The Correspondence of Elizabeth I and James VI in the context of Anglo-Scottish Relations, 1572-1603

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Abstract

From 1572 until 1603 Queen Elizabeth I of England maintained a significant correspondence with King James VI of Scotland. This correspondence has recently begun to receive some scholarly attention but generally it sits separated from its context in historical analysis. This thesis seeks to analyse the lengthy correspondence in order to understand its role in diplomacy and to reintegrate it into its broader Anglo-Scottish diplomatic context. In doing so it explores the idea of the existence of a multilayered approach to diplomatic relations during the Elizabethan period, which enabled Elizabeth to manage the difficulties that arose in the Anglo-Scottish relationship.

The thesis discusses the role of the correspondence through four main concerns that occurred from 1585 until Elizabeth’s death in 1603. It commences by examining the negotiations for the Treaty of Berwick that occurred in 1585-1586, negotiations that took place within the royal correspondence and through the work of ambassadors. Shortly after the treaty’s conclusion the discovery of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, involvement in the Babington plot sparked a diplomatic storm that involved not only the various threads of Anglo-Scottish diplomatic relations but also pressure from France. Diplomatic relations were only restored shortly before the Spanish Armada but were immediately placed under significant strain by the uncovering of the Brig o’ Dee Affair and the Spanish Blanks plot in Scotland. A situation made worse by James’ appeared inaction against his Catholic nobility. This led to one of the most diplomatically difficult periods of the correspondence and alliance that lasted from 1588 until 1595. From 1595 the Anglo-Scottish relationship calmed, although this does not mean that it became insignificant. During this period James became highly anxious in regards to his right to succeed Elizabeth. As a result he became somewhat obsessed with the seemingly minor issue of Valentine Thomas, a criminal who implicated James in an assassination plot against Elizabeth.

In addition to these four broad points this thesis will also analyse other themes and concerns that arose within the correspondence. These include such concerns as the problem of rumours in diplomatic relations, the rhetorical trope of innocence, which is used on several occasions by the monarchs, and the mutually shared concept of royal honour that was fundamental to both Elizabeth and to James.
This thesis seeks to place the correspondence of Queen Elizabeth and King James back into its original context of Anglo-Scottish diplomacy and in so doing demonstrate that Elizabethan England possessed a multilayered approach to diplomacy.
Declaration

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# Table of Contents

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**  
V

**INTRODUCTION**  
1

- **ANGLO-SCOTTISH RELATIONS BEFORE 1585**  
3
- **LITERATURE REVIEW**  
5
- **LETTER WRITING PRACTICES**  
9
- **THESIS OUTLINE**  
15

**CHAPTER ONE: A NEW ALLIANCE AND BORDER DISPUTES**  
18

- **THE MURDER OF FRANCIS RUSSELL**  
21
- **RUMOURS IN ANGLO-SCOTTISH DIPLOMACY**  
24
- **PARALLEL CONCERNS**  
26
- **CONCLUSION OF THE TREATY**  
31

**CHAPTER TWO: MARY’S EXECUTION AND ELIZABETH’S INNOCENCE**  
34

- **DIPLOMACY DURING THE TRIAL OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS**  
34
- **EXTERNAL PRESSURES**  
40
- **THE RHETORIC OF INNOCENCE**  
44
- **THE DIPLOMATIC AFTERMATH**  
47
- **RESTORING ANGLO-SCOTTISH DIPLOMACY**  
49

**CHAPTER THREE: BRIG O’ DEE AND THE SPANISH BLANKS**  
53

- **THE POSTERN GATE AND CATHOLIC CONSPIRACY**  
54
- **THE BRIG O’ DEE AFFAIR**  
56
- **THE SPANISH BLANKS**  
60

**CHAPTER FOUR: VALENTINE THOMAS AND THE SUCCESSION**  
71

- **THE CAPTURE AND QUESTIONING OF VALENTINE THOMAS**  
71
- **THE DIPLOMACY OF THE VALENTINE THOMAS AFFAIR**  
74
- **THE SUCCESSION ISSUE IN THE CORRESPONDENCE**  
86

**CONCLUSION**  
90

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**  
98
List of Abbreviations


Letters Bruce, John (ed.). Letters of Queen Elizabeth and King James VI of Scotland: Some of them printed from originals in the possession of the Rev. Edward Ryder, and others from a MS which formerly belonged to Sir Peter Thompson, KT., Camden Society, Vol. 46, London, J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1849.


Introduction

To the right highe right excellent and mightie prince, our deerest brother and cosin, the king of Scottes.¹

With these words Queen Elizabeth I of England addressed one of her early letters in a lengthy correspondence with King James VI of Scotland. This exchange was partly based on social proximity, for as demonstrated in the address, they were cousins in kinship and also in rank. This proximity extended beyond their personal connections to the closeness of their two kingdoms. The letters between the two monarchs, exchanged from 1572 until 1603, were for the most part a personal correspondence, written in their individual hands. These autograph letters form the main part of their correspondence, though other letters composed by scribes working under Elizabeth and James’ instructions supplemented them. The exchange of both autograph and scribal letters enabled a closer understanding between the monarchs and the possibility of strengthening and reinforcing the diplomatic ties between their kingdoms during a time of widespread political and religious unrest in Europe. From the initiation of the correspondence in 1572 the exchange of letters was maintained for the rest of Elizabeth’s reign, about thirty-one years, and endured many complicated pressures on their diplomatic relationship and the Anglo-Scottish Alliance. These pressures included events such as the creation of the Anglo-Scottish alliance, the trial and execution of Mary Stuart, the Spanish Armada, the attempted Scottish noble collaboration with Spain during the Spanish Blanks plot, and the Valentine Thomas plot. The letters provided an outlet for other concerns in addition to the diplomatic negotiation of events, which allowed the two monarchs to react to rumours, protest innocence, declare honourable intentions and express concerns or happiness. The letters themselves offer a multilayered understanding of the anxieties of the monarchs in question. The focus of this thesis is upon Elizabeth and her aims, which are shown through a detailed analysis of these letters. While James’s intentions and aspirations are worth studying, and will be discussed at different points throughout this thesis as they provide a counterpoint to Elizabeth’s goals, a detailed

¹ ‘Elizabeth to James’, 18 October 1582, Letters, 1-4.
study of the correspondence from James’s perspective is beyond the scope of this thesis. Through the examination of these letters it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of their approach to the diplomatic connections between their two countries and what Elizabeth sought to achieve with this long-running epistolary conversation with her northern neighbour during her lengthy conflict with Spain.

These letters did not sit within a vacuum but instead worked alongside other avenues of diplomatic exchange. During the reign of Elizabeth, day-to-day diplomacy was managed by the Principal Secretary on her behalf. The Principal Secretary would lead discussions of foreign affairs in the Privy Council and manage its related concerns. 2 It was also generally the Principal Secretary’s role to appoint ambassadors. 3 The official correspondence of the ambassadors was sent primarily to the Secretary. But this did not make him the only correspondent as most diplomats would also write to Elizabeth and to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, later the Lord Treasurer. Breaches in the relationship between a diplomat and the Principal Secretary did occur and could result in that diplomat writing more frequently to a different councillor. 4 The operational control of diplomacy by the Secretary has resulted in an ongoing debate concerning who controlled Elizabeth's policies. Gary M. Bell has argued that Elizabeth was removed from the concerns of foreign affairs but this would not explain her concern with foreign correspondence and in particular her long-standing commitment to writing personal letters to monarchs, many of which were in her own hand. 5 Elizabeth maintained correspondence with several monarchs throughout her reign and for the most part these correspondents ruled kingdoms that were important to England’s diplomatic goals, such as Mary Stuart, James VI, Catherine de Medici and Henri IV. However, as a significant number of these letters were written to James during the mid to late periods of Elizabeth’s reign, a detailed study of their content and tone provides vital addition to the ongoing debates concerning the extent of Elizabeth’s intervention in political activities and diplomacy. Elizabeth was additionally closely involved in the work of her Principal Secretaries on foreign affairs. 6 This has led to the idea that it was through the joint efforts of the

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5 Bell, 'Elizabethan Diplomacy', 281.
6 Platt, 'The Elizabethan 'Foreign Office', 736.
Queen and the Principal Secretary that England’s foreign relations were determined and managed.  

Certainly, it is probable that Elizabeth was not involved in all of the minute details of diplomatic practice. Penry Williams argues that Elizabeth’s real power in diplomacy lay in her power to choose what policy would be pursued, not in the actual creation of policy. He has also argued that no important decision could be made without her personal approval.  

Elizabeth was not completely separate from the day-to-day work of diplomacy, however. With her command of several foreign languages such as French, Latin and Italian she conducted personal interviews with visiting foreign ambassadors, often in their own language. Instead, it is likely that there was no single diplomatic arrangement but a multi-levelled one; one royal and the other ministerial/diplomatic. It is this idea that I will explore throughout this thesis in relation to England and Scotland, and establish that a multilayered form of diplomacy was the key to diplomatic ties between these two countries.

Anglo-Scottish Relations before 1585

During Elizabeth’s reign Scotland moved from being a threatening neighbour and base for the French, to a friendly, or at the very least neutral, kingdom. When Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558 Scotland was ruled by a Frenchwoman, Mary of Guise, as regent for her daughter Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scots and wife of the French prince. French soldiers were stationed in Scotland to support this regime. But the political situation within Scotland experienced a dramatic reversal and by 1560 the French were expelled from Scotland by Protestant rebels with the support of their English neighbours. Mary Stuart returned to Scotland in 1561 following the death of her first husband to rule a changed kingdom. Her government was not successful and after eight years of difficult and conflicting rule she fled to England, leaving her infant son behind who had been recently crowned as King James VI. Scotland was then governed by a series of regents, none lasting long before being killed or replaced by others according to the shifting nature of Scottish politics. James was officially

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declared of age shortly before his twelfth birthday in March 1578. This declaration did not alter the political instability of Scotland nor the controlling influence of regents as he was too young to assume fully the role of King or to enforce his personal rule. Throughout this period England carefully watched its northern neighbour, giving support only when it was deemed necessary to further English interests and prevent foreign interference.

England became significantly concerned about the government of Scotland after the swift rise of the French-born Esmé Stuart. Stuart arrived in Scotland in 1579 and in 1581 was made the Duke of Lennox. He held significant influence over the young James and caused concern for the pro-English sections of Scottish society. Lennox’s position was never entirely secure and he was ousted following the Ruthven Raid in August 1582. The raiders were pro-English, led by the Earl of Gowrie, and had feared that the prominence of Lennox and his influence with James could have paved the way for a return to French rule in Scotland. The raiders established themselves as Scotland’s government but the party collapsed in June 1583 when James was liberated from their custody by a group of nobles, mostly from the Catholic north. This group established a new administration under the leadership of James Stewart, the Earl of Arran, who came to dominate the Scottish government.

His control was not to last and in late 1585 Arran was ousted from his position of influence. This coup was achieved with the aid of Elizabeth’s ambassador in Scotland, Edward Wotton, and involved the return of several men who had been involved in the Ruthven Raid and had been residing in England. Arran had been under a cloud before this, however, as he was suspected of involvement in the murder of an English noble, Lord Russell, on the border. Following the fall of Arran, James assumed control of his kingdom and began his personal rule at the age of 19. With James’ full assumption of his personal authority in late 1585 the political situation in Scotland changed. Diplomatic contact solely through intermediaries was no longer sufficient

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for the new political climate. It was during this time Elizabeth initiated a correspondence with her cousin and fellow monarch in Scotland. Her aim was to create a personal understanding between them and perhaps to prevent the turmoil of past difficulties between their kingdoms from returning.

**Literature Review**

In the majority of works concerned with English foreign policy and diplomacy, sixteenth-century Anglo-Scottish relations are only briefly discussed, or go entirely unmentioned. The most prominent scholars of English foreign policy during the Elizabethan period are Wallace T. MacCaffrey and R.B. Wernham. Wernham’s three monographs on the topic are collectively an extensive study of English foreign policy from the ascension of the Tudor dynasty through to the conclusion of the Elizabethan Anglo-Spanish conflict. While these books do cover many aspects of Elizabeth’s foreign policy and diplomacy, Anglo-Scottish relations are relegated to a minimal concern that is barely discussed. Indeed, other than occasional moments when Anglo-Scottish concerns intermingle with continental concerns, such as was the case with the Spanish Blanks or the succession, England’s relationship with its northern neighbour goes without comment. MacCaffrey, like Wernham, has composed three works that discuss Elizabeth I’s foreign policy. Unlike Wernham, MacCaffrey analyses Anglo-Scottish relations in a chapter per book. In *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy* he is generally concerned with the manoeuvring of ministers, monarchs and diplomats but does not discuss the sizable correspondence between Elizabeth and James. He does make some reference to the royal letters in *Elizabeth I* but he does not analyse them in any depth nor does he explore the implications of the correspondence for the diplomatic relationship.

In addition to these overarching works focusing on foreign policy there are others that focus on specific events and the implication of these events for the diplomatic relationship between England and Scotland. An excellent example is Susan Doran’s article ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder? The Impact of

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Mary Stuart’s Execution on Anglo-Scottish Relations’. In this article Doran explores the implications of the Queen of Scots’ execution on the diplomatic relationship between England and Scotland. She additionally makes use of the royal correspondence to explore the issue, but in doing so she does not explore the role of the correspondence in the ongoing diplomatic processes of Anglo-Scottish relations.

Following Doran, my work explores the Anglo-Scottish relationship during Elizabeth’s reign. But unlike Doran, this thesis will seek to uncover the role Elizabeth’s correspondence with James played in the wider diplomatic processes of the period and how the exchange of royal letters interacted with other avenues of diplomatic contact. In order to do this my work will be situated partially in line with research concerning the royal letters but it will also sit alongside discussions of Elizabethan foreign policy and diplomacy. There have been significant scholarly debates concerning the diplomacy of Elizabethan England and particularly if there was in fact a ‘foreign policy’, or merely a collection of reactionary actions taken in response to unfolding events. It is difficult to determine today what is the truth of the matter but regardless of this uncertainty it is certainly accurate to say that Elizabethan England engaged in a significant diplomatic exchange with a wide collection of states.

The foundational text for the history of diplomacy in late medieval and early modern Europe is Garrett Mattingly’s Renaissance Diplomacy. However this work does not explore Anglo-Scottish relations and in addition argues that diplomacy as a system was almost destroyed as a result of the religious turmoil during the second half of the sixteenth century. Mattingly also states that from the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign until 1648 ‘diplomats were concerned with espionage and conspiracy, intrigue and bluff, but scarcely ever with their proper business.’ This position, while it relevant to the actions of some diplomats, does not convey an accurate description of diplomacy during this period. In contrast to Mattingly, De Lamar Jensen argues that instead of being almost destroyed, diplomacy expanded during the sixteenth century and connections were made across religious divides, as was the case with Protestant England and officially Catholic France. Gary M. Bell continues in a similar manner and argues that during Elizabeth’s reign diplomats and diplomacy itself became more

professionalised, with increasing specialisation and training through service as diplomatic secretaries. This professionalization of diplomacy has been taken further by F. Jeffrey Platt who argues that there was a ‘de facto foreign office’ run by Elizabeth’s principal secretaries who served as specialists for foreign affairs. Jason Powell and William T. Rossiter noted the connection between secretaries for diplomats, and the use of such jobs as training. Additionally, they highlight the similarity in the description of work undertaken by ambassadors and secretaries. Therefore while it is difficult to argue that there was a sustained definite foreign policy for Elizabethan England it is clear that diplomacy was a significant concern for the English and that it was increasingly undertaken in a professionalised manner. The increased professionalization of diplomacy does not form a complete image of diplomatic exchanges, however, as at the heart of many English relationships were Elizabeth’s letters, as was the case for England and Scotland.

A final and fundamental question about Elizabethan diplomacy and policy that is often debated is concerned with who controlled policy, was it the Privy Councillors led by the Principal Secretary or was it the Queen? It is true that Elizabeth allowed her councillors freedom to create policies and responses to events. However, this by no means indicates that they controlled England’s diplomatic activities as has occasionally been argued. Such is the case with Bell who suggests that Elizabeth did not control policy because she left the selection of her ambassadors to her Principal Secretary. This, however, is only a small part of England’s ongoing diplomatic efforts and Wernham has argued that there was little that could be accomplished without Elizabeth’s knowledge or approval. Elizabeth also amended a significant number of drafts and met personally with visiting ambassadors. Platt agrees with Wernham’s position and adds that Elizabeth met with her Principal Secretary almost daily to discuss foreign affairs and that any promise made by her ambassadors without her approval would be repudiated. Elizabeth’s sizable correspondences, of which the

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29 Wernham, Before the Armada, 235-236.
exchange with James was one, amply demonstrates Elizabeth’s close affinity with England’s diplomatic relationships and personal participation in diplomacy.

The correspondence between Elizabeth and James has only recently begun to be fully analysed by scholars. Indeed in 2000 it was still possible to call for far greater attention for these letters despite their being available in printed calendar and book form for around 150 years.\(^\text{31}\) Grant Simpson argued for the diplomatic importance of these letters but did not go into great detail about the exchange. In the same year as Simpson’s chapter, Janel Mueller published an article that focused on the connection between one of the great questions of Elizabeth’s reign, the succession, and her correspondence with James.\(^\text{32}\) Mueller argues that Elizabeth used her letters to declare James as her successor and following that, to advise him. However, the focus of Mueller’s article was a study of language and rhetoric and the extent to which these tie to early modern epistolary practice. Indeed how the monarchs used language was the focus of Peter C. Herman’s discussion of Monarchic Verse. Within his article he discussed a sonnet written by James and sent to Elizabeth. Elizabeth, to all intents and purposes, ignored the sonnet on account of its gendered language and the poem’s inherent implication that she was James’ inferior.\(^\text{33}\) While this article only briefly touches on the correspondence it does highlight the importance of language within the letters and the extent to which linguistic and rhetorical conventions governed the production and reception of texts. Herman’s analysis of James’ sonnet, and its reception by Elizabeth, also reveals the consequences when one correspondent seemingly acted out of step with expected rhetorical convention. Evidence from the letters themselves also highlights this as a meaningful issue. Throughout the exchange both Elizabeth and James call attention to language and content which breaks with epistolary convention, such as their uses of innocence rhetoric or appeals to mutual concepts of royal honour. These two rhetorical strategies are analysed in this thesis and add to the historiographical debates surrounding rhetorical strategies and royal correspondence.


One of the most prominent among scholars who work on Elizabeth’s correspondence with James is Rayne Allinson. Allinson has written extensively on the topic but is often focused on the letters themselves and the rhetoric utilised therein, and does not fully explore the implications or role of the correspondence in Anglo-Scottish Diplomacy.\textsuperscript{34} Indeed in a review of her book, \textit{A Monarchy of Letters: Royal Correspondence and English Diplomacy in the reign of Elizabeth I}, it was noted that the analysis of the letters is focused on the relationships between England’s Queen and foreign monarchs but does not situate itself within the historiography of diplomacy and its protocols.\textsuperscript{35}

Susan Doran’s chapter ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins? The Relationship between Elizabeth I and James VI of Scotland 1586-1603’ has a different approach.\textsuperscript{36} In her discussion she acknowledges that Scotland was an important diplomatic concern for England and that the correspondence between the monarchs was at the heart of the relationship. The Anglo-Scottish relationship, was not limited to the royal letter exchange, as can be the impression from many of the studies of the correspondence, but instead it operated alongside the professional work of diplomats. Doran’s argument began the process of placing the correspondence back into its original context but there is still a need to fully reintegrate the letters into Anglo-Scottish diplomacy. This thesis will do so by developing on the work of both Doran and Allinson to return the correspondence into its overarching diplomatic context, taking account of the scholarship in the fields of both epistolary exchanges and early modern diplomacy.

\textbf{Letter Writing Practices}

One of the main means of communication during the sixteenth century, other than face-to-face contact was the exchange of letters. Letters and the act of letter writing were not a simple means of communication but were instead accompanied by a range of conventions and traditions that shaped the finished product. These included


\textsuperscript{36} Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’. 
the spacing of the various parts of a letter on the paper, the colour of seal used before dispatch, and the rhetoric utilised to frame the text itself. Custom extended to the delivery and receiving of letters and was also involved in the continuation of a correspondence. Indeed, as Gary Schneider observed, ‘The basic logic of letter writing - that is, the timely reciprocity of exchange - presupposed that correspondents strove to maintain stable social intercourse and communicative continuity.’\textsuperscript{37} This foundation for letters involving timely reply allowed for the possibility of a correspondence being manipulated by one party through temporarily halting letters or through delaying dispatch. This was usually done in order to display control, emotion or simply to temporise.\textsuperscript{38} Thus letters were in fact problematic as there was additionally room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation.\textsuperscript{39} These difficulties and dictates of custom did not however limit the use of letters during the early modern period, indeed epistolary exchange experienced an increase of use and led to the rise of importance concerning who composed the letters.\textsuperscript{40}

The various practices involved in writing letters during the sixteenth century has led to the letters being differentiated on the basis of authorship in the historiography of epistolary. The main manner in which letters are categorised is between those written entirely by the signatory and those written by a scribe or secretary. Letters written by the individual who signed it are called either holograph or autograph letters. For the purpose of this thesis I will refer to them as autograph letters, meaning written in a person’s own handwriting. Those letters written by someone other than the signatory I will refer to as scribal letters. The differences between an autograph letter and a scribal letter are not a modern concept but were already viewed as significant during the early modern period and are therefore important for us to note and to understand the reasoning for both methods of letter composition. According to James Daybell the initial consideration when analysing a letter is to conclude whether it is an autograph letter or a scribal letter.\textsuperscript{41} This initial step can tell us much about the importance of the document and the relationships between the correspondents.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{41} Daybell, \textit{The Material Letter}, 23
During the early modern period in England an individual wishing to compose a letter could do so themselves, if capable of writing, or have a secretary or a scribe do so for them. The decision to have a scribe write a letter could be based on a variety of considerations, of which literacy was only one. For a literate writer educated in the mechanics of letter writing, the reasons for making use of a scribe or secretary were several and included such considerations as the relationship between the two correspondents, the content or type of letter, circumstances at the time of composition such as emotional distress or illness, and custom. The purpose of a letter could also determine whether a secretary or scribe was used to compose a letter. This was the case with letters that were more formal in nature or related to business affairs and which were generally written by scribes rather than their signatories. Formality, emotion, illness and illiteracy were all reasons that scribes and secretaries continued as the main composers of letters during the sixteenth century in England but this was slowly undergoing a change and increasing significance was placed upon individuals writing their own letters.

As the sixteenth century progressed there was a change in how letters were regarded depending on who wrote them. As a result autograph letters came to be seen as far more personal and intimate than those that had been composed by scribes. Thus letters that were exchanged between members of a family and between married couples were increasingly autograph letters. In addition to this presumption that autograph letters indicated a personal relationship, letters written by the signatory came to hold some of their authority and power. This meant that letters could be used to give commands or as an expression of one’s will. Information of a sensitive nature was also generally conveyed by use of an autograph letter instead of sharing it with a secretary or scribe in an attempt to ensure confidentiality. Therefore in England throughout the sixteenth century there was a division between those letters written by the signatory and those composed by a scribe that held significance to those who received these letters. But this division was not always clear-cut, and the blurring adds further complication to our understanding of letters and their authors’ intentions.

