

Charles I and the Order of the Garter

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Abstract The reforms in the rites and ceremonies of the Order of the Garter that Charles I introduced during the 1620s and 1630s have traditionally been seen by historians as enhancing its high church, religious associations and downplaying its military traditions. This study, however, argues that the celebration of courage, martial achievement, and noble companionship remained central themes within the order during this period and that this tells us a good deal about how Charles understood his relationship with his nobles, and the honorific and chivalric values that lay at the heart of his kingship.

On 20 May 1638, Charles I wrote to his seven-year-old son, Prince Charles, to inform him that he had been elected as a companion of the Order of the Garter. He had been chosen, his father told him, out of the “joyfull & pregnant hopes of your manly virtues in which we are assured you will increase to your owne honour, both in prowes, wisdom, justice & all princely endowments.” The king’s hope and expectation was that “the emulation of chevalrie will in your tender yeares provoke and encourage you to pursue the glory of heroique actions befitting your royal birth & our care & education.”¹ Here, as in other letters, Charles was setting out some of his own most cherished ideals and convictions.² He was also giving voice to the contemporary notion that proving oneself on the battlefield was the supreme expression of masculine prowess.³ Membership of the order, he believed, would help to educate his son in “manly virtues” and chivalric ideals, and provide a “spur” to the “heroique actions” that would vindicate his royal birth and upbringing. These ideals were given visual expression a few weeks later in a Van Dyck portrait of the young prince. This was one of a series of martial portraits of members of the royal family and the aristocracy commissioned from Van Dyck as the nation prepared itself for war against the Scots. He is shown in a full suit of armor that had belonged to Charles’s elder brother, Prince Henry; in his right hand is a cocked wheellock pistol, his left rests on a plumed helmet, and around his neck hangs a chain bearing the lesser George, the medal showing Saint George slaying the dragon that was the badge of the order.⁴

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¹ Charles I letter to Charles, Prince of Wales, 20 May 1638, Ashmole MS 1108, f.117, Bodleian Library (Bod.), printed in Elias Ashmole, *The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (1672), 297.

² Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2005), 12–21, 445–47.

³ Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life* (Oxford, 2009), 44–62.

⁴ Susan Barnes, Nora De Poorter, Oliver Millar, and Horst Vey, eds., *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (London, 2004), 481–83; Karen Hearn, ed., *Van Dyck and Britain* (London, 2009), 77. For

The stress that Charles placed on the masculine and martial qualities of the Order of the Garter is significant because it runs counter to the themes highlighted in some of the recent literature on the subject. The Order of the Garter, like the ideal of chivalry itself, evoked a wide range of associations, from images of loyalty, courage, and heroism in battle to the Christian duty to defend the church and the knightly obligation to protect the weak.⁵ Saint George, the patron saint of the order, was both a warrior and a martyr. These multiple associations have prompted Kevin Sharpe to suggest that, for Charles, the order simultaneously symbolized “manliness and chivalry, chastity, piety and self-regulation, honour and hierarchy.”⁶ This relatively open-ended interpretation of the king’s perception of the order, however, has not been reflected in other recent work.

In a very influential interpretation, Roy Strong has argued that the order developed a less martial, more religious character during the 1630s. There was “a change of emphasis,” Strong claims, as Charles abandoned the public spectacle of the Saint George’s Day processions at Whitehall, in which the knights marched with their retinues in a display of soldierly prowess, in favor of a more civil and spiritual celebration in the relative privacy of Windsor Castle. The central focus became the type of procession depicted in Van Dyck’s sketch of 1638 in which the king paraded under a golden canopy, accompanied by choristers and canons from Saint George’s Chapel chanting the litany, with the knights walking two by two, without their retinues.⁷

This theme has been picked up by others. In his commentary on the 1629 Rubens painting “A landscape with St George and the dragon,” Malcom Smuts has highlighted the way in which the “martial ethos” of the Garter tradition “has undergone a symbolic transformation” and become Christianized. The centerpiece of the painting shows Charles, in the guise of Saint George, having just slain the dragon and about to claim the hand of his princess, Henrietta Maria. This act, combined with the love of the royal couple, had freed the realm from the “devouring monster” of sin and war, and ushered in an era of peace, harmony, and renewal. The depiction of the holy lamb and the Archbishop of Canterbury’s residence of Lambeth Palace,

