the relationship between the Hebrew Masoretic text and the Greek Septuagint text needs a thorough investigation.¹⁵ ■

In Brief: Did James Ussher Visit Samuel Rutherford?

A recent edition of James Ussher's *A Body of Divinity* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007) opens with a narrative account headed "The Eleventh Commandment" (ix-x). It relates an account of a visit made by Ussher to Samuel Rutherford at his home in Anwoth, near Kirkcudbright. The narrative is drawn from *Anecdotes, Religious, Moral, and Entertaining* by Charles Buck (New York: 1843), pp. 135-6. According to this account, having heard that Rutherford spent all night in prayer at times, especially before the Sabbath, Ussher wanted to visit him but being unsure of a welcome visited in the disguise of a beggar. He arrived around dusk and requested shelter for the night, since he could go to no other house at so late an hour for that purpose. He was duly welcomed in for hospitality.

"Mrs. Rutherford, according to her custom on a Saturday evening, that her servants might be prepared for the Sabbath, called them together and catechised them. In the course of examination that evening, she asked the stranger how many commandments there were; to which he answered, 'Eleven.' Upon receiving this reply, she answered, 'What a shame it is for you, a man with grey hairs, living in a Christian country, not to know how many commandments there are! There is not a child of six years old in this parish but could answer that question properly.' She troubled the poor man no more, thinking him so very ignorant, but lamented his condition to her servants; and after giving him some supper, desired a servant to show him upstairs to bed in a garret" (or in other versions the barn).

"This was the very situation in which the visitor wished to

14. Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, new rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 1994). See also Leslie McFall, "Has the Chronology of the Hebrew Kings Been Finally Settled?" *Themelios* 17, 1 (1991): 6-12.

15. See, for example, Gerhard Larsson, "Septuagint Versus Masoretic Chronology," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 114 no 4 (2002): p 511-521. Also Jeremy Sexton, "Who Was Born When Enoch Was 90?: A Semantic Reevaluation of William Henry Green's Chronological Gaps," *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 77 no 2 (Fall 2015): p 193-218.

be placed, that he might hear Mr. Rutherford at his devotions. However, he was disappointed, for that night the good man went to his bed, but did not sleep for some hours. Ussher did not go to bed, but sat listening, hoping to hear Rutherford at prayer. At length, concluding that all the family were asleep, Ussher thought that if he had been disappointed of hearing another offer up his desires to God at the throne of grace, he would embrace the opportunity himself. In one version Ussher prays in his room and in another goes to pray in 'Rutherford's Walk' (the lane where Rutherford was accustomed to walk and pray). In either case Rutherford overheard Ussher pouring out his heart in prayer. He recognised him as Archbishop Ussher and pressed him to preach. Ussher chose to preach on "the eleventh commandment" (John 13:34).

An article in *The Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* tries to work out the date of the visit on the basis of an assumption that Mrs. Rutherford was using the Heidelberg Catechism and they had arrived at Lord's Day 34 which introduces the Ten Commandments. Yet it wryly observes that the account "is perhaps too romantic to have really taken place. Indeed, it is more like a Scotch ballad in prose than a veritable narrative; yet it is too good a story to have omitted" (August 1, 1866, 292-3).

While irresistible to Victorian writers, the story has an apocryphal ring to it. Recent biographers have been reluctant to give it credence: John Coffey does not mention it in *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge, 1998) and Kingsley Rendell is non-committal about it (*Samuel Rutherford: A New biography of the Man and his ministry*, Fearn, 2003, 129).

There are, however, other accounts that appear more plausible. The main possibility is an oral tradition that comes directly from those who lived in the parish of Anwoth during the time of Rutherford's ministry. In 1724, the historian Robert Wodrow recorded an account from a man who had lived in the parish and spoke to those alive at the time. "My informer lived some time in the parish of Anwoth, in Gallo-way, where Mr. Rutherford was Minister, and had the account of Bishop Usher's being there, formerly set down, with thir [these] circumstances, which are firmly believed there; and it's not long since persons were alive who were in the parish at the time. They tell him in the year 1640, the year before the Rebellion in Ireland, (but I think Mr. Rutherford was transported by that time from Anwoth, so that it must have been some years before,) the Primate, having read his books, that *De Gratia* was printed before, and his Letters were in several hands; and having heard of his great success and sweetness in preaching, resolved to come to England by Scotland, and take Anwoth in his way, and came with a servant riding with him. There was no place near the Church where he could stay, that Saturday's night he came to Anwoth, but Mr. Rutherford's house; and so he came to it, and called to know if he was at