The difficulty caused by the blurring of authorship, and indeed our ability to interpret letters written during this period, is a result of early modern composition practices that were often collaborative. Today’s image of letter writing as a solitary endeavour is not applicable to many of the letters of the sixteenth century. The simple fact of a letter being an autograph manuscript does not automatically guarantee that it was composed entirely by its signatory. This is because in many instances there has been evidence found of letters being drafted by others, be they secretaries or family members, before being copied by the signatory in their own hand, seemingly turning these letters into autographs. The ambiguous concept of early modern authorship does not mean that this was the case for all authors or the entirety of their correspondence. At this time letters were moving from being traditionally collaborative in nature to a ‘private’ means of communication. Thus many individuals composed their own letters, either entirely or just portions of it, and usually decided on the manner of composition through considering the importance of the missive, the custom involved and the relationship between the two correspondents. These multiple considerations that applied to letters in sixteenth century England applied to all levels of society, including its Tudor monarchs.

Though all the Tudor monarchs engaged in the practice of letter writing, the main focus for this thesis are those letters composed by Elizabeth. Elizabeth was given an extensive humanist education as a child, an important aspect of which was training in good writing, in regards to both content and handwriting. Elizabeth made good use of this skill throughout her life and was a prolific letter writer who composed around 3,000 letters during her reign. This number cannot be definite as her correspondence has not been calendared and as such is still partially unknown. It is for this reason that the number of autograph letters she wrote is also impossible to calculate. Regardless of this it is clear that she paid close attention to letters dispatched in her name, often calling for revision of letters composed by her scribes.

or secretaries.⁴⁹ Although Elizabeth made extensive use of letter writing, both in her own hand and through the work of her scribes and secretaries, it has not been fully explored by historians, particularly in regards to its role in diplomacy.⁵⁰ This is because, generally, the letters of Elizabeth have been analysed out of context as examples of rhetorical strategies or to discover insights into the correspondents’ character, an approach that has produced important insights but not a complete understanding of their importance in their diplomatic context.

Therefore in order to gain the fullest understanding of these royal letters and their role in diplomacy and diplomatic practice, it is necessary to put them back into their greater context. Rosemary O’Day argued:

Letters will not be (and should not be) regarded simply as isolated texts, ripe for critical exegesis. Rather, they are seen as forming parts of a present and often continuing dialogue, the boundaries of which they sometimes define and incidentally reveal but oftentimes merely hint at in a tantalising manner.⁵¹

This view of letters is not entirely unique and is repeated by James Daybell who argued that 'letters must not be seen as isolated texts, but were often in fact only a single part of wider social and textual transactions'.⁵² The concept of letters as elements of a broader transaction is the foundation of this study, where the letters of Elizabeth must be viewed alongside other elements of English diplomatic practice in order to understand the role of the correspondence and its importance to diplomacy. To undertake such a task for the entirety of Elizabeth’s correspondence is, however, far too vast a project for the purposes of this thesis. I will therefore apply this approach to explore Anglo-Scottish relations and Elizabeth’s correspondence with James.

In addition to the abovementioned points it is important to note the manner in which the royal letters were transported between Elizabeth and James’ respective courts. The correspondence could be transported in a variety of ways, the main two of which were through the post service, or in the hands of diplomats and private

⁵⁰ Allinson, “These latter days of the world”, 1-2.
messengers. The transportation of letters through the post service from London to Edinburgh took on average one week.\textsuperscript{53} However, the post service was notoriously unreliable and often slower that it could be.\textsuperscript{54} As was the case between London and York which always took at lest three days to complete the 149 mile distance, a trip that under good conditions could be made in a single day.\textsuperscript{55} The use of private messengers or diplomats to convey a royal missive could assist in maintaining the letter’s security, but it did not ensure a delivery any faster than by utilising the postal service.\textsuperscript{56} Regardless of the chosen method for delivery postage time could vary significantly. This could result in letters being composed by one author before the reply to their last had reached them, thus breaking the pattern of reciprocity.\textsuperscript{57}

The main source material upon which this thesis is constructed are the letters of Elizabeth and James. I have read 120 letters that have been fully transcribed and published in edited volumes, some of which were published repeatedly and required comparison to establish such when dates did not align exactly. Additional care was taken in comparing some letters have been lightly or heavily edited in different volumes or transcriptions. Of these letters that I have read, sixty-nine were sent by Elizabeth and fifty-one by James. This is a portion of the known correspondence, of which there are at least 260 letters that have survived. Around fifty-five precent of these letters are autograph while the remaining forty-five per cent are scribal.\textsuperscript{58} The original letters that have survived are presently located within the manuscript collections of the National archives in London, the National Library of Scotland, the British Library and Edinburgh University Library.\textsuperscript{59} Elizabeth and James exhibited different approaches to their correspondence. Elizabeth preferred to compose the majority of her letters personally. In contrast James seems to have taken a more measured approach and around half of his correspondence was personally constructed.\textsuperscript{60} The lengths of the letters varied significantly from multiple pages in length to letters that were a collection of a few paragraphs. Within the correspondence a variety of topics and themes are raised and I have used these to guide the thesis. The

\textsuperscript{53} Schneider, 82.
\textsuperscript{54} Allinson, ‘The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I and King James VI’, 31.
\textsuperscript{56} Allinson, ‘The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I and King James VI’, 32.
\textsuperscript{57} Daybell, \textit{The Material Letter}, 142-143.
\textsuperscript{58} Allinson, ‘The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I and King James VI’, 19.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{60} Allinson, "These latter days of the world", 5.
correspondence additionally gave insights into its coexistence with other areas of diplomatic practice, with the majority of letters discussing, either briefly or in great depth, the work of ambassadors.

**Thesis Outline**

The intermingling of royal correspondence and diplomacy is at the core of this thesis and I commence by discussing the origins of the Anglo-Scottish alliance negotiated from 1585 to 1586. This negotiation established the multilayered nature of Anglo-Scottish relations that was to survive throughout Elizabeth’s reign, though not without its troubles. Border issues and the murder of Francis Russell raised profound difficulties during the negotiations that resulted in delays and uncertainty. It was only through the effective operation of the two aspects of diplomatic exchange that the treaty was concluded as the monarchs exerted their prerogatives and pressured their ministers to proceed. The correspondence at this time began to serve as a means to prevent troublesome rumours or to counteract them by writing the ‘truth’ of a situation and thus defuse tensions.

Concluding the Anglo-Scottish Alliance in the Treaty of Berwick was a significant achievement but it was almost undone shortly after with the discovery of the Babington Plot, which is the focus of Chapter Two. The discovery of the plot resulted in the execution of James’ mother Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Both before and after the execution diplomats toiled to find a solution to preserve the tenuous alliance. Initially James relied primarily on his diplomats but as the situation became more uncertain he began to utilise the royal correspondence. After Mary’s execution Elizabeth sought to use the correspondence to express her innocence in the affair. Her expression may, or may not, have been genuine but it was a necessary diplomatic stratagem. Expressions of innocence occur several times throughout the correspondence and the use of it as a rhetorical trope was an important tool which both of the monarchs utilised at various times. Mary’s execution resulted in a suspension of diplomatic relations, at both levels of diplomacy, between England and Scotland that was not restored until shortly before the sailing of the Spanish Armada.

The restoration of relations in 1588 and England’s victory over the Spanish did not place Scotland on the backburner of English diplomatic concerns. Instead, the period from 1588 to 1595 was possibly one of the most difficult for Anglo-Scottish relations and it is the topic of Chapter Three. During this time Elizabeth and her government were anxious about the increasing influence of the Scottish Catholics, led
by Lord Huntly. Their concerns were apparently justified following the interception of letters sent to Spain from the Catholic Lords. However James, to whom Huntly was a favourite, refused to act against the Catholic party and did not see the issue in the same manner as the English. James’ refusal to act on what the English saw as a threat to their security caused deep uncertainty over the ongoing security of the north and connected the newer threat of Catholic conspiracy to the much older concern of the Postern Gate, England’s vulnerable northern border. Through the utilisation of both layers of diplomatic practice the issue was eventually negotiated, though not without truly hazardous occasions when the future of the alliance was placed in severe doubt.

Chapter Four focuses on what at first glance is a minor issue but which, strangely, was one that dominated the correspondence between James and Elizabeth. In 1598 a criminal by the name of Valentine Thomas was apprehended on the border and questioned by the English warden. Thomas claimed that he had gained the support of James to assassinate Elizabeth. Elizabeth and her government placed little value on Thomas’ accusations but after hearing of it James became consumed by fears that these accusations would become commonly believed. James’ paranoia over the Thomas affair was based entirely on its possible implications to his right of succession to the English throne. It was not the first occasion where the succession directed his correspondence or policies towards Elizabeth, indeed it had formed a key part in his considerations for the establishment of their alliance. The succession filled James’ thoughts in the last years of Elizabeth’s reign and it prompted his involvement in risky strategies to achieve it, much to Elizabeth’s irritation.

With the death of Elizabeth in March 1603 the lengthy correspondence came to an end. It had provided a means for the two monarchs, one at the end of a dynasty and one at the beginning of another, to communicate directly and personally with each other. This is not to say however that the correspondence existed in isolation or that only Elizabeth and James knew of its existence. As the letters themselves illustrate they worked in tandem with ministerially supervised diplomats. Furthermore as Alinson suggests, Elizabeth may have thought of diplomacy as possessing ‘two separate but interlinking levels: one between monarchs (negotiated by them “personally” through letters and according to ancient traditions of honor, duty and mutual obligation), and one between states (negotiated by ambassadors and
secretaries in order to preserve or further territorial or economic interests). Allinson’s undeveloped suggestion provides a starting point and this thesis will seek to prove its foundation through exploring the correspondence and Anglo-Scottish diplomacy. Throughout this thesis I will argue that the correspondence, and the work of diplomats, formed a multilayered system of diplomacy that strengthened the Anglo-Scottish relationship and enabled it to survive the pressures of the late sixteenth century.

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61 Allinson, *A Monarchy of Letters*, 44.
Chapter One: A New Alliance and Border Disputes

In 1585, with the conflict with Spain looming, Elizabeth and her government needed to secure their northern border. It was for this reason that Elizabeth commenced her correspondence with James. One of the initial concerns in the correspondence was the negotiation of a more permanent understanding between their two kingdoms, in effect, the completion of a formal alliance in the Treaty of Berwick. The negotiations took place over two years and were far more complicated than the historiography suggests. This chapter will discuss the lengthy negotiations that occurred through the letters as well as the work of ambassadors. The complementary approaches allowed a multilayered diplomatic connection to be created between England and Scotland, which would survive more or less intact for the remainder of Elizabeth’s reign. During the treaty negotiations James’ claim to the English throne was a point of discussion in both correspondence and diplomatic negotiations. Parallel concerns of an English title for James, a pension, and citizenship rights for Scots in England were also raised, but only James’ pension was successfully achieved. The negotiations were slowed in 1585 when an English nobleman was murdered on the borders, giving rise to old concerns about the borders, and this chapter will analyse the implications of this on the Anglo-Scottish diplomatic relationship. This chapter will also discuss the problem of rumours in Anglo-Scottish diplomacy and how this could be negated if the threads of the dual natured diplomacy were utilised, but also in contrast how implications of rumours could be made worse through diplomatic inaction.

The Treaty of Berwick was signed on the 5th of July 1586. Susan Doran observed that the conclusion of this treaty is often seen as the end of the Auld Alliance between Scotland and France, and afterwards Scotland diminished in importance for England.¹ The historiography on Elizabethan foreign policy and diplomacy generally reflects this conclusion. However, this interpretation is a simplistic rendering of the complicated and important relationship between these two kingdoms and one that continued to be of high significance to England during Elizabeth’s reign. The Treaty of Berwick formed the new foundation for the Anglo-

¹ Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’, 203.
Scottish relationship. It was negotiated not only by ambassadors on behalf of their respective kingdoms, but also by Elizabeth and James through their correspondence. It was through this joint effort of correspondence and diplomatic action that a working understanding was initiated and the foundations of the treaty established that would lay the framework for Anglo-Scottish diplomacy for the remainder of Elizabeth’s reign.

During the negotiations of the Anglo-Scottish treaty there were two diplomats who served Elizabeth in Scotland. The negotiations were initiated when Elizabeth named Edward Wotton special ambassador in 1585 for the purpose of creating the alliance. Wotton had been involved in several diplomatic missions for Elizabeth from 1577. Thomas Randolph replaced Wotton in January 1586. Randolph also had diplomatic experience though his was far more extensive than Wotton’s. Randolph was a career diplomat and served on twelve different embassies for England over thirty-one years. He was also, in addition to his role as a diplomat, the master of posts, which was an important part of the diplomatic service. In this role he supervised about thirty riders who carried the letters and documents that formed the core of diplomacy. Both of these men were experienced in the work of diplomacy, having served before and as such would have been familiar with the negotiations and arrangements that they were being called upon to develop. They were aware also of the limitations placed on their roles by their Queen. Diplomats who made promises that went beyond their instructions were likely to lose their careers and have their promises repudiated by Elizabeth. Though Wotton was not as experienced as Randolph, they were both familiar with the demands of Tudor diplomacy and would use their knowledge of it to achieve a successful alliance between the two kingdoms.

In 1585 England’s situation was troubling. The prospect of war with Spain in the Netherlands was a growing possibility, while England had few allies, and most of them were seriously unreliable. In this environment securing their northern border was crucial and the decision was made by Elizabeth and her council to explore the

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4 Bell, ‘Elizabethan Diplomacy’, 268.
6 Ibid., 737.
possibility of an alliance with Scotland. Elizabeth had instructions issued to Edward Wotton in April ordering him to sound out James concerning the creation of an alliance, with the defence of Protestantism being presented as a unifying factor. Wotton was also to offer financial assistance to James. Following his arrival in Scotland, James gave Wotton a favourable response and urged that the negotiations proceed quickly. A draft of the treaty was ready by June but then it met opposition in the Scottish court and it became clear that James Stewart, the Earl of Arran and a dominant individual in James’ court, did not support the proposed alliance. The obstacle of Arran was not easy to bypass and Wotton fell back on old English methods for managing Scottish politics, namely, he conspired against Arran with his Scottish political opponents and provided assistance in his downfall. But Wotton’s involvement in Arran’s fall was suspected and it was necessary for the English to replace him with another ambassador while Wotton returned to Berwick.

The articles of the treaty were initially framed by the shared religion of the two kingdoms. While neither England nor Scotland were universally Protestant, versions of Protestantism formed the official religion of both kingdoms. Therefore the creation of an alliance based on a shared allegiance to Protestantism in the face of largely unfriendly Catholic opponents was politically sound. It could additionally have provided a way to negate some of the mutual distrust that had long existed between England and Scotland. In a letter to Elizabeth, dated the 9th of July 1585, James expressed himself to be highly favourable to the idea of basing the understanding between their respective kingdoms upon their common religion. He wrote that he was highly satisfied with the articles her ambassador Wotton had given him and that they were the ‘fittest and most likely grounds for our sureties to be built on…’. James continued to elaborate that part of the foundation for the alliance was to be that of shared religion, ‘the motion of the same being that religion whereof, we both have, since our very coronations, found the favour of God effectively assisting and preserving us against so many dangers…’. The letter, which foregrounds shared religious sympathies, initiated the Anglo-Scottish negotiations and the proposed treaty articles. This letter is significant because it is a scribal letter, except for its signature and postscript, and would therefore present an official governmental position in

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7 ‘Instructions by Elizabeth for Mr. Edward Wotton’, April 1585, in CSPScots, 7, 611.
8 MacCaffrey, Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 422; ‘Edward Wotton to [Walsingham]’, 1 June 1585, in CSPScots, 7, 654; ‘Edward Wotton to Walsingham’, 17 June 1585, in CSPScots, 7, 673.
9 ‘James to Elizabeth’, 9 July 1585, L.K.J., 62-64.
achieving a royal objective, rather than James’ position. The religious foundation was not to be the entirety of their understanding, however, with both Elizabeth and James using the letters to introduce further ideas, as was the case in a later letter from James.

In August 1585 James wrote another letter to Elizabeth and proposed a modification to the priorities of the treaty. From this brief letter, only a paragraph long and written in his own hand, it appears that the emphasis on religion outlined in the scribal letter analysed above were dominating the proposed articles of the treaty and as such he sought to initiate a counterbalance to that. He wrote: ‘although my articles that the ambassador sends to you desires the league to concern only religion, yet my plain intention is that the league shall be offensive and defensive for all invasions upon whatsomever pretext.’ The clear implication is that James sought not simply an understanding with Elizabeth but a full alliance that committed Scotland to the defence and possibly to involvement in the conflicts of the English. It was also one that firmly aligned Scotland against the Catholic powers of Europe that his mother, Mary Stuart, had favoured. It appears in this instance that James wished to use the correspondence to declare his intentions directly to Elizabeth without the intermediaries of diplomatic practice. His declared desire did not remove the input of others, but it allowed the monarchs to strengthen their strategic understanding while the diplomats discussed the technical details of the alliance. This inter-monarchical use of the correspondence changed the scope of the treaty being negotiated from one that had been originally founded on the concept of shared Protestantism to one that extended towards being an offensive/defensive alliance. It indicates that the royal correspondence operated in tandem with the work of the ambassadors and that neither were sufficient for the complete management of the treaty negotiations.

The Murder of Francis Russell
The negotiation of the Anglo-Scottish alliance was not a smooth process and in July 1585 the diplomatic negotiations were disrupted by the murder of an English nobleman, Baron Russell, on the borders. Francis Russell was the son of the Second Earl of Bedford. Bedford had been an important member of Elizabeth’s government from the time of her accession. He had been named as a privy councillor in 1558 and

10 ‘James to Elizabeth,’ 19 August 1585, C.W., 265-266.
had served in numerous posts including on the Council of the North.  His son, Lord Russell, had accompanied the English warden of the Borders to a meeting with the Scottish warden at Cocklaw on a day of truce. During the meeting he stood to the side with his own men and spoke with an unnamed gentleman when he ‘was sodenly shott with a gonne and slaine in the myddest of his owne men…’. Soon after it became clear that several Scotsmen had been involved and a proclamation was issued for their arrest. However, the men named had disappeared into Scotland and the assistance of James and his government were necessary to capture them. The capture of the men was an aim pursued by England’s ambassador on the ground, but also simultaneously by Elizabeth herself in the course of her correspondence.

The first trace of the murder within the royal correspondence is in a letter written by James at the beginning of August 1585 stating his innocence in the recent ‘mischief’, though he did not elaborate about what the issue was at hand. The context of the letter was revealed in Elizabeth’s reply where she discussed her sadness at the murder of one of her nobles by the hand of a Scotsman and thanked James for questioning his favourite, Arran, over the incident. Elizabeth’s demands in her letters concerning this murder are ostensibly concerned with justice and satisfaction for her nobleman’s death, demands that were still being made in January 1586 and which gave rise to promises by James in May for the delivery of those responsible to repair the damage that had been done to her honour. Honour was a key ideology for both Elizabeth and James, and is discussed in Chapter Two. The murder of a single nobleman on the borders between the two kingdoms did not seem to be of real importance in and of itself, but it did slow the negotiations of the alliance as Elizabeth sought satisfaction for the death of Bedford’s son.

The death of Russell was not only discussed by the monarchs, it was also the topic of lengthy discussions by English ambassadors and the Scottish government. The link between Russell’s murder and the completion of the treaty was made clear to Randolph in the instructions issued to him in January 1586, which stated:

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12 ‘Forster to Walsingham’, 28 July 1585, in Border Papers, 1, 188-189; ‘Proclamation against the Carres, &c.’, [August], in Border Papers, 1, 190.
Touching the accomplishment of the late treaty, he shall declare to him how necessary it is, so that the world may have a sound conceit thereof, that something should be done for the reparation of their honour, owing to the murder committed on the late Lord Russell.  

Elizabeth’s desire for satisfaction for the murder became a common point of discussion during the negotiations and Randolph reported the steps he had taken to gain this and what progress, if any, was made. In May the order had been given in Scotland for those who had been responsible for Russell’s murder to be delivered to Lord Scrope on the Borders. This was not quickly achieved however, and on the 3rd of July Randolph was still requesting the men to be delivered to English custody. This ongoing discussion about the murderers of Russell did not halt the negotiations for the league, which continued throughout the difficulty and was eventually concluded in July 1586, but the influence of endemic border disputes on relations between England and Scotland should not be underestimated. Nor should the combined efforts of the ambassadors and the royal correspondence to the conclusion of the alliance be ignored.

Border disputes had been a regular feature of Anglo-Scottish relations for centuries. Their regularity led to an understanding of the potential volatility of the borders and the historic influence of border disputes on diplomatic relations. In one of her letters concerning the murder of Russell, Elizabeth commented on the fact that such events often sparked greater conflicts between their kingdoms: ‘I mean not only of the murder, but of the breaking out upon our borderers, which commonly are the beginnings of our quarrels.’ This is a clear expression of the importance of maintaining stability and peace in the border area between England and Scotland, and that disputes in such areas could spread far beyond their more humble beginnings and degenerate into war. For this reason the borders and border disputes became a common topic of discussion over the years of Elizabeth and James’s correspondence. The discussion of border conflict also indicates that the letters were used as a means for both Elizabeth and James to raise concerns or issues that they felt warranted the other’s personal attention in order to prevent misunderstandings. Through the use of

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16 ‘Instructions for Mr Thomas Randolph’, [31] January 1585-6, CSPScot, 8, 207.  
17 ‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 21 May 1586, CSPScot, 8, 394.  
19 ‘Elizabeth to James’, August 1585, C.W., 263-264.
their letters the monarchs had in effect established a means to communicate concerns without the added interference of the more public diplomacy of their ambassadors and ministers. The correspondence created what we would today refer to as a ‘hot line’. Indeed, the letters continued to discuss the topic of border disputes, from the time of Russell’s death through to October 1602 when James raised the concern of border disputes again, about five months before Elizabeth’s death. While the murder of Russell slowed the negotiations of the Anglo-Scottish treaty, it was one incident in ongoing concerns about the borders that were a long-lasting source of difficulty in the diplomatic relationship between the two kingdoms. Furthermore border issues and disputes were something Elizabeth and James sought to limit through an understanding created by their correspondence, which was supplemented by the service of their ambassadors.

Rumours in Anglo-Scottish Diplomacy

Before the conclusion of the alliance the letters were taking on multiple roles within the diplomatic exchange, one of which was to provide a means for the monarchs to counter rumours that could potentially impact on the Anglo-Scottish relationship. In July 1585 James wrote to Elizabeth of his hope that she would not act on the basis of any rumour concerning him: ‘I doubt not, madame, but ye will suspend your judgement of me not withstanding any fellow’s reports till you be informed by myself, for you may be assured to be fully resolved according to my promise in whatsomever you inquiere of me.’ James’ request that Elizabeth await a written explanation from himself rather than base her judgement on rumour was one that Elizabeth was fully prepared to support, as it provided a valuable means of countering rumours, though with a single condition. She replied: ‘And for that your request is so honourable, retaining so much reason, I were out of senses if I should not suspend any hearsay till the answer if your own action, which the actor ought best to know, and so assure you I mean and vow to do; with this request that you grant me reciproque.’ Her acceptance of the proposal was founded on a reciprocal disbelieving of rumours until explanation was given. The use of the letters to explain actions and to dispel rumour was a tool both monarchs drew upon throughout the correspondence and occasionally acted as an important diplomatic tool to remove the tensions that such rumours could cause, although this was not always the case.