other martial portraits, see Barnes et al., *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue*, 422, 438, 469, 473, 535, 561, 562–63, 574, 612, 613. In his letter, Charles was probably addressing his son’s governor, the Earl of Newcastle, as much as the young prince. (I am grateful to John Adamson for making this point to me.) Newcastle had been appointed in April 1638, along with Bishop Duppa as tutor, to commence the young Charles’s formal education. Sir Thomas Smith letter to Sir John Pennington, 12 April 1638, The National Archives (TNA), SP16/387/62. The king probably chose him primarily because of his skills as a horseman since one of his principal responsibilities was to supervise the prince’s equestrian training. But the appointment also appears to have owed a good deal to Newcastle’s support for a return to the “manly virtues” and “heroic accens” of the Elizabethan era as a means of restoring the prestige of the English crown and aristocracy. Lynn Hulse, “Cavendish, William, First Duke of Newcastle, 1593–1676,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004). Charles shared Newcastle’s enthusiasm for this program. Both his letter and indeed the portrait of the young prince, reputedly commissioned by Newcastle, can be read as public affirmation of this.

⁵ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London, 1984), esp. chap.1.

⁶ Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (London, 1992), 219–22; see also Kevin Sharpe, “The Image of Virtue: The Court and Household of Charles I, 1625–1642,” in *The English Court*, ed. David Starkey (Harlow, 1987), 241–42.

⁷ Roy Strong, *Van Dyck: Charles I on Horseback* (London, 1972), 59–63; Roy Strong, “Queen Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter,” *Archaeological Journal* 119 (1962): 266–67.

on Smuts's reading, demonstrates that this renewal was to be primarily spiritual and moral, led by a resurgent Church of England.⁸

This stress on the order being emptied of much of its military significance is also a feature of John Adamson's important and innovative account of the transformation of English chivalry during the 1630s. He argues that, as part of a process of distancing the king from the Elizabethan militaristic traditions of accession day tilts, hostility to Spain, and support for the "Protestant cause," the Order of the Garter was remodeled to highlight its sacerdotal and religious aspects. In a shift summed up in the requirement for knights to wear newly designed cloaks bearing the cross of Saint George surrounded by an aureole of silver rays, "the holiness of knighthood was re-emphasised . . . the historicity of St George was affirmed" and renewed stress was placed on "sacred loyalty and idealised moral virtue."⁹ It is these accounts that the king's letter of 1638 appears to bring into question.

This theme is worth exploring further. Charles took his role as Garter sovereign very seriously, grasping every opportunity to celebrate its association with his kingship. His first action on rising each morning was to put on the medal of Saint George, and he was insistent that other members of the order wear the medal whenever they were in public. He promoted commemoration of the order in painting and the visual arts, most notably in the scheme for four tapestries to be hung in the Banqueting House, illustrating its history and ceremony, of which only Van Dyck's oil sketch survives. He also had plans to enlarge the tomb house attached to Saint George's Chapel at Windsor to turn it into a mausoleum for himself and his royal successors.¹⁰ This means that whether or not there was a shift in tone and emphasis during the 1630s, an investigation of what the order meant to Charles, and which aspects of chivalry he particularly valued, can reveal a good deal about his style of kingship and his relationship with the leading nobles who comprised the knight companions.

The king's perception of the Garter was shaped by long acquaintance with its statutes and customs, and an avid interest in its history. Peter Heylyn described how when he visited Charles in his bedchamber at Whitehall in 1631, to present him with a copy of his *The History of St George*, the king "held some conference with me about the argument." It was probably at Charles's behest that Heylyn then produced a second edition, with an expanded account of the history of the order. This drew together accounts by a wide range of contemporary scholars, such as William Camden and John Stow, as well as extensive work on its archives, most notably on the Black Book that contained the revised statutes of Henry VIII's reign.¹¹ Heylyn's *History* provides a useful starting point for investigating the traditions and meanings of the order as they were perceived by Charles and his contemporaries.

⁸ Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia, 1987), 247–49.

⁹ John Adamson, "Chivalry and Political Culture in Caroline England," in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Basingstoke, 1994), 174–75.

¹⁰ Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, 219; Christopher Brown, *Van Dyck* (Oxford, 1982), 189–90; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 136.

¹¹ Anthony Milton, *Laudian and Royalist Polemic in Stuart England: The Career and Writings of Peter Heylyn* (Manchester, 2007), 29–32; Peter Heylyn, *The History of that most famous saynt and souldier of Christ Jesus, St George of Cappadocia*, 2nd ed. (1633), esp. pt. 3.