home? His wife told he was. He said he was a stranger come from some distance, and designed to stay till Monday, and could find no place to stay in, and asked if he might have access to Mr. Rutherford's house? Mrs. Rutherford, seeing him a gentleman, and in good habit, desired him to alight, and signified that she desired to know his name. He said his name was James Usher. She went up, and acquainted her husband. The Primate struck none of them in the head [None of them recollected or recognised the Primate, under the name of James Usher]; and Mr. Rutherford came down and called for a drink, and made him welcome as a stranger, and left him till supper, where nothing passed to discover him. On the Sabbath, early, he went out to the fields, and came to a thicket of trees, a sweet retired place, where Mr. Rutherford used often to retire. There the Bishop spent some time his alone, and was fallen to prayer. When Mr. Rutherford came out, as was his ordinary, knowing nothing the other was there, till he drew near and heard the voice of prayer; and, listening, he perceived a very extraordinary gift of prayer, and was wonderfully taken with it, and stayed till it was ended; and the other came out. Then, when he saw him, his name his wife told him struck him in the head, and presently addressed him, 'Are you the great and learned Doctor Usher?' The other answered, 'I am he whom some are pleased to term so.' Then Mr. Rutherford embraced him most affectionately, and said, "You must preach for me to-day." 'Nay,' says the other, 'I came to hear you preach, and to be acquainted with you, and I will hear you.' 'Well,' said the other, 'I shall take the forenoon, and you the afternoon.' And so the Primate preached in the afternoon, to each other's great satisfaction." (Robert Wodrow, *Analec̄ta, Or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, 4 vols. [Edinburgh]: Printed for the Maitland Club, 1842–43) 132–134).

Wodrow records separately "that Bishop Usher, upon seeing of Mr. Rutherford's books, and hearing accounts of his piety and success, came over in disguise to Anwoth, and heard Mr. Rutherford preach" (*Analec̄ta* II, 364). Ussher's preaching for Rutherford is also recorded in *The humble thoughts, of some sober and judicious Christians, concerning the affair of the Reverend Mr. John Glass, Minister of the Gospel at Tealing: to be before the venerable Assembly, to meet at Edinburgh, May 2d, 1728* (Edinburgh? [1728], 19).

The eleventh commandment does not appear in this narrative and can be therefore discounted. The fact that it is also connected with a shipwreck Ussher was supposed to have experienced supports its dubious authenticity (see *The Whole Works of James Ussher*, ed. Charles Richard Elrington [Dublin 1864], I, 280–1).

According to Ussher's most recent biography, the one occasion when Ussher ventured out of Ireland between 1626 and 1640 was a visit to the coronation of Charles I, July 1633

in Edinburgh (Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England*, Oxford, 2007, 144). It is possible that they met in Edinburgh when Rutherford may have been at the Parliament. This, however, removes the connection with Rutherford's learned publication *Exercitationes Apologeticae pro Divina Gratia*. This was published in Amsterdam in 1636 and there would be no real opportunity during that year for a visit because he was then confined to Aberdeen in July of that year. It is also unlikely that Ussher would visit at a time when the Scottish bishops were proceeding against the Anwoth pastor. Wodrow's account, however, mentions Rutherford's letters as much as *De Gratia* and this almost certainly requires it to have been after his exile to Aberdeen which had occasioned such a torrent of correspondence.

Rutherford returned from Aberdeen in February or March 1638 and, apart from preaching in other locations, remained there until November 1639. At this point he went to St Andrews (arriving at least by November 22, 1639; see Letter CCLXXXIX) in order to take up his role as professor of divinity. This might seem the most plausible window of time when the visit could have taken place.

Another theory is, however, possible that would make Wodrow's oral tradition potentially viable. Ussher did travel to Oxford after preaching before the Parliament in Dublin in March 1640 (Charles Richard Elrington ed., *The Whole Works*, I, 208). He arrived by May 1640 (Alan Ford, 223). It seems unlikely that he would wish to take the troublesome route of going through Ulster, Scotland and Northern England rather than travel from Dublin to Wales and then to Oxford. It is, however, theoretically possible that he returned to his home near Drogheda from Dublin and went to England via Scotland.

Meanwhile Rutherford was married to Jean McMath (commonly spelled Mackmath in contemporary documents) in Edinburgh on 24 March 1640 (see Edinburgh parish records National Records of Scotland, OPR 685-1/43 <https://www.beefheart.net/research/learning/hall-of-fame/hall-of-fame-a-z/rutherford-samuel> [accessed 09-16-2020]). This was the widow of Hew Montgomerie of Balharie or Ballyhenry in Co. Down, Northern Ireland. If this was Sir Hugh Montgomerie, the first Viscount of the Great Ards (c. 1560–1636), he must have married Jean between the death of his second wife Sara Maxwell on 29 March 1636 and his own death on 15 May of that year. While this may seem unusual, Sara Maxwell had returned to Scotland and did not live with Sir Hugh. The brother of this Hugh Montgomerie had been George Montgomerie, bishop of Meath (1562–1621) who was succeeded in this bishopric by Ussher himself.