21 ‘James to Elizabeth’, 9 July 1585, L.K.J., 62-64.
An example of this occurred in early January 1598 when news reached England of James’ most recent Parliament, held in December 1597, in which James spoke heatedly about Elizabeth’s withholding of his pension, the attitude of England’s Parliament towards his claim to the English throne and of Mary Stuart’s execution.23 James’ reckless speech prompted Elizabeth to write to him:

When the first blast of a strange unused and seld heard of sound had pierced my ears, I suppose that flying fame, who with swift quills oft passeth with the worst, had brought report of some untruth; but when too too many records in your open parliament were witnesses of such pronounced words, not more to my disgrace than to your dishonour…24

The source of Elizabeth’s shock and dissatisfaction was a speech made by James after hearing a rumour. The rumour in question stated that Elizabeth and her Parliament had spoken against James’ right to the English throne and acted disrespectfully towards his mother’s memory, which proved to be unfounded.25 In this case James acted precipitously and without confirming the validity of the rumour through either mechanism of the Anglo-Scottish diplomatic understanding, and his ill-thought words quickly spread back to England. The spread of such rumours was not uncommon and the general instability of the political climate resulted in stories becoming exaggerated and believed as truth.26 Elizabeth and James’ earlier agreement to wait for an explanation before acting on rumours, set out in their letters of 1585, was not in evidence in James’ Parliamentary address of 1597.

Elizabeth’s letter to James prompted him to reply to her in February 1598, in which he opened by stating:

Although I had sufficiently purged to your late ambassador, Sir William Bowes, the calumnious and untrue reports that came to your ears of me, yet I could not satisfy myself without sending one of my
own [ambassadors] unto you, as well to inform you more amply of the truth thereof…

James’ statement of innocence, a trope that is used in several ways within their correspondence and will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, made it difficult for Elizabeth to push the matter further as it would call his honour and word as a monarch into question. He continued in his letter to attempt to calm the situation that had become diplomatically difficult through his own actions. James sought to do so by emphasising their friendship and long amity that had been created by the Treaty of Berwick. He also utilised the two threads of Anglo-Scottish diplomatic connection, firstly the royal correspondence to personally express his position and secondly though the dispatch of an ambassador. The exchange of letters and ambassadors following James’ parliamentary appearance in 1597 demonstrates both the use of multi-layered diplomatic connections between England and Scotland, and the difficulties if they were not utilised to manage questions of rumour as was laid out in 1585.

**Parallel Concerns**

During 1585-1586 the negotiation of the Anglo-Scottish league was not the only matter under consideration by the monarchs and their diplomats. Other concerns were negotiated parallel to it, one of which was a pension for James. Throughout the 1580s and 1590s James was in desperate need of money, a fact of which the English were well aware. The idea of subsidising him directly, instead of supporting groups of Scottish nobles, was first raised in 1579 but was not seen as worthwhile until the mid-1580s when James began to exercise his personal rule, and around the time that the negotiations for the alliance were being conducted. During the negotiations the sum of the pension was a source of debate between the two monarchs and their diplomatic representatives. Randolph wrote to Walsingham in May 1586 stating that James was adamant he had been offered more by Wotton for his pension. The figure of up to £6000 per year had been communicated to James without Elizabeth’s approval. Walsingham responded later that month that Elizabeth would give James no more than £4000 per year regardless of James’ dissatisfaction. Walsingham and Burghley

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sought to have the amount increased but Elizabeth was adamant. Over the years that
the pension was paid to James, from May 1586 to December 1602, a specific figure
was never confirmed and the amount varied from year to year, but averaged £3,441 a
year. However, the grant of a pension was not without inherent difficulties for
James. The main problem was that the pension was a gift, not a loan, and was thus
accompanied by social concepts of honour and status. Through the gift the giver was
demonstrating higher status and wealth than the grantee. Essentially the receiver had
to genuflect to the giver, and also suffer additionally the stigmas of need and lower
status. This was a politically sensitive issue for James as a King and he was
determined to emphasise his status as a monarch in both his letters to Elizabeth and in
his dealings with diplomats regardless of what his much-required pension implied.

James was highly defensive of his status as a ruling monarch and he strongly
expressed it during the negotiation of the treaty. Most monarchs were sensitive to
perceived slights to their rights or positions as rulers and James was no exception. He
was particularly emphatic in this regard, however, as he had only recently asserted his
personal kingship and ability to rule his kingdom. In doing this he also stressed the
commonality between himself and other monarchs. In a meeting between James and
the French ambassador, Randolph reported that in response to the French request that
James sign no alliance with England without informing them, James answered:

I reverence and account of the King your master as I ought to do of
my uncle and good friend, yet I pray you to remember and let the
King your master know that I am a King, as he is, not comparing in
greatness, but in dignity, and so as free to make league with any
Prince as ever my predecessors were with him, and that I need no
more of his consent than he hath of mine or my predecessors in any
league that he or his predecessors had made.

In this James was making his point to the French that he was the equal of their King
and would not be dictated to by them. It was also a break from the past where the
Scots were close allies of France. Here James made the point that he was not bound to
that past. It was not only with the French that he sought to emphasise his royal status.

31 ‘Walsingham to Thomas Randolph’, 19 March 1585-6, CSPScot, 8, 254; ‘Walsingham to Thomas
Randolph’, 24 May 1586, CSPScot, 8, 396.
33 Ibid., 122-123.
34 ‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 17 March 1586, CSPScot, 8, 249.
In a letter to Elizabeth, dated the 9th of July 1585, he wrote that ‘we both have, since our very coronations, found the favour of God effectively assisting and preserving us against so many dangers…’\(^{35}\) His reference to their mutual coronations, though far more subtle than his statement to the French was just as clear, he was a King as Elizabeth was a Queen, and thus they were equals regardless of the implications his financial obligation imposed.

In addition to his pension, James sought an English title from Elizabeth. During the negotiation of the alliance Lord Maitland requested ‘that some name of dignity might be given to the King with her majesty's benevolence that there might be inserted…’\(^{36}\) James’ attempt to gain title and lands in England was not based on revenue or the honour of additional titles. He sought it for two reasons. The first was that the gift of title could conceal the source of money given to him as a pension and remove the implication of lesser status. However the secondary reason was a more significant long-term concern. The right to a title and lands within England would act as a safeguard to his right to the English succession as it was against English law for a foreigner to succeed, whereas an English title would have circumvented the problem. The connection between this request and the succession was further expressed by the duchy of Cornwall being named as a possibility, a duchy traditionally given to the English monarch’s heir.\(^{37}\) But Elizabeth firmly refused the request for an English title, leaving James in an uncomfortable position of uncertain succession and an implied lower status to the Queen of England as a result of his pension.

With the refusal of an English title James had Maitland, his Secretary, focus his efforts on the creation of an ‘instrument’ to sit beside the treaty. The ‘instrument’ was to be a letter or document that confirmed, or at least safeguarded, James’ claim to the English succession and to formalise further the pension that was to be part of the alliance. The English government knew of James’ wish for an official confirmation from the beginning of the negotiations. Randolph’s instructions in January 1586 noted that James had made a request for official recognition of his right to the throne to be included as an article of the treaty previously and would likely issue another. If he was faced with such a request he was instructed to suggest that the confirmation


should occur outside of the treaty as a separate document.\textsuperscript{38} The issue of James’ claim did arise as predicted and in discussions between Maitland and Randolph the request was made for an article to be included committing Elizabeth not to prejudice James’ claim in any way. To this Randolph informed both the secretary and James himself that Elizabeth would only handle this matter in a separate document and by no other way.\textsuperscript{39} To assist with the writing of the document the Scottish government sent Elizabeth a proposed ‘instrument’. This document stated that Elizabeth would give James an annual pension and it committed her to:

not by act, constitution or any writ directly or indirectly impair the title or right which her said dearest brother has or pretends to the succession of her crown if she have no heirs of her own body, unless by his public misbehaviour or ingratitude she be justly moved to the contrary.\textsuperscript{40}

Elizabeth received James’ ‘instrument’ poorly, and she wrote to James questioning his desire for such a formal letter. She wrote: ‘Must so great doubt be made of free goodwill, and gift be so mistrusted, that our sign Emanuel must assure?’\textsuperscript{41} Elizabeth’s words indicate that James had made a misstep in this request for a formal signature, her sign manual, and by doing so had publically questioned Elizabeth’s word and honour as a fellow monarch. Such questioning was a dangerous thing to do in the process of a treaty negotiation and by seeking confirmation of his claim he placed it at risk. Her letter prompted a reply from James the following month attempting to negate the difficulty caused by his request. He insisted:

And for the instrument whereunto I desire your seal to be affixed, think not, I pray you, that I desire it for any mistrust; for I protest before god that your simple promise would be more than sufficient to me, if it were not that I would have the whole world to understand how it pleaseth you to honour me above my demerits.\textsuperscript{42}

James constructed his response by insisting that his seeking her confirmation of his claims was not motivated by distrust, but rather his wish to demonstrate publically

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\textsuperscript{39} ‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 14 March 1586, \textit{CSPScot}, 8, 244.
\textsuperscript{40} ‘Bond Proposed by James VI’, April 1586, \textit{CSPScot}, 8, 302.
\textsuperscript{41} ‘Elizabeth to James’, March 1586, \textit{S.W.}, 165-168.
\textsuperscript{42} ‘James to Elizabeth’, 1 April 1586, \textit{C.W.}, 276-277.
\end{flushleft}
how much Elizabeth honoured him through granting it and to act as a deterrent to others from claiming the succession. While rhetorically astute this argument did not convince Elizabeth and in May Randolph informed James that the issue of the succession would be dealt with only in a letter from Elizabeth rather than in the form of the ‘instrument’. At the end of the same month Walsingham wrote to Randolph stating that Elizabeth felt her own letter was sufficient, and regardless she was disinclined to yield to James and give him the satisfaction of his instrument being signed. The complete denial of the instrument and all it had hoped to confirm for James was solidified in June when the ‘instrument’ was returned to Scotland unsigned by the English Queen.

The final issue discussed alongside the treaty negotiations in 1586 was the Scottish request for a reciprocal right to enjoy the liberty of free denizens in each other’s kingdoms. The idea of such a right was not a new one for the Scottish people. The Scots had been able to become naturalized individuals in France as part of the ‘Auld Alliance’ and hold the privileges of being a resident of that kingdom on the condition that they conformed to the laws of France. The idea of having such a right established between the kingdoms of England and Scotland were raised by Maitland in March during the early discussions for the league. Randolph reported that,

The last point was for some liberties to be reciprocally granted to subjects of both realms, as free denizens, as in France. I advised him that our laws differing so from those of France, such could only be granted by Parliament.

It appears that his answer did not dissuade James and several days later Randolph had an audience with the king during which he was questioned again on this matter. Randolph reported it to Walsingham by letter saying:

With regard to the freedom of the merchants in her majesty's country and other liberties to be granted, as in France, I told him that France

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43 ‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 13 May 1586, CSPScot, 8, 377.
44 ‘Walsingham to Thomas Randolph’, 24 May 1586, CSPScot, 8, 396
45 ‘Burghley to Thomas Randolph’, June 1586, CSPScot, 8, 434.
46 Elizabeth Bonner, 'French Naturalization of the Scots in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', The Historical Journal 40, No. 4: (1997), 1085, 1099.
47 ‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 14 March 1586, CSPScot, 8, 244.
and England were governed by different laws, and assured him that it was against the acts of our parliaments.\footnote{Ibid., 244.}

Though his answer on this was quite definite it did not conclusively resolve the question. Maitland informed Randolph in May 1586 that the nobility were concerned that following the conclusion of the league they would likely lose the benefits they had previously held in France and were not being compensated with a similar right in England.\footnote{‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 13 May 1586, CSPScot, 8, 377.} The risk of noble interference in the league did not sway Randolph or his government and the proposed right was not included in the treaty. The four issues of James’ pension, title, ‘instrument’ and naturalization were negotiated alongside the alliance, but only the pension was agreed upon. The removal of these contentious issues through the two strands of diplomatic endeavour should have made the conclusion of the league a smooth process but this was not the case.

**Conclusion of the Treaty**

The monarchs had agreed to the terms of the league between England and Scotland, the accompanying concerns had been managed in one manner or another and the delivery of those accused of Russell’s murder approved. All this, however, did not mean that the conclusion of the league was without incident. As per James’ wishes the conclusion of treaty was intended to occur on the 19th of June 1586, James’ birthday.\footnote{‘Thomas Randolph to Walsingham’, 18 May 1586, CSPScot, 8, 382.} The determination of James to see it finished was not shared by all within his court, and Maitland forced a delay. Maitland was not an opponent of the proposed alliance itself, in fact he supported the principle, but he felt that the English had not offered enough.\footnote{Maurice Lee jr. ‘Maitland, John, first Lord Maitland of Thirlestane (1543–1595).’ In Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press. \url{http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17826} (accessed January 6, 2015); Dawson, Scotland Reformed 1488–1587, 316.} However James, who wanted the league concluded, overruled Maitland.\footnote{Lee, ‘Maitland, John, first Lord Maitland of Thirlestane (1543–1595).’} Therefore the Commissioners from England and Scotland met at Berwick in July 1586 to finalise the treaty.\footnote{‘Memoranda of Thomas Randolph's Proceedings in his Embassy to Scotland’, [July] 1586, CSPScot, 8, 537.} The meeting did not pass without dispute and the commissioners argued about the articles that were to be included in the treaty. This dispute was not well received by Elizabeth as she felt that they were wasting time
since she and James had previously agreed upon the articles to be included.\textsuperscript{54} Elizabeth’s disfavour and a desire of the commissioners to finish their mission provided sufficient encouragement to finalise the treaty. The league was concluded on the 5\textsuperscript{th} of July. In its final form it included twelve articles with the ninth article concerning complaints on the Borders left out of the treaty.\textsuperscript{55}

Historians have identified the Treaty of Berwick as a ‘Protestant alliance for mutual defence’.\textsuperscript{56} While this is an accurate summarisation of its purpose it does not encompass the significance of the changes to the diplomatic relationships that had occurred. For much of their history England and Scotland had been avowed enemies and even today after being unified for so long there still exists a strong rivalry between the two countries. The league that was established between England and Scotland in 1586 was not a simple process nor was it ‘easy to negotiate a treaty in early 1586’ as one historian states,\textsuperscript{57} instead it required a multilayered diplomatic exchange to achieve. It was also not the end of Anglo-Scottish relations, or the importance of Scotland to English diplomatic considerations as much of the historiography implies. As Doran observes ‘most text books and surveys of English foreign policy (including my own) devote little or no space, to Anglo-Scottish relations after 1586 or at best 1587.’\textsuperscript{58} Yet Scotland continued to be of significant importance to England’s concerns and it would remain so for the remainder of Elizabeth’s reign as this thesis will demonstrate.

The Anglo-Scottish league established in July 1586 was the work of complex diplomacy which was achieved not only through the work of the diplomats on the ground but also by the guidance of Maitland and Walsingham, and through the personal correspondence of the monarchs. This was an alliance achieved through a multi-layered use of diplomacy that proved capable of managing the demands made on it during the negotiations. Without these multiple threads of diplomacy this alliance could have faltered. James may have found the promise of a greater pension from his French relatives to be of more use than the smaller one with no guarantees offered by the English. He could have listened to the words of the Spanish and kept

\textsuperscript{54} ‘Elizabeth to the Earl of Rutland and the Rest of the Commissioners at Berwick’, 4 July 1586, \textit{CSPScot}, 8, 502.
\textsuperscript{56} Goodare, ‘James VI's English Subsidy’, 112.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{58} Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’, 203.
away from the meddling English. But England offered something to James that the French and the Spanish could not: namely a hope for Elizabeth’s throne and in the meantime her promise not to prejudice his claim in any way. This message was consistently woven through all levels of the English diplomatic effort and though they promised smaller initial rewards the promise of greater rewards was sufficient for James to accept the league.

With the successful negotiation of their alliance Elizabeth and James would have most likely expected a calming of tensions within their relationship and a more regular conduct of diplomatic exchange. Elizabeth expressed her joy at the creation of such an amity in her letter written to James shortly following the treaty’s conclusion and professed her hope that their alliance be sustained, ‘wich by Gods grace shall ever remain inviolated for my part, and doubt not of your just requittal.’59 It seems that both monarchs were well pleased with the achievement of diplomatic understanding as they turned to other matters requiring their attentions. For James the continued topsy-turvy whirl of Scottish politics, and for Elizabeth her growing concern for the unfurling events in the Netherlands and her diplomatic estrangement with Spain, dominated their activities. However, Elizabeth and James’ hopes for peaceful relations with each other without significant diplomatic tensions were not long lived as the uncovering of a plot against Elizabeth’s life threw the fragile new alliance into question.

Chapter Two: Mary’s Execution and Elizabeth’s Innocence

In the previous chapter we saw the creation of the Anglo-Scottish alliance in the Treaty of Berwick, which had been achieved through dual levels of diplomatic activity, these being royal correspondence and the work of ambassadors. During the negotiations James began to assume his authority as King and he increasingly sought to project his equal standing as a monarch to Elizabeth. Elizabeth herself maintained the dominant position as the elder monarch and she assumed the role of advisor to the young king in the course of their letters. This chapter will continue to explore the interplay of diplomacy through the work of ambassadors and the royal correspondence following the conclusion of the treaty until the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

The defining concern of the Anglo-Scottish diplomacy during this period was the discovery of Mary Stuart’s involvement in the Babington plot and her resultant trial and execution. Throughout this two year period the fate of Mary was debated and discussed by ambassadors in London and personally amongst the monarchs who were seeking a way to resolve the problem in a mutually satisfactory manner. Additionally this chapter will explore the rhetorical trope of innocence, which can be found within the letters exchanged between Elizabeth and James. This trope was of particular importance in the aftermath of Mary Stuart’s execution and was utilised in Elizabeth’s attempts to preserve the Anglo-Scottish relationship. The alliance, which was more or less suspended in the wake of Mary’s execution, was restored shortly before the coming of the Armada, an event that reminded both parties of the necessity of the Protestant Anglo-Scottish alliance for their mutual defence from their Catholic opponents.

Diplomacy during the Trial of Mary, Queen of Scots

In an autograph letter from Elizabeth to James on the 4th of October 1586 the first traces of the discovered plot against Elizabeth were revealed. Elizabeth did not discuss the plot in detail nor did she name anyone involved. This in itself is not unusual with Elizabeth’s letters to James, as she often left individuals unnamed and referred to them indirectly. The practice of leaving certain specific details out of letters was not uncommon and was used during the early modern period to ensure the
security of information. The messengers entrusted to transport the letter to its recipient would usually fill in the resultant missing information orally. Thus Elizabeth commented on the most recent plot against her in an indirect manner, writing that she ‘render you many loving thanks for the joy you took of my narrow escape from the chaws of death, to which I might have easily fallen but that the hand of the Highest saved me from that snare.’ Her letter continued to place the origin of the plot on the actions and the encouragement of the Jesuits who appear to have encouraged the murder of Protestant monarchs. In her letter Elizabeth appeared shaken, or at least keen to utilise this as an opportunity for diplomatic advantage, as she concluded by urging James to move against any Jesuit or their supporters in Scotland for the defence of himself as well as herself. She wrote ‘For God’s love, regard your surety above all persuasions, and account him no subject that entertains them! Make no edicts for scorn, but to be observed. Let them be rebels…’. The full exposure of this plot was quick and it soon became apparent that Mary Stuart was the unnamed conspirator. The period between the trial of Mary during October 1586 and her execution in February 1587 was a time of intense diplomatic exchange by both diplomatic personnel and royal correspondence, and it severely tested their new alliance. During this period the recently established multilayered approach to Anglo-Scottish diplomacy was key to negotiating the pressures placed on their relationship. The correspondence that flowed between the monarchs was an important aspect of the overall diplomatic exchange on the topic and was used by Elizabeth and James to seek some measure of understanding or small concessions from the other.

The direction and volume of the correspondence between Elizabeth and James reveals which of the monarchs found the Babington Plot to be more diplomatically significant. For the period covered by this chapter, Mary dominated Elizabeth’s letters. Elizabeth wrote four letters to James concerning Mary before the execution on the 8th of February 1587 and following the execution she would write another dated 14th of February. James, in comparison, wrote two letters to Elizabeth before Mary’s

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2 Ibid., 457.
3 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 4 October 1586, *C.W.*, 286-287.
4 Ibid., 286-287.
death dated 16th of December 1586 and 26th of January 1587. Another letter dated either late February or early March followed Mary’s execution. The pattern of James’ letters on this subject warrants some scrutiny as he did not send any personal correspondence to Elizabeth while Mary’s trial proceeded and did not write until following the pronouncement of her guilt. The frequency of James’ letters increased as the news from England indicated even more strongly that Mary’s life was in danger and that there was a real prospect of her execution. Elizabeth wrote more consistently in regards to Mary’s trial and situation, taking the initiative in their personal correspondence. Her letters are dated 4th of October 1586, 15th of October 1586, January 1587 and 1st of February 1587. This is most likely because she was aware that Mary would be unlikely to survive her involvement in this latest plot and was concerned about the diplomatic fallout should Mary be executed. From the exchange of letters it is possible to conclude that Elizabeth thought that this matter warranted a significant element of personal diplomacy in addition to the more public usage of diplomats than James.

James’ response to Mary being discovered as a conspirator against Elizabeth, and then being placed on trial, was initially reserved. James wrote in December 1586 in placating tones that suggested sympathy for Elizabeth’s position, saying: ‘I know well enough how hardly ye are pressed by the objecting the peril of your own life unto you, and therefore I never blamed yourself directly of these proceedings’. His words seemed to indicate that while he had a personal interest in the unfolding events he would not hold the outcome against Elizabeth. He also wanted to ensure that his claim to the English succession went unaltered as a result of his mother’s actions. It appeared at this point that James felt that the diplomatic discussions on the topic could be managed more appropriately through other means of diplomacy such as his representatives already present in London, but as discussed later in this chapter his instructions to his representatives only made his chances for a successful appeal more remote.

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7 ‘James to Elizabeth’, Late February 1587, L.K.J.; 84-85.
Archibald Douglas was James’ resident Ambassador in London and had served as such from 1586. Initially he was responsible for arguing James’ defence of Mary but as the trial progressed other diplomatic representatives joined him. Concerning the trial itself James wrote only that he would like Elizabeth to hold off proceeding with the trial until his ambassador could speak to her. Elizabeth’s response to the ambassadors from James and the commissioners he had sent on behalf of Mary was mixed. In her letter to James in January 1587 Elizabeth sought to stress her goodwill to him and her desire to maintain their friendship while underlining the danger she had been in as a result of plots. Elizabeth then rhetorically questioned James about how she could protect her life and keep Mary alive, though in this letter as in others she did not directly name Mary. Instead she commented ‘You may see whither I keep the serpent that poisons me, when they confess to have reward. By saving of her life they would have had mine’. Elizabeth, while still uncomfortable with the problem of Mary and its probable outcome of her death, appears to have been prepared to acknowledge that by keeping Mary alive she would continue to be a source of danger. Thus in her letter Elizabeth sought to illustrate the likely outcome of events to James while still highlighting her commitment to their alliance and her friendship with him.