The themes it highlighted were the three central themes of knighthood and chivalry itself: first, the importance of honoring men of courage and loyalty; second, the value of companionship and the equal standing of men of renown within the honor community; and third, the spiritual role of knighthood in defending true religion.¹² Heylyn's frontispiece emphasized that these ideals were as relevant now as when the order was founded by Edward III in 1348. On one side was a picture of Edward and on the other was a picture of Charles, each clasping a hand to the Garter. Underneath was the motto "Instituit Edwardus, Adornavit Carolus."¹³

The order was founded as a society of fighting men, dedicated to the pursuit of martial valor and bound together by personal loyalty to their lord. Heylyn traced its origins back to King Arthur's foundation of the Round Table, which had been a means of bringing together the "military spirits" who fought alongside him against the Saxons. Edward revived the idea of the Round Table to provide a focal point for gathering "gallant spirits for tilt and tournament," and then after his victories at Crecy and Calais in 1346–48, he decided "to institute an order of a choice companie of knights [twenty-six in number, including himself] who both in oath and honour [were bound] to adhere unto him . . . to adorne their valour manifested in the warres with honour."¹⁴ The Garter was introduced to distinguish the members of the order and to bind them together because it was a common device worn by knights dressing for combat. The motto engraved on it—"Hon y soit qui mal y pense" ("Shame to him that evil thinketh")—Heylyn interpreted as a reproof to anyone who might think the companions had "some other end in it than what was most just and honourable."¹⁵ This close identification of the order with courage and martial achievement was summed up in the preface to the Henrician Black Book, which Charles may have had in mind when he wrote to his son. It described the order's purpose as being to ensure that

true nobility, after long and hazardous adventures should not enviously be deprived of that honour which it hath readily deserved; and that active and hardy youth might not want a spur in the profession of virtue, which is glorious and eternal.¹⁶

This was also the central theme of the Garter investiture ceremony. When the young prince had the Garter strapped to his left leg on 21 May 1638 the deputy chancellor of the order, James Palmer, solemnly declared that "therby thou maiest be admonished to be courragious & having undertaken a just warre into which onely thou shalt be engaged thou maiest stand firme, valiantly fight & successfully conquer."¹⁷

Courage and constancy were the prime virtues celebrated by the order, but closely associated with these were loyalty and fidelity. The letter sent out to summon a new knight to be invested with the Garter tied these two sets of qualities together. He was being elected, the letter stated, in "consideration of your approved truth and fidelity,

¹² Keen, *Chivalry*, esp. chap.10.

¹³ "Edward established it, Charles has embellished it," in Heylyn, *History of St George, 1st ed.* (1631), frontispiece.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* (1633 ed.), 313–20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (1633 ed.), 323–24.

¹⁶ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 182.

¹⁷ Report of Garter Feast, 21 May 1638, Ashmole MS 1108, f. 140, Bod.

as also of your courageous and valiant acts of knighthood.”¹⁸ In the list of crimes for which a companion could be expelled from the order, treason and cowardice were the most heinous. Heylyn described what Maurice Keen has called the “solemn sadism” by which a knight who had transgressed would be stripped of his honors, lest his continued membership bring the whole order into disrepute.¹⁹ While Charles was sovereign, this sanction was never applied, even to those knight companions who were on Parliament’s side in the civil war. But there was the recent instance of Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham, convicted of treason in the Main Plot of 1603. The annals of the order record how on 12 February 1604 he had his banner, crest, sword, and helm “thrown down” from above his stall in Saint George’s Chapel in Windsor then cast out of the west door of the church in an act of ritual humiliation.²⁰

Alongside courage and loyalty, the statutes and traditions of the order placed a heavy emphasis on what Keen describes as “the bond of equal standing in chivalry.”²¹ To qualify for entry to the order, a candidate had to be of knightly status or above and able to demonstrate the gentry lineage and possession of a coat of arms through three generations, which during the sixteenth century was being claimed as the standard of true gentility. Once elected, however, all companions except the sovereign stood on an equal footing, as in the original Round Table. Edward III’s intention, as Heylyn explained, was that since all were “fellowes and companions of the same order . . . therefore no prioritie [was] to be challenged by any of them, no more then was in Arthur’s table which hee imitated.”²² Edward had given form to this principle by allocating to each knight a personal stall in the choir of Saint George’s Chapel—thirteen on the king’s side and thirteen on the prince’s. Over each of these, he erected his stall plate with his coat of arms and then set up his heraldic achievements of banner, sword, helm, and crest. When a stall became vacant, by death or degradation, the next elect knight succeeded to it regardless of his status (except in the case of the Prince of Wales’s stall or one of those reserved for foreign princes) and retained it until his own demise. For ceremonial purposes, he was paired off with the knight in the stall opposite him and always processed two by two with his companion, unless the stall was vacant, in which case he walked alone. This principle was adhered to until Henry VIII’s reign, when a new statute was introduced giving the sovereign power to rearrange stalls at will. From this point onward, when a vacancy occurred, the existing knights were advanced to the more senior stalls closer to the sovereign, and new companions were brought in at the lowest stalls.²³ This introduced precedence into the order in a way that had not existed before. As Heylyn emphasized, however, it was a precedence particular to those who belonged to it: “for in the order they take place according unto the antiquity of their creation and not according to their titles, dignities and estates.” A mere knight could therefore occupy a higher stall

¹⁸ Letter for the election of a Garter Knight, 1570, Ashmole MS 1108, f. 120, Bod.