It is unlikely that Jean McMath was widow of a second cousin of the deceased earl who was also called Hugh. This

individual represented Newton Town (Newtownards) at the parliament of 1634 (D.B. Montgomery, *A genealogical history of the Montgomerys and their descendants* [Owensville IN, 1903], 26) but is said to have attended a funeral in 1663 (D.B. Montgomery, 386). This Hugh Montgomery was most probably a son of Adam Montgomery, to whom Sir Hugh Montgomery sold, in 1610, the towns and lands of Ballyhenrie and Ballyalton, in the parish of Comber. He was a brother of Charles Campbell and a second cousin (D.B. Montgomery, 249)

A registered deed from July 1653 relating to the ownership of Dunskey Castle, near Portpatrick, Wigtownshire, reveals further information. It identifies Mackmath as the widow of 'the deceased HEW MONTGRUMIE (Montgomery) sometime of BALHARIE in the country of Doune, (co.Down, N. Ireland) gentleman' (*Register of the Great Seal of Scotland. Under the Commonwealth (Cromwell)*. X, 81–82, no.164). This most likely refers to the first Viscount of the Great Ards since he had been owner of Dunskey Castle since 1620. Another factor that links Rutherford to the first Viscount of the Great Ards is that Robert Blair had married the Viscount's daughter, Katharine Montgomerie, in the beginning of 1635 (*The Life of Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of St. Andrews, Containing His Autobiography, from 1593 to 1636*, ed. Thomas M'Crie [Edinburgh, 1848], 137). It is reasonable to suppose that Robert Blair's subsequent visit to Edinburgh may have helped to connect Jean McMath with the widowed Viscount in 1636. Jean McMath was the daughter of a prominent merchant Burgess in Edinburgh, probably William McMath (see *Abbotsford Club*, Issue 21 [Edinburgh, 1841], xxxvi–xl). It is likely that Rutherford's friendship with Robert Blair and other prominent burgesses in Edinburgh helped form his marriage to Jean.

The Co. Down connection might seem to open up a possibility that Rutherford visited Ulster to meet his future wife. It would be attractive to think that he might have encountered Ussher in travelling back. Time would, however, not have permitted Rutherford to have left St Andrews after 6 March 1640 (see Letter CCXCVI) and have travelled to Ulster, then Anwoth, then Edinburgh, before 24 March. The banns for his wedding were, however, being proclaimed in St Andrews (and presumably Edinburgh also) for the first time from 2 March (see parish records National Records of Scotland, OPR 453/5, <https://www.beefheart.net/research/learning/hall-of-fame/hall-of-fame-a-z/rutherford-samuel> [accessed 09-16-2020]). This might not have made it advisable to take so long a journey. We also know that Rutherford returned directly to St Andrews with his new wife as there is a letter from there dated 27 March (Letter CCXCVII).



A visitor arrives at the Rutherford House, Anwoth (*Letters* [1891], 10).

One further possibility is that Jean McMath was residing (either temporarily or permanently) at Dunskey Castle, Portpatrick rather than back in her native Edinburgh. Rutherford may have taken the occasion of both joining her on her journey towards Edinburgh and of revisiting Anwoth. This would allow for Ussher to have been travelling this way and stopped at Anwoth also, although it does not allow for McMath being Rutherford's wife at the time. It also seems unlikely (though not impossible) that McMath could be married within a parish where neither party was residing (see the opinion of Thomas Murray, *The Life of S. Rutherford* [Edinburgh, 1828], 324).

Another possibility is that a journey to the south west might have been made for some reason during the period of April up to May 28 1640 (see Letter CCXCVIII). It is likely, however, that the first two weeks of April would have been taken up with the Spring Communion in the town and presumably Rutherford would still have had teaching responsibilities in the College up until Whitsun in mid-May. This would allow just about sufficient time, but it seems that Ussher arrived in Oxford by May. The Ulster connection might also seem to make it unlikely that Jean McMath would fail to recognise the Archbishop's name out of context but her temporary sojourn there would help to explain this. This is the only scenario which would allow for all of the details of Wodrow's account to be accurate and certainly requires a significant stretch if it is even possible.

These are only possibilities and not even probabilities and it must be admitted that some of the possibilities are rather tenuous. The information may indeed leave as many questions unanswered as it seeks to address. Yet it does open up the possibility that there may be grains of truth in the oral history that Wodrow reports. We cannot fully verify it, but we should not rush to dismiss the tale of Ussher's visit out of hand.

MATTHEW A. VOGAN ■