Elizabeth had not sought Mary’s trial or death but the uncovering of the Babington Plot forced her hand. Many historians have argued that Elizabeth had sought to have Mary assassinated in order to avoid the responsibility of the execution. John Guy argues that Elizabeth’s strategy in regard to Mary was not for her to be executed but instead for someone who had sworn to the Bond of Association to fulfil their oath and kill her. This was not an inconceivable option for Elizabeth as the negative diplomatic consequences for carrying out Mary’s sentence would have been felt in her relationships with most foreign powers and could have prompted some to side with Spain making England’s position more perilous.

The Bond of Association was created in 1584, and committed those who signed it to ‘withstand, pursue, and suppress all manner of persons that shall by any means intend and attempt anything dangerous or hurtful to the honour, estate, or

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10 Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 591.
13 John Guy, My Heart is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), 495.
persons of their sovereigns.\textsuperscript{14} The Bond continued to state that those who sought to gain Elizabeth’s throne by means of her assassination would be barred from the succession and killed. Elizabeth understood that if one of those who swore the Bond fulfilled their pledge it would have removed the responsibility from her and minimised the diplomatic consequences of executing a queen. It was for this reason that Elizabeth had Walsingham and Davison write to Sir Amias Paulet, Mary’s keeper and one of those who had sworn the Bond, in order to remind him of his oath.\textsuperscript{15} However, Paulet refused to undertake the Bond and wrote that he would not damage his conscience by undertaking such action.\textsuperscript{16} Paulet was not alone in his response and the Bond of Association was not carried out by any who had sworn to do so, which left an awkward diplomatic situation for Elizabeth to manage. The attempt to make use of the Bond has been discussed by historians, notably by Guy. His interpretation of the events discussed above is reflected in the correspondence. Elizabeth’s letters to James indicate her strong dislike that a crowned Queen could be tried and executed. It was also diplomatically problematic, however, and her letters indicate that she appreciated the fact that she could no longer protect Mary from her own actions.

Elizabeth was aware of the difficulty that Mary’s trial and execution would cause to Anglo-Scottish relations and that it would need to be managed with delicate diplomacy utilising both the correspondence and the manoeuvrings of diplomats. She was additionally wary of James’ reaction. In order to manage the diplomatic situation effectively she and her government sought information from within James’ court to guide their actions. Initially the English government used Patrick Gray, the Master of Gray, as a source of information on Scotland and James’ dispositions. Walsingham wrote to the Master of Gray on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of September thanking him for ‘sounding out the King’s disposition’ and suggested that if James looked unfavourably upon the actions against Mary to remind him of ‘the hard measure his father received at her hands…’.\textsuperscript{17} Gray later wrote to Walsingham that James wanted to preserve his

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{15 ‘Walsingham and Davison to Sir Amias Paulet’, 1 February 1587, in English Historical Documents 1558-1603, Vol. V (A), 982-983.}
\footnote{16 ‘Sir Amias Paulet and Sir Dru Drury to Walsingham, 2 February 1587’, in English Historical Documents 1558-1603, Vol. V (A), 983.}
\footnote{17 ‘Walsingham to the Master of Gray’, 17 September 1586, CSPScots, 9, 21-22. (James’ father Darnley was murdered with Mary’s apparent approval)}
\end{footnotes}
mother’s life and that the King would be sending an answer to Elizabeth on the matter. 18

Ten days later the Master of Gray wrote again to Walsingham to inform him that James had written to Elizabeth about Mary and that he had selected William Keith to be the messenger. Gray’s knowledge of the letter’s existence does not presuppose knowledge of its content, which was seemingly the case for the majority of the autograph letters of the correspondence. Up to this point James had been using Archibald Douglas, his resident ambassador, to argue his case, but with Mary being brought to trial in late October it was necessary to increase his diplomatic effort. 19 Keith had been given instructions to discuss two matters with Elizabeth:

First, to procure instantly for his mothers life, or that otherwise the Queen use her as she think expedient. The other point is that his title “be not prejudit” as was promised to me, and by her majesty’s own hand, at this parliament. 20

Sending another diplomat was not only a sign of increased concern about the outcome of Mary’s trial but also of James’ dissatisfaction with Douglas’ performance. In a letter he sent to Douglas in October 1586 James wrote:

Reserve up yourself na langer in the earnest dealing for my mother, for ye have done it to long, and thinke not that youre travellis can do goode if hir lyfe be taikin, for then adeu vith my dealing vith thaim that are speciall instrumentis thairof. 21

James’ unhappiness with his representative’s efforts to preserve Mary’s life was not entirely warranted as there was little that could be done to prevent England from acting against her and as such Douglas prioritised the protection of James’ title to England, the second point of Keith’s instructions.

18 ‘Master of Gray to Walsingham’, 11 October 1586, CSPScots, 9, 95.
19 Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 591.
20 ‘Master of Gray to Walsingham’, 21 October 1586, CSPScots, 9, 104
21 ‘James to Archibald Douglas’, October 1586, CSPScots, 9, 120-121.
**External Pressures**

The trial and execution of Mary Stuart was not a concern that was confined to the diplomatic relationship between Elizabeth and James, nor in fact was it a purely Anglo-Scottish problem. In 1586 Henry III, the King of France, also sought to appeal for her life. Henry was the former brother-in-law of Mary and wanted, at the very least, to prevent her death. Henry wrote several letters to Monsieur de Courcelles, his ambassador to James, on the subject and put forth his opinion that it was Elizabeth’s councillors not the Queen herself that sought Mary’s execution. He also wanted his representatives in Scotland to encourage James to ‘employs himself by all good offices for his mother…’ and to inform him that if he did not ‘he would do great wrong to his reputation and to the filial amity which he ought to bear her.’ The events of November did not serve to alter Henry’s opinion of James and he commented that he had received a letter from James but was unconvinced of James’ resolve in regards to Mary:

I would that this letter had also made known to me that he was better inclined towards the Queen his mother, and that he had a heart and will wholly disposed to assist her in the affliction she is now in…

Henry observed further in this letter that James should resist giving in on the issue of Mary’s life as a means to make his succession to the English throne easier. The letters from Henry III indicate the attention that the ongoing concern of Mary Stuart’s fate was receiving within Europe, particularly in France, the traditional ally of Scotland. The pressure of the French at this point caused James to strengthen his appeals for Mary in late November 1586. James’ reaction to the French pressure demonstrates that external forces could affect Anglo-Scottish diplomacy and the royal correspondence.

James wrote to his representative in London, Archibald Douglas, in late 1586, most likely in November. He opened by remarking on his surprise that Elizabeth had permitted the action against Mary to proceed so far, ‘to his dishonour and contrary to her good fame…’. He then continued in a truly reckless manner by writing, ‘King Henry the Eighth’s reputation was never prejudged in anything but the beheading of his bedfellow, but yet that tragedy was far inferior to this if it proceedeth as it seemeth

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22 ‘Henry III. To Monsieur de Courcelles’, 1 November 1586, CSPScots, 9, 145-156.
23 Ibid., 145-156.
25 Ibid., 161.
to be intended.’

After such comment he wrote of his intention to send an embassy to England and that Douglas was to seek a hold in all action against Mary until it arrived. Douglas was additionally instructed to present the letter to Elizabeth so that she would know ‘his inward heart…’. The wording of this letter was anything but diplomatic and it is difficult to comprehend how it could have been envisaged as assisting in his appeal for Mary’s life. The public presentation of the letter to the English Queen had the somewhat predictable outcome of causing significant offence and resulted in the refusal to grant safe-conduct for the new Scottish embassy.

James’ letter to Douglas can only be comprehended in light of the international pressure from France for James to act in Mary’s defence. In these circumstances his offence to Elizabeth could be explained by bad council, while he could present himself to his fellow monarchs as a defender of his and his mother’s honour, as was accepted by Henry III in December 1586.

James’ position also became more definite in his correspondence with Elizabeth as it became clearer that Mary’s execution was the most probable outcome of events. His letter written on the 26th of January 1587 was different from his previous letter in tone and content. This letter argued strongly in defence of Mary’s life and stated that her execution would ‘peril my reputation amongst [my subjects]’.

The approaching execution had stirred up Scottish politics to such a point that it was untenable for James to simply observe or lightly object to Mary’s execution, and he was then required to petition Elizabeth strongly for his mother’s life. Indeed he continued to argue his case, elaborating on his difficulty by writing:

What thing, madame, can greatlier touch me in honour that [am] a king and son than that my nearest neighbour, being in straitest [friend]ship with me, shall rigorously put to death a free and sovereign prince and my natural mother, alike in estate and sex to her that so uses her, albeit subject I grant to a harder fortune, and touching her nearly in proximity to blood.

James’ appeal was based primarily upon honour, and he supported this by referring to the divine right of kings. These were two ideologies that the monarchs shared, that of

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27 James VI to [Mr. Archibald Douglas], [November] 1586, CSPScots, 9, 169-170.
28 Ibid., 169-170.
29 ‘Burghley to the Scottish Ambassadors’, 6 December 1586, CSPScots, 9, 184.
30 ‘Henry III. To Monsieur de Courcelles’, 14 December 1586, CSPScots, 9, 195.
31 James to Elizabeth, 26th January 1587, L.K.J., 81-83.
32 Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 592-593; Croft, King James, 22.
33 James to Elizabeth’, 26 January 1587, L.K.J., 81-83.
royal honour and the divine right of a monarch to rule, and in calling on these shared beliefs he placed the strength of his appeal for Mary’s life. James also called upon their ties of kinship, though his use of kinship rhetoric was strictly conventional for royal letters.\(^{34}\) The ties of kinship between Elizabeth and James included their shared status as monarchs, their blood relation and Elizabeth’s role as his godmother.\(^{35}\) However, James’ appeal was unsuccessful and several days after the letter’s composition Mary was executed.

In the letter discussed above the idea of royal honour is an important element. In itself ‘honor is the good opinion of people who matter to us, and who matter because we regard them as a society of equals who have the power to judge our behaviour.’\(^{36}\) During the early modern period concepts of honour were gender specific and were preserved in different manners for each gender.\(^{37}\) Women, including female monarchs, maintained their honour and received praise for demonstrations of piety, chastity and modesty.\(^{38}\) Elizabeth, as explored below, used the associations of modesty and the rhetorical frameworks of it in expressing innocence following Mary’s execution. Elite men would preserve their honour through strength in battle and keeping their word.\(^{39}\) The concepts of honour and personal dignity were of significance to both Elizabeth and James. Elizabeth had referred to a monarch’s honour code as being ‘the law of kingly love.’\(^{40}\) James used the mutually held importance of royal honour in his appeal for his mother’s life as he sought to recast the issue into one of honour in place of political necessity.

James’ ambassadors were to make a final attempt for Mary’s life and in mid-December 1586 the Master of Gray and Sir Robert Melville joined the Scottish embassy in London.\(^{41}\) The Master of Gray was instructed to present a different solution to Elizabeth and her government which would prevent the execution of Mary. Gray was to propose that Mary be sent out of England and given into another prince’s

\(^{34}\) Mueller, “To my very good Brother the King of Scots”, 1068.
\(^{38}\) Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe,* 25; Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King,* 76.
\(^{39}\) Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King,* 76.
\(^{40}\) Allinson, ‘The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I and King James VI’, 57; Allinson, ‘Conversations on Kingship’, 143.
\(^{41}\) ‘Instructions by James VI to the Master of Gray, [17 December 1586]’, *Warrender, 1,* 250-251.
custody rather than being executed. However the proposal was not well received by either the English government or its Queen. Elizabeth strongly responded to this possibility in a letter to James written about the 1st of February, asking ‘Suppose you I am so mad to trust my life in another’s hand and send it out of my own?’ She was careful to place the origin of the idea with James’ councillors rather than with James himself while completely dismissing this final attempt by the Scottish ambassadors to preserve Mary’s life.

Mary Stuart was executed on the 8th of February 1587 and Elizabeth reacted furiously when she learnt of it. Davison who had been entrusted with the signed warrant was sent to the Tower. He remained incarcerated there for eighteen months. Most of the Privy Council fell into disgrace for four months. Burghley was not spared from her displeasure, and as a result he was not received at court for four weeks. His return to court did not mean that the situation returned to normal and Elizabeth maintained her hostility towards him for four months following the execution as she did with her other Privy Councillors.

Historians, with little agreement, have debated Elizabeth’s reaction to Mary’s execution and generally two opposing views have been expressed. Wernham argues that while there was possibly some genuine grief involved many of Elizabeth’s actions were intended for diplomatic show. MacCaffrey concurs, though argues firmly that the majority of Elizabeth’s actions in the wake of the execution were concerned with face-saving gestures. The strength of her response to Mary’s execution, however, indicates otherwise and that it was not a show put on for the benefit of her diplomatic relations. As Penry Williams argued:

While there was probably an element of calculation at times, particularly in the treatment of Davison, it is unlikely that her rage and grief were merely a performance staged to impress James and other monarchs. Burghley, who knew her well, was deeply frightened by her anger.

42 Ibid., 250-251.
43 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 1 February 1587, C.W., 294-296.
44 Williams, The Later Tudors, 351.
46 Wernham, Before the Armada, 382.
47 Ibid., 382.
48 MacCaffrey, Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 424-425.
49 Williams, The Later Tudors, 315.
Williams’ position is similar to Elton who stated that Elizabeth expressed genuine sorrow and anger following Mary’s execution.\textsuperscript{50} Guy is more circumspect, merely arguing that Elizabeth had not intended for the signed warrant to be used.\textsuperscript{51} Elizabeth’s reaction to the execution of Mary and her actions may well indicate genuine distress at the event, and combined with anger at the execution occurring without her complete approval. However, this did not remove the diplomatic necessity of demonstrating her position as the risks to England’s diplomatic relationships from the execution had been a significant part of Elizabeth’s hesitation in signing the warrant and had been ignored by her councillors in its dispatch. Elizabeth’s domestic expression of anger towards her councillors for the dispatching of the execution warrant, however, was not a sufficient expression of horror and innocence for her diplomatic relationships, especially with Scotland. She was well aware of the impact Mary’s death would have on Anglo-Scottish relations and she sought to halt it through a personal expression of innocence to James through their correspondence.

\textit{The Rhetoric of Innocence}

On the 14\textsuperscript{th} of February Elizabeth composed a letter to James in which she appeared disturbed by Mary’s execution, its possible consequences and expressed her regret. This autograph letter is short, around half the length of her usual missives, but contains highly emotional language and a deep protestation of innocence in the entire matter. She wrote ‘I beseech you that – as God and many more know – how innocent I am in this case, so you will believe me that if I had bid aught I would have bid by it’.\textsuperscript{52} This protestation was strong and she was clear that she would have stood by her order if she had intended it. Today it is difficult to untangle the threads of what did occur in between her signing of the warrant and its dispatch, and impossible to know an individual’s intent or honesty. In many respects it falls to individual judgement of the evidence that survives. It is also clear that whatever her emotional response to this event was, it was necessary for Elizabeth to proclaim her innocence in the matter for diplomatic purposes.

Innocence was a trope of Elizabeth and James’ correspondence, and formed an aspect of eleven letters that I analysed for this thesis. In most cases it was James who wrote of his innocence in reply to direct questions from Elizabeth or in response to

\textsuperscript{51} Guy, \textit{Tudor England}, 336; Guy, \textit{My Heart is My Own}, 496.
\textsuperscript{52} ‘Elizabeth to James’, 14 February 1587, \textit{C.W.}, 296-297.
rumours of his actions. This could indicate that Elizabeth was the dominant partner in the correspondence. Additionally it implies that in the case of Mary’s execution their usual roles had been reversed, at least temporarily, resulting in Elizabeth assuming James’ position of the lesser partner of the correspondence petitioning for her innocence to be acknowledged. It appears that proclaiming innocence made it difficult for the recipient of the letter to contradict the statement being made without solid evidence as it would have called into question kingly honour and the authority of the royal word, discussed above as central to both monarchs’ ideologies of kingship.

Elizabeth’s expression of innocence could have had some basis in the rhetoric of modesty utilised frequently in women’s writing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Elizabeth, who after her ascension spoke and acted as queen in place of more differential modesty, was familiar with this form of rhetoric and she used it effectively in a speech she gave at Oxford University in 1566.\textsuperscript{53} In this speech she said:

Those who do bad things hate the light, and therefore, because I am aware that I myself am about to manage badly my opportunity in your presence, I think that a time of shadows will be fittest for me … For a long time, truly, a great doubt has held me: Should I be silent or should I speak? If indeed I should speak, I would make evident to you how uncultivated I am in letters; however, if I remain silent my incapacity may appear to be contempt.\textsuperscript{54}

Elizabeth’s use of rhetoric cannot be taken at face value as she was highly educated and capable, but it was culturally proper for her to make such demonstrations. Traditionally women were expected to be obedient to their husbands or fathers, chaste in behaviour and silent.\textsuperscript{55} It could also be problematic for a woman to display rhetorical skill.\textsuperscript{56} The expectations of behaviour for women in general were also applicable to female monarchs and they received praise for displaying appropriately feminine virtues, virtues that often conflicted with the requirements of a reigning

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoteref{55}Levin, \textit{The Heart and Stomach of a King}, 136.
\end{footnotes}
monarch. Patricia Pender has argued that the utilisation of modesty rhetoric was employed by women to manage the cultural restrictions placed on women writers, an application that Elizabeth would have been aware of. Pender writes: ‘Early modern women often circumvented the charges of impropriety or indecency entailed in assuming the mantle of authorship by denying that they were authors at all.’ While denial of authorship was not the exact purpose of Elizabeth in her letter to James it could have served as a rhetorical foundation for her to express innocence in the execution of Mary.

Elizabeth was fully aware of the rhetoric of modesty when she composed her letter to James in February 1586, as demonstrated in her speech at Oxford. Thus modesty rhetoric was likely utilised as the framework for her rhetoric of innocence she expressed in her letter to James. In so adapting modesty rhetoric it formed a deviation from the traditional rhetorical framework of modesty. It was not uncommon for Tudor women to deviate from traditional rhetorical models and adopt more individualistic approaches. It also highlighted Elizabeth’s anxiety over the issue as deviation could indicate uncertainty on the part of the writer while following rhetorical norms conveyed reassurance and stability. Elizabeth was distressed by the execution of Mary as the disgrace of most of her council would attest. She wished to convey her innocence in the matter to James and the associations and conventions of modesty rhetoric were beneficial. Elizabeth needed her interpretation of the events of Mary’s execution to be accepted by foreign powers such as France and Scotland.

To resolve the issue Elizabeth sought to use her dissatisfaction with Mary’s execution to express her innocence. Whether her innocence was real or not will never be known but the very fact that she expressed it so strongly following Mary’s execution prompts one to conclude that her diplomacy with James required her to do so.

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57 Sarah Duncan, “‘Most godly heart fraight with al mercie’: Queens’ Mercy during the Reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I”, in *Queens & Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by Carole Levin and Robert Bucholz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 33.
61 Rayne Allinson, ‘The Queens three Bodies: Gender, Criminality and Sovereignty in the Execution of Mary Queen of Scots’, in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 105; Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 593.
The Diplomatic Aftermath

For almost one year following the execution of Mary the correspondence between Elizabeth and James slowed to a practically non-existent trickle compared to the earlier free flowing exchange. During the two years before Mary’s execution there was on average more than ten letters exchanged between the monarchs. However, between the execution and August 1588 James composed only one letter to Elizabeth. This letter gives the impression of strained emotions, where his words stick rigidly to the diplomatic protocols and phrasing. But the formality could have also been his way of satisfying the demands of his people as there were indications that he was privately relieved that Mary was dead.62 James wrote that he:

dare not wrong you so far as not to judge honourably of your unspotted part therein. So, on the other side, I wish that your honourable behaviour in all times hereafter may fully persuade the whole world of the same.63

In this he indicated that while he would not question Elizabeth’s honour, and that he would accept her protestations of innocence, he warned her that in her future actions she would need to be careful to protect her reputation of honour. He demanded an unspecified satisfaction for Mary’s death to ‘strengthen and unite this isle, establish and maintain the true religion, and oblige me to be, as of before I was, your most loving and dearest brother’.64 The italic elements in the last quote indicate words not present in the autograph draft of the letter but from a copy of that he eventually sent to Elizabeth and the amendment could indicate the difficulty of his feelings to her at this time. It could also indicate the input of an advisor but it is difficult to be certain and is highly unusual for a letter of this correspondence to be concluded in such a way. The words themselves also indicate that there was a diplomatic break as a result of Mary’s death and this required Elizabeth to make reparations to ensure that the alliance and indeed the relationship survived.

While James wrote his acceptance of Elizabeth’s innocence the broader Anglo-Scottish diplomatic situation was severely strained. Following the execution there was a breach in relations between the two kingdoms and unrest on the ever-problematic borders. Reports made their way to England of planned reprisals for

62 Croft, King James, 22.
63 ‘James to Elizabeth’, Late February 1587, L.K.J., 84-85.
64 Ibid., 84-85.
Mary’s death that added to the government’s anxiety as the Spanish threat increased. The anger towards England was not limited to Catholic Scottish nobles but was shared by their Protestant compatriots and they jointly called for James to seek revenge for his mother’s death.65 The Scottish response was strong enough for some of Elizabeth’s experienced councillors to become concerned about the possibility of war.66 James who viewed the alliance, and his possible succession to the English throne, as of more importance than the idea of a war of revenge, did not share his kingdom’s anger towards the English as strongly.67 He was however forced to make concessions to the angry response of his people and did not ask for his pension to be paid in 1587 as it would have taken on the appearance of ‘blood money’.68 The anger within Scotland after the execution of Mary Stuart was beyond all calculation of the English Privy Council and was part of what Elizabeth had feared.

The royal correspondence was not the only line of diplomacy to fall silent after the execution of Mary, as the exchange of ambassadors was also halted. In early February 1587 Elizabeth sent Robert Carey, the son of her cousin Henry Carey, on a mission to James’ court. He was to detail the events surrounding the execution and to explain her innocence. However, Carey’s mission was never completed and he only made it as far north as Berwick. James refused to grant Carey safe passage to enter Scotland and make his way to Edinburgh.69 After this failed diplomatic mission there was little diplomatic contact between England and Scotland. The exchange of letters between the monarchs also lapsed into silence. Mary Stuart’s execution and the intensity of the Scottish response exerted a profound effect upon the multilayered Anglo-Scottish relationship that had been established during the negotiations for the Treaty of Berwick, and resulted in its break down from early 1587.