¹⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 176; Heylyn, *History of St George* (1633 ed.), 337–38, 343–44.

²⁰ Annals of the Order of the Garter 1603, MS X.7, ff. 103–04, Windsor Castle, St. George’s Chapel Library and Archive (WCLA); Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 621–22.

²¹ Keen, *Chivalry*, 197.

²² Heylyn, *History of St George* (1633 ed.), 341.

²³ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 321–28; Peter Begent and Hubert Chesshyre, *The Most Noble Order of the Garter 650 Years* (London, 1999), 220–21.

than a duke, which, as he pointed out, was what had happened between 1603 and 1610 when Sir Henry Lee occupied a higher stall than the Duke of Lennox.²⁴

These notions of companionship and qualified equality beneath the sovereign were expressed in the process for electing new knights. Each knight companion present at the annual chapter would fill in a suffrage paper with nine nominations (three earls or “those of higher degree,” three barons, and three knights), based on the tradition of the Nine Worthies, the heroes of chivalry. A summary of these papers would then be presented to the sovereign, who after conducting a “scrutiny” would make his election. While the final choice of candidate was solely the sovereign’s prerogative, based on his understanding of the merits of those under consideration, convention required that he should normally elect those who had received “the greatest number of voices.” This was generally adhered to by simply letting the knights companions know in advance which candidates the sovereign favored so that they could include them in their suffrage papers.²⁵ Once the election had taken place, it was normally recorded in the annals as with “the consent of all the knights companion.” This was not, as Elias Ashmole explained in his 1672 guide to *The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter*, because their consent was required but “to signify rather an applauding or praising of the sovereign’s choice as being in their judgements according to the merits of the person elected.”²⁶

The chapter, which took decisions relating to the governance of the order, worked in a similar fashion. Again the sovereign had the final say, but he was expected to consult the companions and secure their consent. During the 1630s there was a nucleus of established companions, consisting of the Earls of Arundel, Salisbury, Dorset, Carlisle, Holland, and Berkshire, and, in particular, the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, the lieutenant and “ancientest knight” of the order, all of whom attended the majority of feasts and chapters.²⁷ Charles felt comfortable working with such men, and his respect for their advice was such that on occasion he would change course as a result of it. There was a good example of this in February 1641 when he proposed dispensing with the annual feast of the order because of “the great and important affaires in parliament.” The knights’ response was that while they “did all confess an absolute power to dispense in the sovereign,” they were unable to find any previous instance in which the celebration of the feast had been “omitted,” no matter how difficult the circumstances. They, therefore, “humbly besought the sovereign not to begin to make a breach in the constant order.” The matter was debated, a vote was taken, and it was decided to find time to celebrate the feast as normal.²⁸ The chapter’s procedures provided a model of

²⁴ Heylyn, *History of St George* (1633 ed.), 341; Reports of Garter Feasts 1602–8, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 64–68, Bod.

²⁵ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 265–76, 290.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 291–92.

²⁷ Annals of the Order of the Garter, 1553–1638, MS X.7, WCLA; Reports of Garter Feasts, Ashmole MS 1108, Bod. On the status of the lieutenant and “ancientest knight,” see Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 533–38. The lieutenants prior to Pembroke and Montgomery were Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester (to 1627) and William Herbert, 3rd Earl of Pembroke (to 1630).

²⁸ Garter chapter, March 1641, Ashmole MS 1111, f. 41r, Bod.; Ashmole MS 1108, f. 146v, Bod.

governance that Charles appears to have found highly congenial. To some extent, it matched the constitutional arrangements for the realm as a whole. As he readily acknowledged, a good monarch would consult with, and seek the consent of, both council and Parliament and, where appropriate, follow their advice. The final decision, however, remained his, as the sovereign being endowed by the God with the kingly wisdom to discharge this role.²⁹ In the case of the Garter, there was the difference that consultation did not involve the whole realm but a small, select group of noble companions whose acknowledged virtue had earned them the right to have their say. It exemplified the traditional principle that a monarch should consult with his *consiliarii nati*, his natural counselors, made up of the nobles whose innate wisdom and virtue equipped them to perform this role.³⁰

The third prominent theme in the traditions and statutes of the order was the ideal of Christian knighthood. Central to this was the cult of Saint George, which after receiving a battering at the hands of Protestant reformers who claimed that Saint George was a fictional character or, worse, an Arian heretic, was revived by Peter Heylyn. Heylyn accepted that the Golden Legend story of Saint George slaying the dragon was not a true event but rather an allegory for the Christian knight confronting and defeating sin; otherwise, he took great pains, supported by a mass of documentation, to demonstrate that he was a canonical saint acknowledged by the early church.³¹ The image of Saint George slaying the dragon continued to be the central motif of the order, decorating the lesser George (which knight companions were required to wear on a blue ribbon as part of their daily dress) and the greater George (hung on the Garter collar and worn on ceremonial occasions). Nowhere was it more graphically or dramatically depicted than on the new seal of the order, introduced at Charles's behest in 1637.³² It was an image which, as Heylyn explained, served to remind the companions that "as their saint and patron was in his time a faithful champion of the church of Jesus Christ so should they also be the guardians and defenders of the Christian faith . . . never to lay aside St George's resolution of dying, if need be, for the faith of Christ and in defence of his religion and the Holy Church."³³ As the Garter symbolized courage, fidelity, and knightly companionship, so the George was a constant reminder of the Christian vocation of knighthood.

The traditions and ideals associated with the order, then, encompassed a wide range of references and allusions. In different contexts, different themes were accentuated and symbolized. The question raised by recent writing about the order is which of these had the most powerful resonance for Charles and which was given most prominence during the 1630s. It is important to emphasize that this was never a matter of either/or and that one aspect was never being privileged to the exclusion of others. The order always retained its multifaceted identity. Nonetheless, it might be possible to detect shifts of emphasis that, as has been suggested, could

²⁹ Cust, *Charles I*, 19–20, 469.

³⁰ Kevin Sharpe, *Politics and Ideas in Early Stuart England* (London, 1989), 88–89.

³¹ Strong, "Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter," 262–66; Milton, *Heylyn*, 30–32; Strong, *Charles I on Horseback*, 62; Heylyn, *History of St George* (1633 ed.).

³² Begent and Chesshyre, *Order of the Garter*, 157–70; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 246–47.

³³ Heylyn, *History of St George* (1633 ed.), 335.

reveal much about how Charles conceived of his kingship and how he understood the role of his nobles within it.

The first point to stress is that there is no doubt that Charles was strongly committed to promoting the spiritual mission and welfare of the order, and consequently he gave strong support to proposals to beautify and enhance the religious ceremony of Saint George's Chapel at Windsor. The extent to which the initiative here came from the king himself or from others is unclear. William Laud, although holding no specific post connected with the order, took a particular interest in its affairs and worked closely with successive deans of Windsor, Matthew Wren (1628–34) and his brother, Christopher (1634–59).³⁴ As in his ecclesiastical policy more generally, Charles tended to rely on others to translate his preferences into practical policy and remind him of what needed to be done. At the same time, however, he encouraged them to come forward with proposals by letting it be known what approach he favored.³⁵

The initial measures in this area related to the silver communion plate used in Saint George's Chapel. By the normal standards of liturgical decoration under Elizabeth and James, the chapel was well endowed. The communion table stood altarwise at the east end, and there were hangings, lighted tapers, and a tapestry of the crucifixion. But much of the original plate had been sold off during Edward VI's reign and not replaced.³⁶ At one of the first chapters of Charles's reign, at Windsor on 24 November 1625, Laud, who was acting as prelate of the order in place of his ailing mentor, Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Winchester, revived a proposal first made in April 1618 that each companion should contribute at least £20 for plate for the altar. Though Laud led the way by making his own donation, the companions were slow to respond; in September 1628, the new dean, Matthew Wren, recommended that the order be repeated.³⁷ Money came in only gradually, but with continuing encouragement from Charles—who donated £100 from the Privy purse—and the Earl Marshal, the Earl of Arundel. By 1634, £600 had been collected. This was enough to commission the Utrecht silversmith Christian Van Vianen to produce a spectacular collection of silver plate engraved with scenes from scripture. After being consecrated by Laud, this was offered up at the Garter feast day service on 3 October 1637, with Charles leading the way, kneeling to offer the “great bason,” followed by each of the companions bearing a piece of plate.³⁸ At the same time, a new organ was installed, paid for by the dean and the chapter. All this established Saint George's Chapel as one of the showcases for the “beauty of holiness.”³⁹ In a speech thanking the dean and the chapter for their donation, the chancellor of the

³⁴ The Wren brothers were particularly enthusiastic proponents of the “Beauty of Holiness.” Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c.1700* (Oxford, 2007), 262–65.