The failure of the correspondence indicated that the key link of diplomatic relationship between the two kingdoms had been broken. Allinson argues that a royal correspondence was an important element in maintaining the relationships between two kingdoms in alliance. Breaking a correspondence of this type could therefore

65 Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 599-600.
67 Elton, England Under the Tudors, 370; MacCaffrey, Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 245.
cause significant damage to the diplomatic relationship as a whole.\textsuperscript{70} The suspension of the Anglo-Scottish diplomatic relationship was significant and those historians that argue that Mary’s death had little impact greatly underestimate the heightened feelings this issue incited within Scotland.\textsuperscript{71} For the year following the execution diplomatic relations were practically suspended.\textsuperscript{72} Strained diplomatic relations made the threat from Spain even more severe and as it became clearer that the Armada would soon set sail England looked to its defences. It was in the midst of England’s preparations that Elizabeth sought to secure her postern gate against the Spanish as she had done against the French. To that end Elizabeth restarted her correspondence with James.

\textit{Restoring Anglo-Scottish Diplomacy}

Elizabeth had allowed the silence in the correspondence to stand and she did not write to James again following her protestation of innocence until events of the wider world prompted her to do so in May 1588. Her letter expressed her willingness to overlook the recent past and said that she wished ‘to turn my eyes to the making up of that sure amity and staunch goodwill…’\textsuperscript{73} Elizabeth’s language concerning the repair of the amity and the very length of time between her letters to James indicates how much of an impact the execution of Mary had on the relationship between England and Scotland. Yet Elizabeth’s letter also indicated the strength of her desire to normalise relations between their kingdoms, promising that he would find her to be ‘the carefulllest Prince of your quiet government, ready to assist you with force, with treasure, counsel, or anything you have need of as much as in honour you can require, or upon cause you shall need.’\textsuperscript{74} This declaration of support and assistance underlined her desire to repair relations, but it was motivated by something far more substantial than a simple wish for her innocence to be accepted by James. In May 1588 England was well aware of the assembly of the Spanish Armada and was diplomatically isolated from much of the continent on account of the kingdom’s Protestantism. The execution of Mary had alienated Scotland and thus made James an unpredictable neighbour. It was this concern that prompted Elizabeth’s wide-ranging promises in her letter to James, ones that seem to have been well received as a little over a month

\textsuperscript{70} Allinson, \textit{A Monarchy of Letters}, 91.
\textsuperscript{71} Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 589-590.
\textsuperscript{72} Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’, 206-7.
\textsuperscript{74} ‘Elizabeth to James’, 11 May 1588, \textit{L.Q.E.}, 191-193.
latter Elizabeth sent another letter to thank James for his acceptance of the ‘truth’ and questioned James about what he wanted as satisfaction for Mary’s execution. For his satisfaction James sought from Elizabeth an additional £1000 per year for his pension and her acknowledgment of him as her heir. It also appears that James had recently expressed a commitment, as written by Elizabeth in her letter, to the ‘constant defence of your country, together mine, from all Spaniards or strangers’. The commitment to the joint defence of England and Scotland by James seems to indicate a thawing of the diplomatic tension between them and an intriguing move of James to align with Elizabeth against Spain.

The alignment of James with Elizabeth in the face of the Spanish Armada was possibly more curious than it seems at face value. Following Mary’s execution, during the suspension of relations between England and Scotland, James could have found support across most of Europe and from most Catholics to make a move against Elizabeth. Indeed parts of Protestant Scotland itself were in favour of acting against England in the aftermath of the execution. Instead, James chose to commit himself to the cause of Elizabeth’s England. This was most likely in order to secure his claim in the succession and a possible increase in his pension. However his passive support in itself would have been sufficient for that purpose. Instead James declared in a letter written in August that he:

offered unto you my forces, my person, and all that I may command, to be employed against yon strangers in whatsoever fashion and by whatsoever mean as may serve for the defence of your country. Wherein I promise to behave myself not as a stranger and foreign prince but as your natural son and compatriot of your country in all respects.

His strong rhetoric was a declaration of alliance to Elizabeth and England, far more than the assurance that was necessary to maintain his position diplomatically, and therefore England could turn its attention to the Channel and its defence against the Armada assured of at least James’ allegiance.

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75 Wernham, Before the Armada, 383.
76 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 1 July 1588, C.W., 355-356.
77 Doran, ‘Revenge her Foul and Most Unnatural Murder?’, 600.
78 Wernham, Before the Armada, 383.
79 ‘James to Elizabeth’, 4 August 1588, L.K.J., 87-89.
In 1588 the Spanish Armada failed disastrously in its attempt to invade England. This event was one of the few times in Elizabeth’s reign that the threat of foreign invasion was more immediate than the concern of conspiracy and plots. It had also served to encourage England to rebuild its diplomatic understanding with Scotland. The dramatic confrontation that occurred off the south coast of England resulted in Spain’s fleet fleeing and did not ultimately require the English or Elizabeth to call upon James to make good on his rhetorical support. Elizabeth celebrated the achievement in a letter sent to James shortly following. She wrote of the victory in the ‘narrow seas’ through the assistance of ‘God’s singular favour’ before continuing to comment on how Philip II, the King of Spain, had given her the glory of a military victory through his attempts at duplicity rather than continue with the diplomatic alternative that they had been pursuing. As she wrote: ‘even in the mids of treating peace, begins this wrongful war. He hath procured my greatest glory that meant my sorest wrack…’. Her evident joy at the defeat of the Armada in the Channel did not remove her unease over English security, however, and she urged James to maintain his vigilance against the Armada that was returning to Spain by sailing around Scotland. Her concern was centred on the unreliability of the Catholic Lords in Scotland and the prevalent belief within England that they would align themselves with the retreating Spanish fleet.

The two years from the discovery of the Babington Plot in 1586 until the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 were amongst the most difficult for the Anglo-Scottish alliance. Mary’s position within English custody had long been a delicate issue for Elizabeth’s diplomacy but the discovery of her involvement in yet another plot had made it untenable. The flurry of Scottish diplomacy to ensure Mary’s survival was not well received by the English who for the most part saw her not as a Queen but as a constant threat and a rallying point for Catholics. Elizabeth was torn between her personal beliefs in the rights of monarchs and the need to defend herself from the plots of others. As the diplomats pleaded for Mary, James made direct appeals to Elizabeth calling upon her to act with honour and to uphold the divine right of kings. None of their appeals were sufficient to protect Mary and the warrant was eventually signed and dispatched. Through her correspondence with James she sought to express her innocence in the affair, using the rhetoric of modesty as a framework,
and attempted to protect their alliance. The matter caused a strong outpouring of anger in Scotland towards England and for a year following the execution of Mary Anglo-Scottish diplomacy was in effect suspended. It was the threat of the outside world that again urged Elizabeth to look north towards Scotland and in the face of the Spanish Armada she sought to mend her connection with James and resume their correspondence. James, seeing his future more in England than the continent swore to uphold their alliance regardless of the recent difficulties between them. Regardless of his promise the English were still concerned about Scotland’s friendship and feared that in the end the Scots would side with England’s enemies. It was this concern that prompted the strong reaction to the discovery of the Spanish Blanks in Scotland alongside the still pervasive idea of a Catholic conspiracy against England and their Queen.
Chapter Three: Brig o’ Dee and the Spanish Blanks

The repairing of the Anglo-Scottish alliance following Mary Stuart’s execution and the defeat of the Spanish armada failed to ease Elizabeth’s fears or her council’s anxieties for England’s security. Instead, following the wake of the Armada crisis concerns of Catholic conspiracy were heightened, particularly those originating in Scotland, which influenced England’s understanding of Scottish politics. Their viewpoint was not baseless and the discovery of two plots, the Brig o’ Dee Affair and the Spanish Blanks, reinforced a perception of James acting irresponsibly with their joint security and having pro-Catholic leanings. The period from 1588 to 1595 has been described as the lowest ebb of the Anglo-Scottish relationship.¹ This chapter will explore the diplomatic exchanges surrounding the two plots to explore how the multilayered approach was utilised during such a troubling time. The royal correspondence will be examined for its role in relation to formal diplomatic representation, which at times escalated tensions rather than easing them, and the rhetoric of kinship employed within them will be analysed. From 1588 to 1595 Scottish plots dominated the diplomatic exchanges and it took the combined approach of diplomatic personnel and royal letters to negotiate it with the Anglo-Scottish alliance intact.

The Spanish Blanks, and its precursor the Brig o’ Dee affair, are not significantly analysed in the historiography of Anglo-Scottish relations. The main discussion for both is a chapter written by T.G. Law and published in 1904.² In this he catalogues many of the events of the two plots and highlights that the Spanish Blanks was effectively a repetition of the Brig o’ Dee affair on a larger scale. Maurice Lee Jr. has written several works on Scottish politics during James’ reign and argued initially that ‘James knew perfectly well that there was no real substance to the Catholic plot.’³ His assessment of James’ knowledge however was an insufficient interpretation of the plots and their effects on Anglo-Scottish relations, which this chapter will seek to rectify. In his later work Lee altered his position by stating that James’ inaction in the Spanish Blanks affair was an error of judgement and that its resultant danger went unrealised until spring 1594.⁴ Doran agrees with Lee’s revised assessment and names

¹ Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’., 214.
⁴ Lee, Great Britain’s Solomon, 75.
that spring as ‘the lowest point of Anglo-Scottish relations.’ Additionally during this period Lee and Doran argue that the continuation of the Anglo-Scottish alliance was at significant risk. The significance of the Brig o’ Dee affair and the Spanish Blanks plot needs to be explored further for their implications to the Anglo-Scottish diplomatic relationship and to examine the role of the royal correspondence during this period.

**The Postern Gate and Catholic Conspiracy**

During the period of 1588 to 1585 three men exerted profound influence on the politics of Scotland and through the inconsistency of their politics impacted upon Anglo-Scottish relations. John Maitland of Thirlestane was the younger brother of William Maitland, Mary Stuart’s Secretary. Maitland rose to a position of influence within James’ court and served as a close advisor to him for around ten years. Until his death in 1595 Maitland was seen as an opponent to the nobility and their hereditary rights, which often resulted in him clashing with the nobility, and calls for his removal were commonly listed as motivations for rebellion. While Maitland could be said to represent the government of James and acted as Scotland’s Burghley or Walsingham, the two other important figures were drawn from the traditional Scottish nobility, but professed different beliefs. George Gordon was the sixth Earl of Huntly and a highly influential magnate in northern Scotland. Huntly’s Catholic faith played a role in his political actions but he additionally demonstrated secular motivations. Many of his political intrigues were concerned with the return of Catholicism, but they were generally accompanied by the strictly secular motive of removing Maitland from his position of influence. The objective of Maitland’s removal occasionally aligned Huntly with Francis Stewart, the Earl of Bothwell and the nephew of Mary Stuart’s third husband. Bothwell was Protestant but this did not prevent him from being an ally to the Catholic Huntly if he saw a political benefit. These three men and their differing ambitions, embroiled their King in diplomatic difficulty with England, and in many respects shaped Scotland’s chaotic politics.

Huntly and Bothwell in particular caused significant issues for James in his relationship with Elizabeth. On numerous occasions they instigated political instability that

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5 Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’., 214.
8 Grant, ‘The Brig o’ Dee Affair’, 93-94.
9 Ibid., 101.
prompted Elizabeth to correspond with James, urging him to act against such individuals and groups within Scotland. This proved to be a continuing theme within Elizabeth’s letters to James and was a result of two different concerns. The first was the ever-present concern about the vulnerability of England’s northern border, commonly referred to as the ‘postern gate’. At the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign the concern over England’s vulnerability to invasion from the north was a result of the positioning of French soldiers in Scotland. While this concern eased following the eviction of the French in 1560 and the alliance with Scotland it had never entirely disappeared. It had flared again during the Armada crisis in 1588 when Elizabeth wrote to James in August. In her letter, filled with expressions of joy at Spain’s defeat, she strongly implored him to act against questionable Catholic noblemen to ensure they did not offer assistance to the defeated Armada on their return voyage. Elizabeth added that she thought that the Armada would find no sanctuary unless certain nobles acted contrary to James’ orders.11 As I will examine below, the motivations for her entreaties were validated early the following year, but at this point this was only an unsubstantiated fear that prompted her letters to James.

The English anxieties over the ‘postern gate’ were linked to changes in the way that international relations were perceived during the early modern period. Traditionally relations with other kingdoms were seen through a prism of dynastic interests solidified through matrimonial alliances. While this remained true, diplomacy became increasingly influenced by confessional differences.12 The religious differences between Catholics and Protestants were progressively an important aspect in the formation of collective identities. It was these identities and their religions that informed the understanding of potential allies and enemies.13 Additionally during this period the idea that religious uniformity was essential for ensuring the security of the state became prominent for European governments.14 Many of Elizabeth’s advisors held the view that there was a Catholic threat to England, which in turn influenced their perceptions of foreign policy.15 Through the merging of Protestantism with English collective identity in the later sixteenth century England began to perceive its enemy as Catholic, and in a similar manner to the merging of belief with identity, the ‘postern gate’ became intertwined with conspiracy.

11 ‘Elizabeth to James’, August 1588, S.W., 181-183.
13 Ibid., 411.
14 Ibid., 415.
Elizabeth’s fears concerning the ‘postern gate’ were based upon an appreciation of the vulnerability of the northern border. This vulnerability became linked to another concern held by the English government concerning Catholic conspiracy against England. The fear of a Catholic conspiracy aimed against the English government and Elizabeth was an influence on Protestants generally and an obsession for leading ministers such as Burghley.\textsuperscript{16} During the period from August 1588 through to the beginning of 1596 Elizabeth composed twenty-nine letters to James that were analysed for this thesis. Of these the majority of the letters are concerned with Scottish politics and the dangers of the Catholic party. James, in comparison, sent only twelve letters to Elizabeth over the same period. Throughout Elizabeth’s letters the frequency of her urging James to act against the Catholic nobility or the presence of continental Jesuits within Scotland seems to be more than paranoia about the plots and conspiracies against her and her kingdom. Rather, these ideas of conspiracy became linked, at least for Elizabeth, with the historic weakness of the English border with Scotland. As evidenced by her correspondence with James, Elizabeth thought that the ‘postern gate’ was not merely the entry point for an army as was the traditional concern, but also a way for Catholics and their supporters to enter England. For this reason Elizabeth strongly urged James to act against Scottish Catholics, stating that it was for their mutual defence and his own estate’s preservation. In doing so Elizabeth sought to use James to guard England’s rear as she faced the various threats of the war with Spain, but it became difficult to depend on his support following the revelation of two conspiracies within Scotland.

\textit{The Brig o’ Dee Affair}

On the 20\textsuperscript{th} of February 1589 a packet of letters was sent to the English ambassador in Scotland, William Ashby, from Elizabeth’s Privy Council. The cover letter of this packet, written in Burghley’s hand, states that its contents were ‘of great weight and to be used very secretly and substantially…’ and directed Ashby to show them to James in private as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{17} Ashby’s instructions were to reveal:

\begin{quote}
the letters on[e] after another, both in the ciphers and in ther explained sort, 
and such other letters as be written out in ciphere. And you shall shew to 
hym the alphabet, whereby his majesty may himself plainly see the truth of 
the translating therof.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{17} Privy Council to the English Ambassador’, 20 February 1588-9, in CSPScots, 9, 682-697.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 682-697.
That Ashby was instructed to present the letters in such a manner illustrates that there was a strong possibility that James would doubt the authenticity of the letters and as such not act on them as England felt was necessary. Ashby was also to attempt to guide James in choosing a minister to assist him in this and with whom he would share the information. This concern over his choice of minister was based on the religious leanings and foreign policy inclinations of some members of Scotland’s government.

The letters Ashby presented had been intercepted by the English on their way from Scotland to the Duke of Parma and their messenger was placed in custody. The first enclosed letter expressed the regrets of a group of Scottish Lords, unnamed in that letter, on the failure of the Spanish Armada the previous year and in particular that the retreating Armada did not seek their assistance. The Lords write that if they had been able to meet the Armada they could have provided it with supplies and men to guide it safely around the treacherous coastlines of Scotland and Ireland. These men suggested that the King of Spain send another army, but land it in Scotland instead of England, and requested money to support such an enterprise. This Spanish force could then be supplemented with Scottish levies that the Lords would call upon. The Scottish lords also offered pilots to guide the Spanish ships around Britain and to avoid direct conflict with the English at sea, instead attacking England by land through Scotland or possibly Ireland.19

The second of the abovementioned letters gives much more information about the group who was proposing such an understanding with Spain. Robert Bruce, a Catholic Scotsman who was linked with several conspiracies involving Spain, wrote the second letter. In his letter Bruce discussed money that had previously been sent to Scotland by Spain and three of the Catholic Lords - Huntly, Morton and Claud Hamilton. He also wrote about the conversion of Erroll and Crawford to Catholicism and the preparedness of Bothwell to support the Spanish cause against England even though he was noted as a Protestant.20

Bruce’s lengthy letter seems to indicate that he was a key player of the Catholic party within Scotland and had detailed knowledge of money, contacts with Jesuits and the connections to key Catholic Scotsmen. Huntly and Errol authored the next two letters. Huntly sought to explain his recent conversion to the Protestant faith. He stated it was not an honest conversion and that he remained Catholic. Erroll’s letter was of a different tone to Huntly and was full of fervour for his newfound faith. He spoke of his recent conversion to Catholicism

19 Ibid., 682-697.
20 ‘Privy Council to the English Ambassador’, 20 February 1588-9, CSPScots, 9, 682-697.
and following that his profound desire to assist the King of Spain in his efforts. The other letters in this packet were written by less influential figures and have less significance to the political manoeuvring within Scotland or the Anglo-Scottish relationship.

On the 27th of February 1587 Ashby carried out his instructions and presented the intercepted letters to James. Huntly was sent to the Castle of Edinburgh that afternoon. Though the speed of events gives the appearance of a straightforward process, the reality was not so smooth. The careful instructions concerning how to approach James were justified, as Ashby reported to Burghly:

> When I first moved the King, right honourable, and made show of the letters, I found him unwilling to read them, and more to believe the matter contained, saying it might be a matter feigned, and it was dangerous to touch the credit of noblemen; if it could no be proved it would breed a feud for ever.

After an hour of discussions James consented to read the letters and call for his council. Huntly was then sent to the castle but on his way there Bothwell, Erroll and Montrose met him. Following this meeting they went their separate ways, Huntly to the castle while Erroll fled town in disguise with 'two or three principal gentlemen, papists and counsellors to him and Huntly.'

This incident brought to light significant differences in the outlooks of the English and Scottish Governments concerning the issue of Catholic conspiracy and security. For England the situation was clear, the Catholic Scottish Lords had conspired with Spain and sought to assist with a foreign invasion. As such England, and Elizabeth in particular through her letters, sought at least to have those men removed from positions of authority, or exiled if possible. However James viewed the situation differently as it was not only a political situation for him, but also a personal one. Huntly’s position within Scotland’s domestic political scene was based not only upon his place as a leading landowner, faction leader and prominent Catholic, he was also a close friend of James. This friendship made action against the Catholic Lords in Scotland particularly problematic. As Thomas Fowler, Walsingham’s agent in Scotland, observed, there was unlikely to be any major fallout from the intercepted

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21 Ibid., 682-697.
24 ‘William Asheby to Burghley’, 2 March 1588-9, in CSPScots, 9, 701-702
25 Ibid., 701-702
letters on account of 'the King's too much affection to Huntly.' Indeed during Huntly’s brief stay within the Castle’s walls James visited him daily and allowed his wife and friends to see him freely. Huntly was released from his light imprisonment on the 7th of March 1589.

James’ treatment of Huntly and his persistent scepticism concerning Catholic plots was met with dismay from England, and particularly from Elizabeth. She expressed her concern for the state of Scotland and the presence of a Spanish funded party within Scotland in her letter to James dated the 16th of March. Elizabeth claimed that it was only out of care for him that she complained and called for him to act against the threat. She wrote ‘Awake, therefore, deer brother, out of your log slomber, and deal like a king who will ever raigne alone in his own.’ Elizabeth’s exhortation to rule and to act as a King in his own right occurs in several of her letters to James. It was probably an expression of significant anxieties within England that certain nobles, such as Huntly, were able to control James and were attempting to align him with England’s foreign enemies. Elizabeth’s position on James’ response to the plot was unknown to James when he wrote to her on the 18th of March, indeed their letters appear to have passed each other on their respective journeys. His letter is full of thankfulness for the revelation of the intercepted letters. James stated that he had commissioned an ambassador, the laird of Wemyss, to aid in the strengthening of their friendship and to convey more information to her. The contrast of the tones between the two letters is stark. James was thankful for the information but he did not view it as particularly dangerous, while Elizabeth was worried and urged James to move against those implicated in the conspiracy.

After his release, Huntly was removed from his captaincy of the Royal Guard and he departed Edinburgh for the north. In April about 3,000 men followed Huntly, Errol and Crawford into rebellion. However, it was not an exclusively Catholic affair as Bothwell and Montrose joined them as allies. Huntly was able to gain such support by claiming that Maitland, the King’s councillor, had been controlling James and that they intended to free him. On the 17th of April Huntly’s rebel force was confronted by James outside of Aberdeen at Brig o’ Dee. Seeing that James had led his own army against them the rebels

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26 ‘Thomas Fowler to Walsingham’, 1 March 1588-9, in CSPScots, 9, 700-701; Lee, John Maitland of Thirlestane, 179.
28 Lee, John Maitland of Thirlestane, 181-3.
32 Lee, John Maitland of Thirlestane, 186-187.
refused to fight their King and dispersed.\textsuperscript{33} Huntly and his fellow Lords surrendered shortly after.\textsuperscript{34} Huntly’s position as a friend of James was not diminished by this event and four months after his trial he was released and returned to favour.\textsuperscript{35} This plot and rebellion, today known as the Brig o’ Dee affair, was a mixture of domestic Scottish politics and international concerns. It is this mixture that led to differing views of it and James’ response in England and in Scotland. However, while James’ response may have been correct in terms of Scotland’s domestic situation, in regards to his diplomatic relationship with Elizabeth he gravely misjudged the significance of these events, which led to greater difficulties several years later.

\textit{The Spanish Blanks}

Following the Brig o’ Dee affair the concern for the actions of the Catholic Lords faded somewhat, but not entirely. James’ position perplexed the English government and made it doubt his reliability as an ally against the foreign Catholic powers that they were in conflict with. The war with Spain continued in the Netherlands and called for a significant commitment of England’s resources, a situation that left the risk of Catholic intrigues in Scotland as a source of anxiety. This anxiety was apparently vindicated in late 1592 with the discovery of another plot involving the Scottish Catholic Lords.