³⁵ Cust, *Charles I*, 133–42.

³⁶ Strong, “Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter,” 254–55; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 490–91.

³⁷ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 491; Garter chapter Meeting, 27 April 1626, MS X.7, f.156, WCLA; Proposals for Garter chapter, 22 September 1628, TNA, SP16/117/56; Garter chapter, 24 September 1628, Ashmole MS, 1113, f. 188, Bod.

³⁸ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 491–95; Wren letters to Roe, May–June 1637, Ashmole MS 1111, ff. 59–60; Garter Commission and chapter, July and October 1637, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 105,107, Bod.

³⁹ Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 227–30.

order, Sir Thomas Roe, described how “you have modelized [*sic*] . . . heaven . . . in your chappell.”⁴⁰

Charles’s concern to beautify his chapel was matched by his desire that it should be seen to promote proper liturgical practice. He was, again, encouraged in this by Laud who, as dean of the Chapel Royal, persuaded him to abandon the Jacobean practice of cutting off set prayers to proceed straight to the sermon on the entry of the monarch and to keep the liturgy going from start to finish.⁴¹ Charles introduced this approach to Garter services by dispensing with the Elizabethan practice of dividing the feast day service into two parts. Ashmole records that after 1626, “the sovereign went to chapel at the beginning of divine service and the celebration thereof continued on, without any interruption, to the end.”⁴² Charles also made it a priority to promote order and decency. The chapter meeting at Windsor in September 1628 was something of a watershed in this respect. The newly installed dean, Matthew Wren, brought forward a series of proposals for observing “the due rights and ceremonies of the Holy Church” that, after being vetted by Laud, were approved by the king.⁴³ Out of these came the further measures to collect the plate money, a chapter decree that henceforth all companions should bow when they presented their offertory, and a concerted effort to tackle the problem of ensuring “due reverence” in the regular chapel services. Wren was particularly exercised by this issue and was determined to discourage what he called the “Puritan humour” of despising of set prayers and undermining the reverence of worship.⁴⁴ It was not until 1637 that his brother was able to persuade Charles to address the problem directly, but once the king had grasped what needed to be done, he acted promptly. In his capacity as sovereign, he issued instructions to the dean and the chapter to prevent the disruption of services by noisy spectators and to bar those of “inferior quality” from sitting in the Garter stalls. He was determined, he declared, to ensure both “due reverence due to the house of God” and “the preservacon of the honour of his own chappell.”⁴⁵ Charles’s recognition that the services in Saint George’s Chapel, like those in the other chapels royal, represented a particularly potent expression of the sacred majesty of kingship was summed up on the gilt cover of the chapel’s new prayer book consecrated in 1637. It shows him exercising his semidivine powers in touching for the king’s evil, accompanied by an incensing angel and representations of preaching and the baptismal rite.⁴⁶

The king’s personal support for promoting a high church spirituality within Saint George’s Chapel is clear, but it is questionable how far this extended to the noble

⁴⁰ Speech by Roe, 1637, VI.B.2, 248–49, WCLA. This was imagery that had also been used to describe the beautification of the chapels royal at Whitehall and Greenwich. Peter McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge, 1998), chap. 1.

⁴¹ McCullough, *Sermons at Court*, 155–57.

⁴² Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 549–50.

⁴³ Proposals for Garter chapter, 22 September 1628, TNA, SP16/117/556.

⁴⁴ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 583–84; Wren letter to Roe, November 1637, Ashmole MS 1111, f. 61, Bod.

⁴⁵ Garter Commission, November 1637, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 111–12, Bod.; Sovereign’s Order, 15 December 1637, VI.B.2, 252–53, WCLA.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, “The Ecclesiastical Policies of James I and Charles I,” in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (Basingstoke, 1993), 44; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 496.

companions. The knights themselves, with a few exceptions, showed a marked lack of enthusiasm for these particular reforms. Christopher Wren was complaining as late as 1637 that it was well nigh impossible to prise the contributions for plate out of some of them; even Charles himself acknowledged that it was pointless to hope for them to come up with measures to reform the abuses during service time.⁴⁷ The lead in implementing spiritual reform of the order lay very much with the sovereign and the clerics attached to it. But how far did these initiatives relating to Saint George's Chapel extend across the board to produce a shift of emphasis in the Order of the Garter as a whole, as some historians have suggested?

Reform of the order was an ongoing process. James had set up several reforming commissions of companions, with the intention of "renewing all things as they might be to the first and most ancient institution of the order." But these met only occasionally and achieved little.⁴⁸ Charles's interventions were more direct and purposeful. He demonstrated his commitment to the order in April 1634 with a decree to provide £1,000 a year, out of the royal exchequer, to ensure that there was adequate income for staging the annual feast, equipping legations to foreign princes, paying the stipends of the officers, and funding anything else necessary to uphold the "reputation of the . . . most noble order."⁴⁹ Under his sovereignty, there were two main phases of reform. There was a series of initiatives in the early part of the reign, which culminated in a 1630 commission to consider all "statutes and ordinances" and "resolve of some general declaration in chapter to reform and reduce [them] into one body." Matthew Wren, as register, drew up a manuscript survey of all amendments to statutes since the last major reform in Henry VIII's reign, and the commissioners met on at least three occasions; however, the project ran out of steam and nothing concrete was accomplished.⁵⁰ The second spate of reforms followed the appointment of Sir Thomas Roe as chancellor on 5 December 1636. Roe was a heavyweight courtier, with the contacts and experience to get things done, and he was looking for a role that would bring him to the king's attention and further his ambition for high office.⁵¹ The chancellorship offered him an ideal opportunity. He threw himself into the role energetically, preparing the ground for the reforming chapter of 18 April 1637 with "divers petitions for reformacon and renovacon," enlisting the support of the dean and register, Christopher Wren, with assurances of support for his pet projects in Saint George's Chapel, and, above all, engaging the enthusiasm of the king.⁵² Several significant reforms were implemented, as we shall see, but ultimately it was much less than had been anticipated. This was partly because of foot-dragging on the part of the companions,

⁴⁷ Wren letters to Roe, May–November 1637, Ashmole MS 1111, ff. 59–60 Bod.; Roe letters to Wren and bishop of Salisbury, November 1637, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 111–12, Bod.

⁴⁸ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 195–96; Garter chapter, 19 May 1622, Ashmole MS 1132, f. 7, Bod.

⁴⁹ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 258–59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 193, 196–97, 491; Commission to examine Garter Statutes, 13 February 1631, MS X.7, ff. 177–78, WCLA.

⁵¹ Michael Strachan, "Sir Thomas Roe, 1581–1644," in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Roe's journal as Chancellor of the Order of the Garter, 1636–1638, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 95–122, Bod.

⁵² Garter Feast, 17–19 April 1637, and Roe letters to Wren and Garter Knights, November 1637, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 98–100, 111–12; Garter chapter, 17–19 April 1637, Ashmole MS 1113, ff. 176–77, Bod.; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 198.

and Roe being called away on an embassy to Germany in May 1638, but mainly because from mid-1638 onward the court became absorbed in preparations for the Scots war.

Perhaps the most successful—and certainly the most visually striking—of all these reforms was the change ordered in the companions' dress. This was something in which Charles took a close, personal interest. He was a stickler for enforcing the statute of the order which required that no companion should "be seene abroad or openly" without the lesser George round his neck and the Garter about his knee. When the Earl of Arundel chided Prince Frederick Henry for not complying with this while on an embassy to the Low Countries in 1636, for instance, Charles let it be known that he warmly approved of his action.⁵³ As he explained in one of his decrees, failing to wear these insignia "may be thought an omission whereby the order doth receive some diminution of honour."⁵⁴

Reform of dress was one of the first changes once Charles became sovereign, and there is every indication that this initiative came from the king himself. At a chapter on 27 April 1626, he decreed that henceforth all companions and officers should wear the Garter star on their "cloaks, coats and riding cassocks" whenever they went abroad. Initially it was stipulated that the star should be a simple device, with the red cross of Saint George on a white background surrounded by the Garter, but around 1629 it was transformed by the addition of the aureole of silver rays. The purpose of this reform, as Charles explained it, was that "the wearing thereof may be a testimony apert to the world of the honour they hold from the said most noble order." However, as Ashmole pointed out, the adoption of the aureole also highlighted the cross's religious connotations. The use of "beams and rays" was a device commonly employed in paintings of the heads of Christ and the apostles, to signify their heavenly status; it was generally thought that it had been adopted "in imitation" of "the ensign" of the French Order of the Holy Ghost.⁵⁵ This change transformed the public appearance of the Garter knights. The conspicuous silver star became the central motif of a whole genre of Van Dyck portraits during the 1630s. The most famous example is his 1637 portrait of Charles in his Garter cloak, but perhaps the most striking is his 1633–34 portrait of James Stuart, Duke of Lennox. It depicts the young duke, newly invested into the order, resplendent in George, Garter, and decorated riding cloak, about to set out for the hunt.⁵⁶ This captures what must have become the everyday appearance of the Garter knights in their new dress, with the Garter star providing a distinctive reference to the spiritual associations of the order. This suggests, then, that recent historians are right to stress that this particular reform enhanced the religiosity of the Garter. Its message was similar to the Rubens painting of Charles as Saint George, which was executed at about the same time the aureole was introduced: this was a knightly order dedicated to the service of the church and true religion.