On the 1\textsuperscript{st} of January 1593 Robert Bowes, England’s ambassador in Scotland wrote to England and reported on recent events in Scotland. He stated that he and others had become aware that Catholic individuals had passed messages to George Kerr to transport to the continent. Bowes informed Andrew Knox, the minister at Paisley, of the situation and he acted upon the information.\textsuperscript{36} Knox captured Kerr on the 27\textsuperscript{th} of December 1592 before he could set sail.\textsuperscript{37} Upon the capture of Kerr two packets of letters were discovered, one of which included:

\begin{quote}
\begin{itemize}
\item eight clean sheets of fair and gilded paper, whereon nothing is seen written,
\item save only that some are subscribed solely by William Earl of Angus, some by George Earl of Huntly, some by Francis Earl of Erroll, some jointly by all three, some by the three earls and the Laird of Auchendowne.
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Grant, ‘The Brig o’ Dee Affair’, 93-94.
\textsuperscript{34} Lee, \textit{John Maitland of Thirlestane}, 187-188.
\textsuperscript{35} Grant, ‘The Brig o’ Dee Affair’, 93-94.
\textsuperscript{36} ‘Robert Bowes to [Burghley]’, 1 January 1592-3, in \textit{CSPScots}, 10, 828-829.
\textsuperscript{37} Law, ‘The Spanish Blanks’; 253.
\textsuperscript{38} ‘Robert Bowes to [Burghley]’, 1 January 1592-3, in \textit{CSPScots}, 10, 828-829.
The letters were found unaddressed but it was clear that they were intended for a recipient of high status. The use of the blank documents was not known until later and will be discussed below. In addition there were other letters written by the Earls under assumed names. The intercepted packets of letters, and the events that followed, are known as the Spanish Blanks and this conspiracy, like the earlier Brig o’ Dee affair, reveal differences in the ideas about how to manage Catholicism within Britain and the effects that such differences could have on the relationship between the two kingdoms.

Bowes reported again two days after his last letter. The Blanks had been given to the Scottish Council for investigation and after reviewing them it was clear that Huntly, Angus and Erroll had conspired with Spain. The Council decided to send two men to James, who was absent, to explain the issue and to call upon him to mount an expedition against the Earls. Sir John Carmichael, stopped to see Bowes before he went to James and requested Elizabeth write to ‘Counsel and prick the King into this action.’ Bowes supported Carmichael’s request and urged that James’ pension be paid in full as it could distract him from the Earls. Before James was informed the Council and the people of Edinburgh moved against the Earl of Angus who was in Edinburgh when the Council was examining the letters. After reviewing the letters the Council called for him to be warded in the Castle. Angus initially refused but acquiesced after the townsmen armed themselves against him.

The Council then proclaimed that ‘all Jesuits, seminaries, excommunicates, and such persons as were with Bothwell …’ should depart within three hours. Bowes noted that ‘This order against Bothwell’s followers is cast in to please the King …’ Bothwell had fallen out of favour with James and in 1591 he had been implicated in using witchcraft against James. James’ trust in Bothwell was severely damaged by these revelations and he sought to have him removed from any influence within Scotland. It was his fear of the unpredictable Bothwell that reinforced James’ friendship with Huntly, despite the Brig o’ Dee affair. James’ personal attachment to Huntly had caused deep tensions within Scottish society with the Kirk feeling he was supporting Catholics over Protestants such as Bothwell. This was made more hazardous following the murder of the Earl of Moray on the 7th of February 1592 by Huntly and James’ refusal to punish him for it. The political and social unrest within

39 ‘Robert Bowes to [Burghley]’, 3 January 1592-3, in CSPScots, 10, 829-833.
40 Ibid., 829-833.
41 ‘Robert Bowes to [Burghley]’, 3 January 1592-3, in CSPScots, 10, 829-833.
42 Lee, John Maitland of Thirlestane, 229.
Scotland was based in many respects on James’ personal relationships with these two men, his friendship with Huntly and his dislike of Bothwell.

James’ position in regards to his Catholic nobility and his lack of response towards their actions caused Elizabeth considerable concern and moved her to write to him in January 1593. In her letter she called for him to remember the danger the plot had placed them both in. She wrote, ‘Yet such I see the imminent danger and well-nigh ready approach of your state’s ruin, your lives’ peril and neighbours’ wrong…’. It is apparent in this letter and in others that she composed to James that she believed the security of England was connected to that of Scotland and because of this she sought to have James secure her northern border, either militarily in opposing foreign invaders or through the capture of those involved in plots. Elizabeth continued this letter by basing her appeal on the long relationship between them and how she had defended him during his childhood and youth. But she then queried how the nobles involved had been permitted to maintain their position and estates regardless of their treachery. Elizabeth committed herself to uncovering the extent of the plot and urged James to act against the ‘ringleaders of this conspiracy’ as she had acted against the individual that her people had intercepted with the letters from the Brig o’ Dee affair. In her letter she stated that the messenger had been given the ‘boots’, a form of torture that crushed the foot.

Elizabeth additionally displayed some measure of unease in regards to James’ lenient treatment of traitors and rebels in Scotland as had occurred following the revelations of the Brig o’ Dee letters. As such she demanded from James ‘a resolute answer, which I challenge of the right, that may be deeds both by speedy apprehension with heedy regard and not in sort as public rumour may preceed present action, but rather that they be entrapped or they do look therefor…’ Elizabeth’s disquiet with Scottish politics and James’ apparent inaction to recent developments was not speedily resolved. For the next two years the repercussions from the Spanish Blanks and the connected issues of security in the north and anxieties about Catholics would exert a noticeable strain on Anglo-Scottish relations and the royal correspondence.

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44 ‘Elizabeth to James’, January 1593, C.W., 365-368.
46 ‘Elizabeth to James’, January 1593, C.W., 365-368.
47 ‘Elizabeth to James’, January 1593, C.W., 365-368.
48 Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’, 214-5.
In the letter discussed above, Elizabeth was pressing for a more significant response than he had given in the past towards conspiracy. In order to do this Elizabeth made use of several rhetorical strategies. These included those of personal honour, their kinship and the length of their relationship itself. Kinship could be used in a number of ways and it was common to use such rhetoric to emphasise the relationship between fellow monarchs. According to Allinson kinship could be used:

- to acknowledge a sense of common experience,
- to make a point about the current status of their relationship,
- to assume a position of authority over the other,
- to invoke redress for perceived transgressions, and
- to navigate the terms of their alliance.\(^\text{49}\)

In reminding James of their kinship Elizabeth was seeking to call attention to their shared experiences, in this instant as a ruler conspired against, and to attempt to gain some authority over the situation through the giving of advice.

Additionally, her reminder of the length of their relationship was given in an attempt to add weight to the rhetoric of kinship. Elizabeth was pointing out that she had been there for him as his concerned relation for his entire life and it was for this reason he should follow her advice and move against the conspirators. Elizabeth added another layer to her rhetoric in her January letter, that of personal honour. Personal honour as a monarch was an important concept for both Elizabeth and James, as was discussed in the previous chapter. For both monarchs a broken promise or a stain on their honour was a blemish on their political status. Additionally the maintenance of honour was an important aspect of preserving their estate’s security.\(^\text{50}\) Elizabeth, in her need to counteract a conspiracy against her in a Kingdom over which she possessed no direct control, called upon the rhetorical strategies of kinship, connection and honour to urge James into action.

Until the end of January very little was known about the substance of the Earls plot, but details emerged after the torture of Kerr and his associate Graham of Fentry.\(^\text{51}\) The blanks were to have been sent with Sir James Chisholm but because he was not ready they were sent with George Kerr instead. The blanks were to be filled by William Crichton ‘with quhat particular conditionnis…’. They were to contain promises of money and men, an assurance that James’ title and life were to be unharmed and that they were to gain liberty of conscience

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\(^{50}\) Allinson, ‘Conversations on Kingship’, 143.

within Scotland. For this purpose the documents had been left blank as they were intended to validate an agreement, which had not been concluded. Fentry added that the noblemen knew more of what was to be placed in the Blanks. When questioned again Fentry added that the idea for the transportation of the Blanks was for ‘sum discreet gentylman suld be directit toward Spayne with letters and blankis to be fillit up thair as suld be accordit betwix thais…’ He was then asked to clarify the plan of the noblemen to the best of his knowledge, to which he responded:

The cheiffest thing I understand they had to seik wes money. And gif any men came, that his Majesties persone and estat suld nawayis be prejugit of his hienes titillis and richt ather heir or in Ingland, both that libertie of conscience suld haif bene cravit without interess or harme of ony persone. And that the landing of the men was thocht most commodious to be in the west seyis becaws of the commoditie of the portis…

The information these two men had revealed, which caused the death of one and the imprisonment of the other, did not motivate James to act against the plot’s ringleaders.

In July 1593 James held a Parliament, which was for the purpose of acting against the Catholic Earls. However, action was only taken against Bothwell whose possessions were forfeited. In justifying his actions, or rather lack thereof, James claimed that there was insufficient evidence to move against the Earls. James’ insufficient response against the Catholic nobles caused tensions not only domestically but also with England. As such in September James wrote to Elizabeth to explain his reasons for such leniency to her. He claimed that Scottish law prevented him from acting against the Catholic Earls, and in addition the remainder of his nobility were against him forfeiting their possessions. He asked for Elizabeth’s advice in the matter, though it is unlikely that he truly wished for any more advice from the English queen. James’ autograph letter was quite lengthy and it demonstrates that he believed it was highly necessary to set out his actions and to explain his reasoning to Elizabeth. However, James’ explanation in September 1593 was unlikely to satisfy Elizabeth and it is curious that James, who often sought to emphasise his kingly status, would feel it necessary to explain his actions.

55 Ibid., 256-257.
James had other reasons than his friendship with Huntly for turning a blind eye to the actions of his Catholic nobility. While it seems that James did not have any personal leanings towards Catholicism himself, he did find it politically beneficial to use the Catholic nobility to counterbalance the influence of the Scottish Kirk. James also held a fear of becoming excommunicated by the Pope as had been done to Elizabeth. His concern was that such an excommunication could weaken his chances of inheriting the English throne. There was a prevailing belief in Scotland and on the Continent that the Catholic party within England was stronger than it actually was. James felt that by avoiding excommunication and maintaining communications with Catholics, both within Scotland and without, he could gain further support for his claim in the succession. This attempt of James to pacify the Catholics led to significant difficulties between himself and the Kirk, and between himself and Elizabeth.

The diplomatic crisis escalated to a royal dispute between late December 1593 and April the following year as a result of the exchange of two strongly worded letters. Elizabeth sent a letter dated the 22nd of December 1593 within which she expressed her dissatisfaction with recent events within Scotland and James’ unsatisfactory responses to those events as a king. Her opening statement set the tone of the letter and demonstrated her unhappiness with James’ actions, writing ‘To see so much, I rue my sight that views the evident spectacle of a seduced king, abusing council and wry-guided kingdom.’ To open a letter to a fellow monarch, particularly one with whom she had a personal understanding, not least as a result of their lengthy correspondence, was quite remarkable. This is not to say that Elizabeth did not ever use such language in royal exchanges, but within her correspondence with James it was unusual. A sense of Elizabeth’s disturbance and increasing tiredness with the ongoing political instability in Scotland, and James’ seeming inaction, is noticeable: ‘For your own sake play the king, and let your subjects see you respect yourself…’ She also indicated that should he continue to ignore her advice then she would not aid him when he ran into difficulties as a result. In April the following year, however, James sent a stinging reply, throwing her words back at her and escalating the tension through a veiled threat. He wrote ‘But thinking it best to take a pattern of yourself since I deal with you, I must, repeating the first words of your last letter, only the sex changed, say ‘I rue my sight that views the evident spectacle of a seduced queen.’ The reason for this acid response was the discovery that one of James’ traitors, the uncontrollable Bothwell, had sought refuge in England and had

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59 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 22nd December 1593, C.W., 372-374.
60 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 22nd December 1593, C.W., 372-374.
received support from some of Elizabeth’s subjects. After elaborating his charges and outrage to Elizabeth he concluded his letter with a reference to the Aeneid, ‘I trust ye will not put me in balance with such a traitorous counterpoise, nor wilfully reject me, constraining me to say with Virgil, ‘Flectere si neq uero superos, Acheronta movebo.’ The Latin translates as: If I am unable to sway the gods above, I will stir up Acheron. Acheron was a river in the classical Roman underworld and thus James is implying he will raise hell if his demands were not met. Through this James appeared to be indicating that if Elizabeth did not deal with Bothwell, he would seek assistance from other sources, foreign sources, who were opposed to Protestant England.

James’ veiled threat was not well received by Elizabeth and she said as much in her letter sent in response in May. In this letter she protested her innocence in the matter of Bothwell and declared that if James had written to her sooner concerning the matter she would have seen to his banishment from England. Nevertheless, Elizabeth’s letter, while denying the accusations James had put forth, was rather more measured and calmer than her letter written in the previous December. It was additionally quite firm in response to James’ threat to seek the assistance of external support, stating he would do better to deal with her honestly as a friend:

And that you may know I am that prince that never can endure a menace at my enemy’s hand, much less of one so dearly treated, I will give you this bond: that affection and kind treatment shall ever prevail, but fear or doubt shall never procure aught from me: and do avow that if you do aught by foreigners, which I know in end worst for yourself and country, it shall be the worst aid that a king ever had…

Elizabeth’s meaning was clear and it was thoroughly understood by James who responded at the beginning of June. In this letter James attempted to save face and to extricate himself from the diplomatic quagmire he had waded into through miscalculation. He began by claiming that she had not understood his meaning: ‘that ye have far mistaken the meaning of my last letter, I am forced to let this present serve for a short apology thereof…’, before launching into an elaborate explanation for the use of the phrase ‘seduced queen’ and his implied threat in Latin. James’ strategy to explain away the difficulties by mistaken meaning was used in several of his letters and was a way by which one author might

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62 Ibid., 375-377.
63 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 18th May 1594, C.W. 377-380.
64 ‘James to Elizabeth’, 5th June 1594, C.W., 380-382.
honourably and diplomatically remove some of the heat from previously written words, thereby allowing for an easing of tensions. In this letter James wrote that he had meant to state that he would only appeal for aid from Elizabeth and would not do so from foreign sources. While it is difficult to see how Elizabeth would have actually believed that was the meaning of James’ blunt words, she did not desire conflict with Scotland and as such allowed him the diplomatic retreat by accepting his meaning, writing that: ‘You have so well repaired the hard lines of menacing speech that I like much better the gloss than the text, and do assure you that the last far graceth you better, and fitteth best our two amities’. Elizabeth’s acceptance, at least outwardly, allowed for a return to a more normalised correspondence between the two monarchs and the easing of the diplomatic strain that had begun with the discovery of the Spanish Blanks.

The Spanish Blanks plot that had been revealed in January 1593 did not resolve itself easily and it took several other events within Scotland to prompt James to make any aggressive move against those involved. James’s refusal to act against the Catholic party in the Parliament of July had caused the Kirk to suspect his religious leanings and it agitated for action. This agitation and the continued diplomatic pressure of England clashed with James’ view of the conspiracy as unimportant and in this situation James sought a compromise. To this end James proclaimed the Act of Absolution on the 26th of November. The Act stated that:

And that all his majesty's subjects which have not as yet embraced and professed the said true religion, or that have made defection therefrom in time bygone, shall, before 1 February next to come, effectually obey his highness's laws by professing and exercising of the said true religion…

This would in effect reset the political board and would at least return Huntly to reassert the image of being Protestant, which would remove much of the strength from James’ opponents. To increase the appeal of this Act that was sure to inspire objections from both the Kirk and England, a clause was added for those who felt their consciences would not allow for such conformity. These individuals were informed that noncompliance would mean that ‘they shall depart out of the realm to such parts beyond sea …’ into exile. The Act continued to

68 ‘The Act of Absolution’.
make it clear that this was not only a general call for conformity but aimed at addressing the issue of the Catholic Earls. It stated that:

> our sovereign lord, with advice of the said elected commissioners of the estates and council, decrees, declares, statutes and ordains that William [Douglas], earl of Angus, George [Gordon], earl of Huntly, Francis [Hay], earl of Erroll, Sir Patrick Gordon of Auchindoun and Sir James Chisholm of Cromlix, knights, being suspected, accused and called to his highness's late parliament for treasonable causes and crimes contained in the summons executed against them upon occasion of blanks and letters intercepted…

These men would additionally be required to pay sureties for good behaviour. The Act of Absolution was intended to take the heat out of the political situation but it did not allow for the strengthening of Huntly’s stance and his refusal to pay surety or to conform.

Amidst the continuing disturbance of possible sanctions of the Catholic Earls, Bothwell sought to regain his position within the court by acting the part of the Kirk’s champion and opponent of Huntly. It was in this role that Elizabeth and the English government gave him secret support and allowed him to seek refuge in the north of England. Bothwell was an unreliable ally however and was impossible to control. On the 3rd of April 1584 Bothwell launched an attack on James at Leith. This raid prompted James to realise the danger of his situation and that the only way in which he could gain the support of both England and the Kirk to move against Bothwell was to give his word that he would act against the Catholic Lords.

James’ first action therefore occurred at the Parliament held in June where the Catholic Lords’ lands were forfeited and they were condemned. In July Huntly himself gave James the final proof that he was unwilling to toe the line and that action was indeed necessary. A Spanish ship arrived in Scotland and its passengers, including priests from England and a papal nuncio bearing gold from the Pope, were captured. Upon hearing of this news Huntly went to Aberdeen and freed the prisoners. James could no longer ignore the issue and base his actions upon their friendship. James decided to act with force.

The division of James’ political opponents ceased to be an issue following the raid on Leith and made moving against them a more reasonable proposition. In the Leith raid Bothwell had shown himself to be an unreliable agent for English interests and a political

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69 Ibid.
liability in their dealings with James’ government. It was no longer possible to argue that Bothwell was the injured party seeking the best for Protestantism and the Anglo-Scottish alliance. As such the English government began to distance themselves from Bothwell and refused him further refuge in England or support. In August the decision to do so was proven wise as Bothwell accepted an invitation from Huntly to side with the Catholic Earls in return for money.\(^{73}\) James delayed gathering his men and dispatched the Earl of Argyll ahead. The greater numbers of the Catholic Lords defeated the Earl but it was only a temporary victory. James followed Argyll north and brought the rebels into submission.\(^{74}\) By March 1585 the situation was clear and James was the sole monarch of his kingdom without the heavy influence of favourites. The Lords resisting him in the north were unable to dissuade him from his position and began to drift into exile. Huntly and Erroll agreed to leave by the 15\(^{\text{th}}\) of March, while Bothwell departed late April.\(^{75}\) With the departure of the rebellious Lords politics within Scotland quietened and diplomacy between England and Scotland eased into a less confrontational relationship.

The Spanish Armada in 1588 did not mark the end of concerns for the vulnerability of northern England, instead it marked a new phase of anxieties that did not diminish until mid-1595. The basis of English anxieties were not entirely new, but were instead a mixture of the traditional appreciation of the ‘postern gate’ and the fear of Catholic conspiracy. It was how these concerns merged during the late 1580s and early 1590s that exerted such a profound impact on Anglo-Scottish relations. It also revealed different perceptions about the risk posed by the intrigues of dissident nobility with foreign powers. The two conspiracies that came to light within Scotland, those of the Brig o’ Dee Affair and the Spanish Blanks, illustrated the differences of view held by the governments of England and Scotland, but more importantly by the two respective monarchs. For James these intrigues by Huntly were not a significant issue and he was willing to overlook them on account of their friendship. For Elizabeth the correspondences between Huntly and Spain threatened not only James but herself. It was her anxiety over the weaknesses of the border with Scotland and the memory of a hostile Catholic force to the north that prompted such fervent urgings for James to act. The differing views of the monarchs exchanged without intermediary through their correspondences were clear and led to a royal diplomatic dispute. In this circumstance the correspondence was not used as a means to reach diplomatic understanding but caused tension between the two Kingdoms, which was only resolved through carefully constructed clarifications and claims.


\(^{75}\) Lee, *John Maitland of Thirlestane*, 283.
of misunderstanding. The resolution of the Spanish Blanks through James’ move against the Catholic Lords allowed the strain on Anglo-Scottish relations to ease and English anxieties about conspiracy in the north to diminish.
Chapter Four: Valentine Thomas and the Succession

Affairs between England and Scotland were for a time calm after the events of the Spanish Blanks, but the capture of Valentine Thomas by English border officials in 1598 sent James into a state of emotional turbulence that turned into an obsession. Thomas was an Englishman of no real importance or standing. During his imprisonment Thomas informed the English that he had secretly met with James, and that in this meeting James encouraged him to assassinate Elizabeth. Neither the English government nor Elizabeth placed any value on Thomas’ story and did not inform James of the conspiracy.¹ James soon learnt of the accusations and was horrified at the possible implications on the succession. Indeed the succession issue was a persistent undercurrent from the late 1590s, though for the most part it was not explored openly in either of the diplomatic channels utilised by the monarchs. James’ concern about this matter resulted in a relatively unimportant incident becoming a significant diplomatic exchange during which the multiple layers of Anglo-Scottish diplomacy were utilised, those of ambassadors and of the royal correspondence, and acts as a clear example of the interrelationship between these diplomatic mechanisms.

The Capture and Questioning of Valentine Thomas

English border officials were already aware of Valentine Thomas’ existence in 1598, as he was horse thief and a suspected Catholic agent.² Based on their knowledge of Thomas, the deputy Warden of the Middle Marches, Edward Gray, was ordered to detain any Scotsman travelling without licence or safe conduct, and Englishmen travelling without authority.³ In March 1598 a Scotsman, Robert Crawforth, was apprehended in Morpeth and questioned. In his interrogation Crawforth spoke of travelling to Edinburgh with Valentine Thomas, who had used the alias of Thomas Anderson. Anderson informed Crawforth on the journey he had ‘gotten the acquaintance of on Mr John Steward of the Bewte keeper of the Kinges chamber door…’ and ‘had promised to bring him to secret conference with the king …’⁴ Crawforth reported that Anderson met James secretly ‘nightly for the space of v

¹ MacCaffrey, Elizabeth I: War and Politics 1588-1603, 323.
² Lee, Great Britain’s Solomon, 82.
³ ‘Edward Gray to Lord Burghley’ 4 March 1597-8, in Salisbury, 8, 77-78.
⁴ ‘Examination of Robert Crawforth’, 2 March 1597-8, in Border Papers, 2, 520-522.
or vj nights together.’ He reported that their discussions focused on James’ claim to
the English throne and the possibility of conquering England. The two men then
returned to England, separated and Crawforth was apprehended. Gray employed
Crawforth to lure and inform on Thomas in return for his life. The plan was successful
and Thomas was taken into English custody. The relevant information was sent to
Lord Burghley and Thomas was later transported to London.

Elizabeth’s council doubted Thomas’ story and as such they did not inform
Scotland, or James himself, of Thomas’ accusations. However, word of Thomas’
confession managed to spread to Scotland and by June 1598 James was aware of the
plot. Sir William Bowes, the treasurer of Berwick, wrote to Burghley reporting
advices from George Nicolson the English ambassador in Scotland. He stated that
James was unhappy about the ‘slander and dishonour laid on him by Valentine…’ and
that he was loudly ‘protesting that for all the crowns in the world he would not be
guilty, even in thought, especially to her majesty.’ Others questioning the issue in
Scotland thought that the incident had been ‘intended against the King.’ James
resolved to send an ambassador, Davis Foulis, to London to protest his innocence in
the matter and to clear his name of any slander, though this ambassador was not
dispatched for several months. His decision to send an ambassador highlights his
determination to publicly proclaim his innocence rather than to handle the matter
discreetly through the correspondence. It also indicates the differences of opinion
regarding the issue of Thomas, for Elizabeth it was one that was better left quiet while
James wanted to proclaim his innocence widely. This fundamental difference of
opinion led to a matter of minor consequence evolving into a long running topic for
Anglo-Scottish diplomacy that was, at least for James, entangled with the succession
question.

Bowes’ report made it clear the Thomas issue could not remain a secret.
Therefore the English resolved to send an ambassador to James to explain the plot’s
details. In sending an ambassador they were responding to James’ resolve to pursue
the Thomas plot through ambassadorial contact. The yet unappointed ambassador was

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5 Ibid., 520-522.
6 ‘Edward Gray to Lord Burghley’ 4 March 1597-8, in Salisbury, 8, 77-78.
7 ‘Sir W. Bowes to Burghley’, 5 June 1598, in Border Papers, 2, 537-538; Susan Doran, ‘Three Late-
Elizabethan Succession Tracts’, in The Struggle for the Succession in Late Elizabethan England:
Politics, Polemics and Cultural Representations, ed. Jean-Christophe Mayer, (Montpellier: Institut de
Recherche sur la Renaissance, 2004), 96-97.
8 ‘Sir W. Bowes to Burghley’, 5 June 1598, in Border Papers, 2, 537-538.
to ‘acquaint him [James] that one Valentyne Thomas, a subject of ours, lewdly disposed and long accused of many notorious crimes, has been apprehended in the borders and being brought to London…’. The instructions proceeded to clarify the English position regarding Thomas:

And therefore howsoever he may hear that the varlet may receive his trial for his other notorious crimes against our crown and dignity, yet we have sent to you to assure him that as we no way do condemn him, so the offender shall never be charged with any confession of his that ever the King did deal with him to any such end….

Nicolson, the English representative in Scotland preformed the instructions, reported on his audience that James was apparently satisfied with Elizabeth’s response, but warned that ‘The King is precious over his good name and would not I conceive be further unjustly slandered.’ He added David Foulis had been appointed to act as James’ ambassador in England and to discuss the situation with Elizabeth. The initial period of the Thomas affair was characterised by the work of ambassadors in place of the correspondence. The reason for the utilisation of diplomats was most likely founded on James’ desire for his innocence to be publicly known and for his ‘good name’ to be preserved.

Five days later Nicolson wrote that James’ secretary, most likely James Elphinstone, had approached him to enquire if Thomas had been tried and executed as James wanted them stayed so he could ‘write with his own hand to her Majesty how he would desire that the matter to be handled for the clearing of his honour therein.’ James’ determination to write personally, rather than to leave matters to his ambassador, indicate that he wished to make full use of the diplomatic mechanisms that had been established over the previous thirteen years and to employ a multifaceted approach to the matter. His use of the personal correspondence would also have ensured that the Thomas affair was taken seriously by Elizabeth as such matters aired within their correspondence would necessitate a monarch’s personal attention and response. Elizabeth found his request strange as she had acted

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9 ‘Instructions for on to be sent into Scotland’, 1 July 1598, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 232-234.
10 Ibid., 232-234.
moderately towards Thomas in order to safeguard James’ interests.\textsuperscript{13} It was becoming apparent at this point that England and Scotland viewed the matter of Valentine Thomas in quite different ways. With the dispatch of ambassador and letter James began to employ both threads of Anglo-Scottish diplomatic contact, and in doing so demonstrated his anxiety with the implications of the Thomas’ plot.

Ambassadors and their reports were an important part of early modern diplomatic conduct, which can be clearly seen in the conduct of the Thomas affair. Indeed it was only in response to such a report that Elizabeth and her council explained the Thomas plot to James. A monarch’s representative, either official or unofficial, had many roles. Possibly one of the most vital ones was the gathering of information from their location and sending it to their monarch and government.\textsuperscript{14} Their information gathering activities, and some ambassadors’ involvement in conspiracies, resulted in diplomats being looked upon with suspicion within the courts they resided.\textsuperscript{15} Regardless of such suspicions the information gathered by diplomatic representatives was of great importance for the creation of policies and helped to guide the actions of their monarchs and ministers in managing diplomatic relationships.

\textit{The Diplomacy of the Valentine Thomas Affair}

Elizabeth wrote the first mention of the Valentine Thomas affair in the correspondence in a brief letter to James sent in July 1598. It was written in her hand and possibly dispatched with her instructions to her ambassador, as they both carry the same date. The two documents would have presumably travelled to Scotland with an English messenger, either an official English messenger or in the hands of a trusted servant. Elizabeth appeared rather disinclined to mention the story of Thomas to James and she began her letter by stating that she did not wish to disturb him but thought he should be informed. While her hesitancy could have been a rhetorical device, she only wrote of the matter after hearing James’ reaction to the Thomas plot and his demands for action that made it a diplomatic concern requiring a personal response. Elizabeth continued her practice of leaving details out of her correspondence and did not name Thomas in her letter or any specifics. Instead she wrote that she had given the information to her ambassador, which again points to the

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letter travelling with the ambassadorial instructions. Elizabeth then made some effort to emphasise that she did not believe that James was involved in any way, writing that ‘And charge you in God’s name to believe, that I am not of so viperous a nature to suppose or have thereof a thought against you…’.\textsuperscript{16} This brief letter reflects that Elizabeth, and additionally her government, did not perceive the Thomas issue to be of any great importance. Additionally it is probable that without the reports from Scotland she would not have written of the plot. James however took a significantly different view of the matter and that is evident from his letters concerned with it and the volume of his correspondence on the topic.

For this chapter I have analysed eight letters exchanged by Elizabeth and James during 1598, the first year of the Thomas affair. Of these eight letters, five were dispatched following the revelation of the Thomas plot and are primarily concerned with the management of the problem. Elizabeth sent two letters, one discussed above on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of July and the second dated the 26\textsuperscript{th} of December.\textsuperscript{17} This demonstrates that while Elizabeth did discuss the topic of Thomas she was not anxious about the issue and thought it was not significant. James however wrote three letters to Elizabeth on the matter dated 30\textsuperscript{th} of July, August and 26\textsuperscript{th} of September 1598.\textsuperscript{18} Another letter from James on the topic is undated but is likely to have been written in January or February 1599.\textsuperscript{19} James wrote far more consistently regarding the Thomas affair than Elizabeth, which illustrates the anxiety that James felt towards the issue. It also clearly depicts the difference between the two monarch’s views of the Valentine Thomas plot and its significance.

James wrote his first letter concerning the Thomas plot at the end of July and immediately set about pronouncing his innocence in the affair as he had informed the English ambassador that he would. A reply in the same month as Elizabeth’s original letter was quicker than was the norm for their correspondence and illustrates the importance James placed upon the Thomas issue. He wrote, ‘But, in truth, I bear so little regard to so vile and treacherous lies proceeding from so base a fountain as I,

\textsuperscript{16} ‘Elizabeth to James’, 1 July 1598, \textit{L.Q.E.}, 258-259.
\textsuperscript{17} ‘Elizabeth to James’, 1 July 1598, \textit{L.Q.E.}, 258-259; ‘Elizabeth to James’ 26 December 1598, \textit{Letters}, 127-128.
through only my innocence, should have force enough to bear…’.

James requested Thomas’ execution be delayed so that ‘my underserved slander may be removed from the minds of all men.’ The strength of this letter in itself would be highly important on its own as an indication of James’ mindset at the outset of the Thomas affair but it becomes even more so when it is placed alongside the following two letters sent in August and September. It was unusual for James to write in three consecutive months, especially as he was not responding to Elizabeth’s letters. The first of the two letters James sent to Elizabeth was brief, only a few paragraphs. It discussed how he had sent a servant ‘whom by ye shall be informed what I crave for clearing of my honour anent these slanders which that base villain have raised upon me…’.

David Foulis, the Scottish ambassador, arrived in London either late August or early September 1598, and met with Elizabeth’s Privy Council to discuss James’ position regarding Thomas’ accusations. James, according to Foulis, was troubled by questions of honour, the misnamed Act of Association, and that any action against Thomas could prejudice James’ right of succession and break Elizabeth’s promise from 1586 to do nothing that could harm his right. The Privy Council sought to counter these claims. The Act that Foulis was concerned with was actually the Act for Provision to be made for the Suertie of the Queenes Majesties most Royall Person, and the continuance of the Realme in Peace, and had been used to establish protocol for action against those who conspired against Elizabeth. They stated that the Act would be of no concern as ‘the records showed that no man could be endangered by it, unless he were charged for attempting against the Prince, convicted and sentence given against him and the Great Seal put to a patent giving power to all men to pursue their lives that have attempted the like fact.’ James’ desire for a public declaration of his innocence was also answered, but not in the manner that he wanted. The Council stated that ‘seeing no public act has proceeded that might endanger your Majesty’s name or right, there can be no public declaration made…’ The Privy council of

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20 ‘James to Elizabeth’, 30th July 1598, L.K.J., 157-158.
21 Ibid., 157-158.
22 ‘James to Elizabeth’, August 1598, L.K.J., 158-159.
England in this instance were clear on their position and it was in agreement with their Queen, the issue was unsubstantial and Valentine Thomas’ accusations should be given no possibility to become public knowledge, which James’ public declaration would have done.

James’ obsession and adamant expression of his innocence in the matter of Valentine Thomas was not for the most part concerned with the slander to his honour but instead revolved around the English succession. The succession had been on his mind for some time and often appeared as an element in other concerns, such as during the initial Anglo-Scottish alliance discussed in chapter one, alongside the execution of Mary Stuart discussed in chapter two, and the events surrounding the Catholic conspiracies in Scotland raised in the previous chapter. Historians have had conflicting views of James and his approach to the English succession. Jenny Wormald argues that he was extremely confident in his eventual succession and as a result did not allow Elizabeth to influence his policies or become a key aspect of his foreign policies.26 Maurice Lee Jr. has argued that James’ greatest ambition politically was to gain the English throne and as a result many of his decisions as a monarch were made with consideration as to how they could be perceived by Elizabeth and her government.27 A more nuanced interpretation of these two positions was put forth by Susan Doran who suggests that James was initially confident but during 1595 this changed following the publication of A Confrence about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland by Robert Persons, an exiled Jesuit. This work argued against James’ rights and instead supported the claim of the Spanish Infanta Isabella.28 With Doran’s identified change in James’ position on the succession, the discovery in early 1598 of Thomas’ plot would have added further substance to his worries and assisted in turning this affair into an obsession for James.29

James’ paranoia over the Thomas affair was extreme but not completely unfounded on account of a Parliamentary Act mentioned briefly above. The legislation in question was created when England was highly anxious about the threat

27 Lee Jr., Great Britain’s Solomon, 82.
29 Doran, ‘Loving and Affectionate Cousins?’, 221-222; MacCaffrey, Elizabeth I: War and Politics 1588-1603, 323.
of Elizabeth’s assassination for the benefit of alternative claimants to the English throne, such as Mary Stuart. Its words reflect this fear, stating amongst the targets of the act were those who made ‘any attempt tending to the hurt of her Majesty’s most royal person, by or for any person that shall or may pretend any title to the crown of this realm after her Majesty’s decease…’ \(^{30}\) It was this Act, which aimed to exclude any claimant to the succession found implicated in any plot to assassinate Elizabeth, that caused James’ paranoia about Thomas’ accusation and his subsequent obsession for Elizabeth to declare his innocence beyond any question.\(^{31}\) The lengthy diplomatic effort in itself testifies to James’ unease over the matter but its connection to the Act was made abundantly clear when he instructed his ambassador to gain a copy of the Act to analyse its precise implications.\(^{32}\) He feared that any suspicion, or even a lingering doubt about his involvement, would have barred him from the English succession.

James’ concerns for the succession became heightened during the Thomas affair and prompted him to seek external support for his claims. In August 1598 an embassy from James delivered their mandate to the King of Denmark. This embassy is generally associated simply with the succession question but its timing indicates that it was prompted by James’ anxieties from the Thomas affair.\(^{33}\) The embassy was sent to discuss two issues, the initial one within the mandate was to call for the unity of Christendom against the Turks, an objective that was only routinely discussed, but the second item was related to James’ claim on the English throne and it was this item that formed the focus of the ambassadors’ energies. The Embassy’s mandate states that:

He [James] wishes us to instruct you more clearly and fully as to his right to the English throne upon the death of Queen Elizabeth. With increasing years she becomes more sickly; and competitors and their

\(^{30}\) ‘An Act for Provision to be made for the Suertie of the Queenes Majesties most Royall Person, and the continuance of the Realme in Peace’, 704-705.


\(^{32}\) Doran, ‘James VI and the Succession’, 31-32.

\(^{33}\) Doran, ‘Three Late-Elizabethan Succession Tracts’, 97.
instigators are leaving no stone unturned at home or abroad to prejudice the title of the King of Scots and his children.\textsuperscript{34}

James wanted his representatives to explain the strength of his claim and to seek a promise of assistance in the case of a disputed succession. He then needed to address the issue of ‘untimely canvassing…’ by stating that he held nothing but affection and devotion for Elizabeth:

But his Majesty has considered that it would not be ungrateful for the Queen of England (whether moved by consideration of his filial offices, or of her advancing years, or by a divine instinct to prevent the outbreak of dire dissensions for the kingdom after her death) to declare him and his children to be by indubitable right the heirs and successors to the Crown. Although he does not despair that she will some time do the right thing, nevertheless he wishes that his kinsmen and especially the Princes of the Holy Roman Empire would importune her to make this declaration.\textsuperscript{35}

James’ ambassadors were to carry this message to the Protestant Princes of Germany, in addition to Denmark, to seek foreign support for his claims in order to remove any doubt over his rights. His embassy was ultimately unsuccessful and the responses he received, while favourable to his claim, refused to promise any support beyond sending representatives to England to appeal that Elizabeth declare in James’ favour at some point in the future.\textsuperscript{36} James’ canvassing did not go unnoticed within England however, as Elizabeth and her government were aware of James’ approach to foreign powers by December 1598. In his letter to the English ambassador in Scotland, Nicolson, Sir Robert Cecil wrote of the news reaching court about the Scottish embassy speaking of ‘her infirmities and sickly state…’.\textsuperscript{37} Elizabeth had taken such speech against her state extremely unkindly and as such his actions could have easily resulted in the opposite of his intentions.

On the 26\textsuperscript{th} of September James wrote to Elizabeth thanking her for her actions so far in counteracting Thomas’ claims. The Thomas affair was the sole

\textsuperscript{34}‘Mandate of James VI for his Ambassadors, and Delivered by them to the King of Denmark at Copenhagen in August 1598’, \textit{Warrender}, 2, 358-361.

\textsuperscript{35}‘Mandate of James VI for his Ambassadors, and Delivered by them to the King of Denmark at Copenhagen in August 1598’, \textit{Warrender}, 2, 358-361.

\textsuperscript{36}Warrender Papers, 2, 363-380.

\textsuperscript{37}‘Sir Robert Cecil to George Nicolson’, [31 December 1598], \textit{CSPScots, 13 Part 1}, 366-368.
concern of this letter and overall James’ tone was of reasonable request and not one of demand in regards to the management of his concerns. It was clear he was not fully satisfied, however, and entrusted Foulis with achieving his objectives and asked Elizabeth to grant them.  

This letter demonstrates that James made a combined approach in pursuing his aims in regards to the Thomas issue. It also signifies that there were two separate approaches to achieving results within Anglo-Scottish diplomacy that could be utilised together when necessary. James’ objectives were clarified in a letter from Foulis to Robert Cecil soon after. Within this Foulis forwarded three articles from James that he asked to be shown to Elizabeth. The articles were similar to what Foulis originally outlined, and requested an Act in Parliament declaring his innocence in the Thomas affair, or that all mention of James’ involvement be removed from any record of Thomas’ accusations or that Thomas be tried in the Star Chamber for his false confession. Any of these options would have been accepted as satisfactory. Meanwhile James continued to agitate for action and Nicolson’s reports for the duration of October are filled with commentary on the issue. James’ perception of England’s slow response agitated James and Nicolson reported:

Since my last such reports have increased here anent the matter of Valentyne Thomas as almost moved the King to doubt and fear a hard intent towards him more than that matter, but that he is of better hope and assurance of her Majesty’s good will to him than some of his subjects would have him, who by many policies would have stirred him to anger thereat.

Nicolson continued his observations of the Valentine Thomas matter in the Scottish court, stating:

38 ‘King James VI to Queen Elizabeth’, 26 September 1598, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 297-298.
40 ‘King James VI to Queen Elizabeth’, 26 September 1598, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 297-298.
Yet I see not but if that matter be not ended to the King’s contentment there will want no evil informants to do the worst offices here, which were good were prevented for the good of both princes.\textsuperscript{43} Nicolson viewed some measure of reassurance as a necessity to calm James regarding the English alliance and his position in the succession. The difficulty with that however was that for Elizabeth and her government the issue was best left unmentioned for James’ benefit and their own.

Cecil wrote to Nicolson in November to inform him of Elizabeth’s final decision on the Thomas affair. He wrote: ‘For the matter of Valentyne Thomas she has stayed the arraignment, so as he stands only indicted, in the which indictment the King is not so much as named, so as for matter of record there is nothing existant.’\textsuperscript{44} Cecil continued: ‘Secondly, which is a most plenary satisfaction, there is an Act drawn to be signed and sealed by the Queen with her signet manual, wherein she protests as much as she wrote in her private letter, absolves the King utterly and condemns the caitiff by the same words.’\textsuperscript{45} This Act specified that the details of the letter were not widely known and not seen as a public declaration, therefore it was necessary to complement the previously given private letter’s reassurances with an Act. Cecil concluded by stating he believed that Elizabeth would offer no more to James on this issue. From the English perspective the Thomas’ plot had been given far more attention than it called for and that these concessions to James should conclude the matter. However, the unrest that the accusations had caused James and the anxieties it had fuelled concerning the succession, were not fully taken into account by Elizabeth and her council. These documents arrived in Edinburgh by the 20\textsuperscript{th} of November and it was quickly apparent that James was not satisfied. Nicolson reported from Scotland: ‘Yet he is very desirous further that all examinations and records of Va: Thomas wherein his name is touched may be drawn out of record and given to Mr. David [Foulis] that nothing thereof may remain against him.’\textsuperscript{46}

While members of her Privy Council managed much of the day-to-day correspondence to her ambassadors, Elizabeth was not oblivious to the conduct of diplomatic activity and was informed of her representatives’ actions. Elizabeth would

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 321-323.
\textsuperscript{44}‘Sir Robert Cecil to George Nicolson’, 7 November 1598, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 331-332.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 331-332.
\textsuperscript{46}‘George Nicolson to Sir Robert Cecil’, 20 November 1598, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 337-338.
also write to her ambassadors and agents when she thought it would be of use or was a matter of importance. Such was the case in late December 1598 in the midst of the Thomas affair when Elizabeth wrote to Nicolson, her ambassador in Scotland. She commenced her letter by stating that the assurances that James had desired had been given though they were entirely unnecessary, indeed she had spared Thomas’ life only for James’ sake. She then continued to the main concern of her missive, James’ embassies to Denmark and Germany speaking of the succession of which her ambassador in Denmark had informed her. Elizabeth wrote of her displeasure that the embassy in question:

have be wrought to handle so impertinently with other princes a matter of sour and distasteful nature to any prince as the bespeaking aforesaid by public embassy assistance for the recovering of that estate and fortune in which Almighty God has placed us an absolute and free monarch with[ou]t help or dependence of any but God’s ordinance.\textsuperscript{47}

Her letter continued to state that the Scottish ambassadors were saying Elizabeth was in a ‘valetudinary state….’\textsuperscript{48} The conclusion of the text instructed Nicolson to give James a warning to ‘be careful that no boute-feux or factious subjects of his authority or name to colour any unkind or contemptible courses towards us or our state, either abroad or at home.’\textsuperscript{49} Elizabeth’s message to Nicolson demonstrates that she was aware of the various threads of her diplomatic relationships and sought to utilise different methodologies for different purposes.

In December 1598 Elizabeth’s Privy Council assembled three different documents for James. The first of these documents was the confession of Thomas, which outlined his accusation of James’ encouragement for Elizabeth’s assassination, stating ‘I must have you do another thing for me, and all is one, for it is all but blood. You shall take an occasion to deliver a petition to the Queen in manner as you shall think good, and so may you come near to stab her.’\textsuperscript{50} The second document was a declaration from Elizabeth that set out Thomas’ capture and that he had implicated James. It stated ‘notwithstanding such satisfaction as we have given him by private
letters …’ that ‘he remains still much grieved with the scandal…’.  

After commenting on her longstanding relationship with and care for James she stated ‘we do hereby profess to all to whom these letters shall come that we give no credit to such things as the said Valentyne Thomas has affirmed against our good brother in any sort…’.  

The requirement for a declaration about matters that had already been considered in the letters emphasises their private nature and therefore their insufficiency in counteracting concerns of public reputation. These two official documents were primarily aimed at satisfying James’s demand for a public acquittal and were accompanied by a personal attempt by Elizabeth to conclude the matter through the use of their correspondence.

Elizabeth’s letter tried to soothe James’ highly-strung nerves concerning the Thomas plot and in response to his previous two letters on the subject. The letter was constructed in her own hand and dated the 26th of December. Elizabeth informed James that she had fulfilled the requests given to her by Foulis, his ambassador. She then stated ‘by my signature to such a grant as I suppose you might ask manie kings and lacked such a furniture.’ It is evident from Elizabeth’s letter that she did not think that the matter was of importance and that she was humouring James by issuing the patent. Elizabeth additionally wanted to clearly inform James that it was only because of their long relationship and her personal care for him that she accommodated his requests. This was further emphasised by the explanation of such in her personal letter to James, which enabled her to speak to him directly without a diplomatic intermediary.

The documents arrived in the hands of Nicolson late January 1599. After the documents were delivered Nicolson reported that the matter of Thomas was far from settled. He wrote of an audience with James where:

He [James] also said that she did not free him in her declaration, but as proceeding upon his own protestation of his clearness and of her opinion of the same; and in which he said her majesty might have

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52 ‘Declaration of Queen Elizabeth concerning Valentyne Thomas’, 20 December 1598, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 358-359
53 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 26th December 1598, Letters, 127-128.
cleared him upon and by declaration of his long and good behaviour towards her and upon her experience had thereof…

James called Thomas, a ‘lying and false knave…’, and suggested he be sent to Scotland to be properly questioned and implied that torture would be an appropriate method. Nicolson concluded his report by stating ‘I see the King intends yet to insist yet again with her for her favour to him that he be perfectly cleared of Va: Tho: slanders.’ James made his position abundantly clear in his dissatisfaction with David Foulis’ performance of his duties in London and Nicolson remarked ‘how little the King thought the things Mr. David brought back were to his contentment or honour…’ and ‘that the King has again viewed and reviewed such things as Mr. David brought anent his acquittal of that matter of Valentyne Tho[mas’] slanders, and the more he views them the less contentment he finds…’. As a result of James’ dissatisfaction Foulis was disgraced. This was one of the significant risks of diplomatic service, for while achieving the goals instructed of them could give an ambassador great rewards and opportunities, any perceived failure of duty could result in royal disfavour and ruin a diplomat’s career.

James responded to the documents sent by Elizabeth in a lengthy letter constructed in his hand. There is not a specific date for this letter but it is likely that it is the letter recorded by Nicolson as being part of a packet of letters given to him around the end of February. The writing of the letter had been delayed for some time, a fact that Nicolson felt the need to report on: ‘But seeing it falls not so out but receives longer delay I have thought it my duty to inform you the causes thereof, which are these: that the King has been troubled with a cold…’ His cold aside, James expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the documents, writing that ‘I cannot finde, in any pointe thatiof, anything near to my iuste satisfaction.’ The management of the issue was additionally made more delicate by James’ refusal to accept the documents from Elizabeth and instead returned them to her. Sir James Elphinstone wrote to Robert Cecil explaining that Foulis was thoroughly disgraced for accepting the offending papers that did not fulfil his Kings orders and as such the offending papers

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55 Ibid., 384-387.
58 ‘George Nicolson to Sir Robert Cecil’, 17 February 1598-9, CSPSsots, 13 Part 1, 405-406.
were ordered returned. Elphinstone requested that Cecil ‘would travail by all good means that such a patent might be procured as thereby his Majesty’s innocency might be clearly manifested…’.  

Elizabeth did not immediately respond to James’ actions but in late April Sir William Bowes was instructed to go to Scotland. His instructions were detailed and outlined the events of the entire Thomas affair, commented on the return of the documents and James’ dissatisfaction, stating ‘For requital of all which we have now a letter of expostulation for further satisfaction and, instead of thanks for that we did, a return of all the originals under our own hand as not worthy the keeping.’. The instructions highlight that in his hasty return of the documents James had implied Elizabeth’s words written in her own hand were worthless, which was a slight to Elizabeth’s honour inflicted by James in pursuit of his own.

James held several audiences with Bowes during which Bowes partially clarified the situation and attributed some of the problems to miscommunication. James had believed that Thomas had already been tried which would have allowed Thomas’ accusations more potency. Bowes informed James that Thomas had only been indicted but not brought to trial. Bowes conducted his work as Elizabeth’s ambassador efficiently and was highly successful in his audiences. He was able to gain the agreement of James to accept a personal letter from Elizabeth confirming his innocence without any public declaration on the issue. Valentine Thomas spent the rest of Elizabeth’s reign imprisoned, but soon after James’ ascension he was executed, thus putting an end to this long drawn out affair. James’ obsession with having his innocence in the matter proclaimed to all appears rather extreme, for this was not a serious plot nor was any significance placed upon it by anyone of importance in England. Additionally any public acknowledgement of James’ innocence would necessarily result in Thomas’ accusations becoming public knowledge and would therefore be counterintuitive. Instead James kept this issue alive when it could have faded quickly into insignificance.

63 ‘Answers of King James Vi to the Propositions Submitted to him by Sir William Bowes’, [31 May 1599], CSPSsots, 13 Part I, 488-492. 
64 Lee Jr, Great Brittain’s Solomon, 82.
The Succession Issue in the Correspondence

James sought to ensure his succession to Elizabeth in a number of ways but generally he did not utilise the correspondence for this task. Indeed one of the clearest traces of James’ attempts to ensure his succession is not found in his own letter, but instead in one written by Elizabeth in August 1600. In the August of that year James had been ambushed at Gowrie House, the details of the conspiracy are not entirely clear but it did result in the deaths of the earl of Gowrie and his brother.\textsuperscript{65} Following his escape from the attempted assassination Elizabeth wrote to congratulate him on his survival and provided an interesting comment. She said that she was aware that preparations had been made for her funeral, writing:

And though a King I be, yet hath my funeral been prepared (as I hear) long or I suppose that their labour shall be needful, and do hear so much of that daily as I may have a good memorial that I am mortal, and with all so be they too that make such preparation before hand…\textsuperscript{66}

Her message became more pointed though by adding that ‘they are so well known that they may do more harm to others than to me.’\textsuperscript{67} James had been in communication with several members of Elizabeth’s court to prepare his way to the succession. At this time James’ main correspondents in England other than Elizabeth were Essex and his supporters.\textsuperscript{68} From this letter it appears that Elizabeth was aware of his dealings and warned him that such actions could damage his claim, just as he feared would happen as a result of Thomas’ accusations against him. It appears that James fully understood the implication of her point and replied to her letter in September in a rather direct fashion. He wrote, ‘And quhairas ye appeare to charge me with the prepairing untymouslie of your funerallis …’. After attempting to dispel the rumours surrounding her future funeral he continued to state his lack of involvement in such preparations, ‘But as for purging me of all these surmyses, I will onlie repeate my former attestations of my upricht and honest course in all that

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 278-279.
concerned your person or state…’.  

James did not halt his communications with members of her court, but his protestations were accepted and not queried again as Elizabeth’s point had been made.

While James had maintained a longstanding correspondence with Elizabeth, he additionally conducted a diplomatic exchange with the members of the English government. However, his understanding of the English court was rather simplistic and inaccurate. It appears that James was of the belief that councillors opposed to his right of succession controlled Elizabeth, and that the worst of these councillors were William Cecil Lord Burghley and his son Sir Robert Cecil. It was James’ belief in the Cecils’ hostility that prompted him to open communications with Essex and his supporters who gave support to his viewpoint because of their political rivalry with the Cecils. James’ involvement with Essex was not unknown to Elizabeth as her letter from August 1600 demonstrates. Her warning was not heeded though and in 1601 James’ risked his position in the succession through his attempts to ensure it. On the morning of the 8th of February Essex and his supporters marched out of Essex House in a fit of political desperation and called for support from the people of London and their protection from his rivals. He claimed that he intended to free Elizabeth from evil councillors and to ensure that the Spanish Infanta was not named as her successor. His rising was completely unsuccessful and shortly after Essex imprisoned and executed for his actions. Before Essex was placed into custody he had many of his documents burned so the full details of the rising are not entirely clear. However, it is known that James was in some way involved with, or at least informed of, of Essex’s plans. After the Essex Revolt James’ ambassadors came to an understanding with Robert Cecil and a secret correspondence began between him and James. Whether this correspondence was known by Elizabeth cannot be proven but

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69 ‘James to Elizabeth’, September 1600, Letters, 132-133.
71 ‘Elizabeth to James’, 21st August 1600, L.Q.E., 278-279.
74 Doran, ‘James VI and the English Succession’, 40.
if it was done without her approval its discovery would have placed Cecil in danger. Elizabeth did not approve of James’ covert correspondences with members of her court but they were useful in the smooth transition following her death regardless of the danger that could have resulted from their discovery.

There were other traces of James’ interest in the succession, but in his letters to Elizabeth they were only that. James could not risk blatantly pushing his claim again, as he had by his involvement in the Essex Revolt. Because open pursuit of the issue was closed it is probable that he did so covertly by attempting to gain Elizabeth’s favour in her final years. From the beginning of the correspondence Elizabeth had written many letters of advice to James. This advice was not generally followed, leading her to write in January 1592 that she:

knowe not what to write, so litel do I like to loose labour in vain; for if I saw counsel auaill, or aught pursued in due time or season, I shuld thinke my time fortunately spent to make you reape the due fruit of right oportunitie; but I see you haue no luk to helpe your state, nr to assure you from treasons leasur. Elizabeth’s exasperation with the lack of response to her advice never dissuaded her, but by the final years of her life there was a change to their customary pattern. James started asking Elizabeth for advice that had previously been given to him unsolicited. He also began informing her of contact with foreign powers, such as Spain or the Papacy in Rome. These requests for advice from James were more than likely part of an attempt to assure Elizabeth of his commitment to her in her final years and that he was not plotting against her interests. James’ requests were therefore a form of reassurance to Elizabeth of his loyalty and religious allegiances, and an attempt to ensure his succession following her death.

The Valentine Thomas affair was a long lasting diplomatic issue in Anglo-Scottish relations. It was an intriguing episode because Thomas himself was an unimportant figure and his plot was extremely doubtful. His capture and confession however led to a complex diplomatic exchange that lasted over two years. In many

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77 MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics 1588-1603*, 323.
respects this exchange could be said to encapsulate the Anglo-Scottish diplomatic relationship as navigated by Elizabeth and James. To manage the affair each monarch used all of the diplomatic tools at their disposal. Sometimes a letter was the most likely chance for success while at others the display of an official ambassador was more likely to procure the wanted result. The Thomas affair also involved at its heart the accompanying issue of the English succession and it was this that caused such consternation from James and prompted him to engage in hazardous actions that could have resulted in his loss of the English throne. In the end it was Elizabeth who saw the issue with far more clarity than her Scottish counterpart and sought to warn him when he overstepped. The experienced Queen, while unhappy with James’ meddling in English politics and his untimely canvassing, sought to protect James even from himself. If he had been granted his demands in the Thomas matter his right as her successor could have been prejudiced. Instead Elizabeth offered all that was possible without compromising James and thus ensured his eventual ascension as the King of England.
Conclusion

For over eighteen years Queen Elizabeth of England maintained a substantial correspondence with her godson King James VI of Scotland. This correspondence was to a large extent a personal exchange between these two highly intelligent monarchs. Most of Elizabeth’s letters to James, particularly those concerning matters of importance, were written in her own hand, which demonstrates the significance of the diplomatic relationship to Elizabeth. James approached the correspondence in a different manner, utilising the services of scribes more frequently and particularly when he saw the matter to be of lesser importance. However when the issue in question was of personal significance to James, such as was the case preceding Mary Stuart’s execution or pursuing satisfaction in the Valentine Thomas affair, he would construct the letter in person using his own hand. In routine letters or matters of little political value to the monarchs scribes were utilised. In these cases Elizabeth in particular remained closely involved in the drafting process and was known to have final copies rewritten for the utilisation of a single disapproved word. The personal involvement of the respective monarchs in the construction of their correspondence allowed a freer exchange than would have been possible by either an exclusive use of scribal letters or through diplomatic representation. It also permitted a more individualistic approach to rhetoric and appeals to mutually shared concepts of kingly honour and kinship. However, the use of royal correspondence, while highly useful, was not in itself a sufficient manner for managing the complexities of Anglo-Scottish relations during the late sixteenth century. Therefore alongside the letters a lively diplomatic exchange was undertaken to safeguard the relationship and to provide further channels of communication.

The English and Scottish governments made extensive use of diplomatic personnel alongside the more intimate royal correspondence. This form of diplomatic contact was far more public than the letters and had its own protocols. During the late sixteenth century English diplomacy became increasingly professionalised with a structure of apprenticeship and regional specialisation. A number of diplomats were repeatedly tasked as representatives in certain locations, which enabled the development of their own personal networks of local supporters and informants. The position of resident diplomats as central figures in information networks resulted in
them often coming under suspicion for involvement in political intrigues or conspiracies, nevertheless the role of the diplomat was significant to the continued flow of diplomacy. Elizabeth’s representatives in Scotland were for the most part experienced diplomats who served for long periods of time in Scotland or were posted there on a number of occasions. English diplomats were generally chosen and directed by Elizabeth’s Principal Secretary. This enabled the Principal Secretary to have influence on his Queen’s policy, however this did not place him in primary control. No decision could be made and no action undertaken without Elizabeth’s approval which acted as a limiter on the Principal Secretary’s authority. Diplomats representing both Elizabeth and James had the ability to influence the relationship between their respective kingdoms, either for better or worse depending on their service. The utilisation of diplomats, regardless of their professionalism, was not a sufficient method for handling the multitude of variables that commonly occurred in the process of early modern diplomacy. For this reason Elizabeth did not restrict her contact with James to the work of her diplomatic professionals, nor did she manage her affairs solely through their correspondence, rather she sought to utilise both methods of connection and establish a multilayered diplomatic relationship.

Multilayered diplomacy was not in itself a new methodology but for the duration of Elizabeth’s relationship with James following his assumption of personal rule it became her favoured manner of managing her diplomacy with Scotland. This thesis has drawn attention to the ways the Elizabeth sought to initially establish and then maintain the Anglo-Scottish alliance through use of a dual layered approach. In doing so her personal correspondence with James became a centre point for ongoing relations between the two kingdoms. It enabled sensitive issues to be managed by the monarchs with minimal involvement from other parties but it additionally permitted alternate avenues if necessary. The four chapters of this thesis explore the working relationship of the correspondence and diplomatic personnel through key periods of the relationship. These significant periods required more than one method in order to achieve an outcome that was satisfactory to both Elizabeth and James. The varied approach was not always successful and at times one of these methods could cause an escalation of tensions in place of removing them, however the existence of two different threads of communication ensured that it was highly unlikely for communication to halt altogether. Indeed during the period covered by this thesis there was only one year where official communications between England and
Scotland were halted. Elizabeth’s approach to her relationship with James was a combined method and sought to extract the most from her highly capable diplomatic representatives and Privy Council in strengthening the alliance between formally hostile kingdoms. In creating and then maintaining the Anglo-Scottish alliance through the use of both personal and professional methods Elizabeth achieved a measure of understanding with Scotland that ensured a smooth succession for James to the English throne following her death.

The first concern of both layers of diplomacy was the creation of an Anglo-Scottish alliance. It was during the two-year process of negotiating the alliance that many of the connections between England and Scotland were established. In the midst of the negotiations James assumed full authority as a king in his own right after a lengthy minority. This resulted in a need for Elizabeth to engage with her Scottish counterpart directly in place of the more indirect method of diplomats overseen by her Principal Secretary. The negotiations were not a smooth process however and the murder of Francis Russel on the borders slowed the process. It also demonstrated the importance of border issues to the Anglo-Scottish relationship that continued long after the conclusion of the treaty in 1586. Through utilising the correspondence to demand satisfaction for her noble’s death Elizabeth sought to gain James’ personal involvement in the matter’s resolution and to connect such a resolution to the treaty’s conclusion which was desired by both monarchs. James also sought to achieve a personal objective in this early phase of the correspondence by requesting Elizabeth wait for his personal explanation of rumours instead of acting immediately upon them. To this proposal Elizabeth agreed and it established the monarchs’ correspondence as a means to counteract potentially damaging rumours, though it was not always utilised in such a ways by these occasionally impulsive individuals. The Anglo-Scottish alliance was eventually concluded through the work of the diplomats on the ground and by the monarchs’ letters, which in effect established a pattern that would more or less continue for the duration of Elizabeth’s reign.

The first challenge to face the Anglo-Scottish alliance concluded at Berwick in 1586 was the discovery of Mary Stuart’s involvement in the Babington plot. Initially James utilised the more traditional exchange of diplomatic personnel in place of the multiple threads established during the recently concluded negotiations, indicating his belief that the situation was similar to previous occasions. In contrast however
Elizabeth immediately sought to communicate directly with James through both their personal letters and by ambassador, which indicated that she at least thought the Mary situation could proceed very different than had been the case previously. As Mary Stuart’s trial progressed it became clear that her life was in grave danger, prompting James to commence direct appeals to Elizabeth for his mother’s life. There was significant pressure placed upon both monarchs during this time, originating from within their own kingdoms and externally. France was particularly interested in preserving Mary’s life and sought to motivate James to take a stronger stance in the matter as a demonstration of kingly honour and his role as a dutiful son. Regardless of this external input and James’ appeals, Mary was executed in February 1587. Elizabeth wrote shortly after learning of the event appealing for James to accept her innocence in the matter. Her use of innocence rhetoric at this time may, or may not, have been genuine but it was apparently required diplomatically. Innocence rhetoric was one of the many rhetorical tropes utilised by the monarchs in their correspondence and in most cases it enabled a difficult situation to be sidestepped as challenging the statement would question a monarch’s word, a concept that was important to both Elizabeth and James. Following Mary’s execution diplomatic relations between England and Scotland were effectively suspended, through both the correspondence and direct representation, highlighted by the refusal of safe conduct for Elizabeth’s ambassador to travel into Scotland. Relations were eventually restored almost a year later as the shadow of the Spanish Armada loomed, but the risk of communication failure remained a concern for the two kingdoms and required careful maintenance through correspondence and by diplomatic endeavours.

Although a significant part of the scholarly literature has argued that Scotland became an insubstantial concern following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the period from 1588 to 1595 was probably the most precarious for Anglo-Scottish relations during the later years of Elizabeth’s reign. Catholic conspiracy amongst the Scottish nobility was the source of the difficulties and was made more troublesome by James’ refusal to act against Huntly, his friend and favourite. Elizabeth and her council viewed James’ inaction on the matter with alarm as the threat of conspiracy had become linked in their minds with the far older concern about the vulnerability of the Postern Gate. Elizabeth demonstrated her anxieties through the high volume of letters she sent to James in this period commenting on the Catholic threat and the need for him to move against the dangerous element within his nobility. James did not see
the matter in the same way as Elizabeth, often leaving her letters without response for some time. It was not only through the utilisation of the correspondence that Elizabeth sought to motivate James, but also through her diplomatic representatives in Scotland, making extensive use of the two threads of diplomatic contact that had been re-established following the Armada. The benefit of multiple avenues of diplomatic exchange was demonstrated in late 1593 – early 1594 when these occasionally fiery monarchs exchanged a pair of highly volatile letters. These letters increased, rather than decreased, the diplomatic tensions and it required careful manoeuvring from their diplomatic representatives and carefully constructed letters to calm the situation. The period of 1588 to 1595 was one of the most volatile of Anglo-Scottish relations that required the correspondence and ambassadorial representation to work together in order to prevent open rupture, and in this case it needed the work of diplomats to cover for their strong willed monarchs’ letters.

The relatively minor issue of Valentine Thomas and his unlikely plot developed into a serious diplomatic concern at James’ instigation. Additionally the flow of diplomatic exchange acts as an example for how these two mechanisms of representation and correspondence worked together and how each could be used in various circumstances. From the outset Elizabeth and her government placed little value upon Thomas’ plot, believing it to be of little consequence. However James took a radically different view of the affair as he thought Thomas’ implication of his involvement could impact on James’ right to the English succession. James’ concerns turned to obsession and ensured that this minor issue became a prominent feature of the Anglo-Scottish diplomatic exchange for several years. It also brought the succession to the fore, though it had been a background concern for James even before the conclusion of the Anglo-Scottish alliance in 1586. The risk to his claim, embodied by Thomas, prompted him to pursue support for his succession rights through foreign contacts and clandestine approaches with English courtiers. His attempts to gain support were not successful, indeed they attracted Elizabeth’s attention and disapproval for his untimely canvassing which could have placed his succession in danger instead of securing it. Ultimately through careful management of the relationship by use of the royal correspondence and ambassadorial representation the matter of Valentine Thomas was managed without significant strain to the alliance. In doing so the last few years of Elizabeth’s reign passed with few
difficulties in Anglo-Scottish relations and paved the way for James’s peaceful and relatively smooth ascension to the English throne following her death in 1603.

There are several other intriguing potential lines of research involving Elizabeth’s correspondence and the idea of multilayered diplomacy that could be pursued. Research into Elizabeth’s earlier correspondence and diplomacy with Mary Stuart when she was still the reigning monarch of Scotland could explore if Elizabeth’s diplomatic strategy to Scotland originated with James or commenced years before. This could additionally aid in establishing whether Elizabeth possessed a ‘Scottish policy’ or if it was more simply a reactive diplomatic relationship. Anglo-Scottish relations may not have been Elizabeth’s only diplomatic connection that she supported with a dual layered approach and this could provide significant insights into her diplomatic network throughout Europe, and indeed beyond. A good starting point to this would be Elizabeth’s diplomacy with France either during the period of Catherine de Medici’s influence or the reign of Henri IV. Catherine’s role as an advisor and an influential member of the French court provided a different type of individual for Elizabeth to negotiate with. The correspondence exchanged between these two strong women may provide useful insights into the ways women wielded diplomatic power and engaged in politics during the late sixteenth century. Elizabeth’s correspondence with Henri IV was of a similar duration as hers with James, which could provide a useful comparison in how she approached these equally important relationships. Furthermore the relationship between Elizabeth and Henri has not received significant attention for over one hundred years. These three main avenues of potential research may yield significant additions to our understanding of how Elizabeth conducted her diplomatic relationships and additionally establish if the idea of multilayered diplomacy argued in this thesis was more widely used by this impressive queen.

The correspondence exchanged between Elizabeth and James was long lasting and diplomatically important but was not isolated from other aspects of diplomacy as some studies of the correspondence appear to indicate through their focus on only the rhetoric of the letters and the ideas that could be traced. The letters themselves were part of a larger diplomatic relationship, one that the letters themselves clearly indicate. In the majority of the letters analysed for this thesis, written by both Elizabeth and James, there are references to other diplomatic figures. These figures mentioned by
the monarchs include ambassadors, gentlemen, bearers and commissioners. In the 
mentioning of these diplomatic individuals it appears that while Elizabeth and James 
wrote many things to each other there was still some concern about the confidentiality 
of what they put to paper. The need for haste could also prompt the use of diplomats 
rather than the letters alone as Elizabeth wrote was the case in her brief note in 1598, 
that ‘for more speed have sent charge with Bowes, to utter all without fraud or guile 
…’. ¹ In this instance however speed was most likely not the only consideration, but 
also the need for secrecy, as the topic being discussed was the plot of Valentine 
Thomas. Diplomats were also used by the monarchs to gauge what the intentions or 
thoughts of the other were in regards to sensitive topics. This appears to have been the 
case in a letter written by James following the murder of Russell in 1585 when he 
wrote that ‘I have also directed expressly the bearer hereof unto you to know your 
mind…’. ² The numerous mentions of individuals involved in diplomatic relations 
between England and Scotland within the correspondence illustrates that the letters 
stood within the larger sphere of Anglo-Scottish relations, and though the importance 
of the letters must not be understated, it cannot be said that they were isolated but 
were instead part of the greater whole.

I hope yow will beare with my molestyng you to long with my 
skatching hand, as proceding from a hart that shall be ever filled 
with the sure affection of

Your loving and friendly sistar,

Elizabeth R.³

With the above words Elizabeth concluded one of the last letters she would 
send to James as three months later she died leaving him the English throne. Her tone 
is affectionate and it concludes with a remembrance of their kinship and friendship 
that had been a feature of their relationship built throughout their correspondence. 
This relationship had not been without its troubles as both Elizabeth and James were 
strong willed and possessed noted tempers that could get the best of them. However 
these difficulties were usually managed through the complex diplomatic mechanisms 
that had been established alongside their formal alliance. These mechanisms included

¹ ‘Elizabeth to James’, 1 July 1598, *L.Q.E.*, 258-259. 
² ‘James to Elizabeth’, 31 July 1585, *C.W.*, 263 
the traditional utilisation of diplomatic personnel as representatives in each other’s courts, as well as an extensive use of a personal correspondence exchanged for the most part in the monarchs own hands. The multiple layers of diplomatic contact were significant as it aided in maintaining the Anglo-Scottish alliance during the politically tumultuous late sixteenth century when many kingdoms within Europe were undergoing significant strain and being torn by religious division and war. These external concerns exerted influence upon Anglo-Scottish relations, as no diplomatic relationship is isolated from its wider surroundings, but through the use of the correspondence and ambassadors these were managed and generally negated. As the words written by Elizabeth above indicate it was a personal relationship, created with difficulty and occasionally at risk of failure, that ensured at first the creation and then survival of the Anglo-Scottish alliance and at its heart were the written words of Elizabeth and James.
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