The religious theme was less prominent in some of the other reforms. But, as with most aspects of the order, there was considerable overlap between the spiritual and

⁵³ Heylyn, *History of St George*, 348–49; *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1636–39*, 557–58.

⁵⁴ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 216.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 216; Garter chapter, 27 April 1626, MS X.7, f. 156, WCLA; Begent and Chesshyre, *Order of the Garter*, 170–71.

⁵⁶ Barnes et al., *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue*, 475, 585.

the secular. The intent behind many of these, as Roe explained in January 1638, was “to restore” the order “to the primitive institution, both in statutes, robes and all other honours degenerated and corrupted by tyme and observance.”⁵⁷ In Charles’s lexicon, “primitive institution” could have a multitude of meanings. In ecclesiastical affairs, it was a term used to justify high church policies that were supposedly a return to the “primitive” purity of Elizabethan Protestantism. At court, it meant introducing a regime of Spanish-style order and gravitas.⁵⁸ With respect to the Garter, however, it was used to justify a campaign to revive ancient usage and emphasize the order’s historical depth. Though the attempt to simplify the statutes came to nothing, the further upgrading of the robes was apparently successful.⁵⁹ Roe stipulated that the mantles worn on ceremonial occasions be of “a rich celestial blue” and the outer robes purple—in accordance with what was deemed to be early practice—and went out of his way to line up an overseas merchant to provide the requisite material that companions were then obliged to purchase.⁶⁰ Attendance by companions at feast day celebrations was also tightened up, and those unable to make it were required to present formal petitions of excuse and then observe the feast day formalities in their own homes, as the ancient statutes decreed.⁶¹ Finally, the new seal and signet were introduced, and formal measures were taken to regularize the pay of the officers’ stipends out of Charles’s annuity, all again under the auspices of Roe.⁶² None of these measures had specifically religious connotations. The imperative, as Roe had indicated, was to maintain hallowed traditions that would uphold the honor and sense of permanence associated with the Garter. But the emphasis on regularity, dignity, and decorum played into a broader Caroline project to promote order and equilibrium that, as Kevin Sharpe has shown, encompassed both church and state.⁶³

The theme of antiquarian revival was perhaps most evident in the scheme to restore the original number of “poor” or “alms knights,” but here it was allied with an emphasis on the more martial traditions of the Garter. The order of twenty-six “poor knights” (one for each companion) had been established by Edward III to recompense “valiant men, chiefly such as had behaved themselves bravely in war, yet afterwards hap’ned to fall into decay.” Their chief duty was to act as bedesmen, praying for the soul of the sovereign of the order, for which they received lodgings at Windsor and an annual stipend. Lack of funds led to a reduction in numbers during the fifteenth century, but Henry VIII reendowed them at half of their original complement and they had continued at this level under Elizabeth and James. After the Reformation, their duties became largely ceremonial, attending at feast day processions and royal visits, although they were still required to pray for

⁵⁷ Roe letters to Garter Knights, January 1638, Ashmole MS 1108, f. 113, Bod.

⁵⁸ Cust, *Charles I*, 150, 262.

⁵⁹ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 197–98; Garter Commissions, May and November 1637, February 1637/38, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 105, 111, 114, Bod.

⁶⁰ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 210.

⁶¹ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 485–86; Garter chapters, 17–19 April and 2–4 October 1637, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 98–99, 106 Bod.; Letters for Dispensations, March 1638, Ashmole MS 1132, ff. 19–25, Bod.

⁶² Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 247–48, 259; papers relating to the Poor Knights, 1637–38, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 99–100, 109, 114, 116, Bod.

⁶³ Sharpe, *Politics and Ideas*, 106–09.

the monarch.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the priority remained to provide relief for distinguished former soldiers who had fallen on hard times. Surviving petitions from those seeking admission to the order, and the accompanying testimonials from their commanding officers, make it clear that distinguished service in the recent wars was the principal qualification for admission.⁶⁵

During the 1630s, a good deal of attention was given to the plight of the “poor knights.” Vetting of old soldiers for the next available place was part of the regular business at chapter meetings; Charles provided for them in the annuity he allocated to the order; and Roe’s predecessor as chancellor, Sir Francis Crane, set up an endowment in his will to provide lodging and stipends for a further five knights, to bring the number up to eighteen. One of Roe’s “petitions” in April 1637 suggested that the chapter should build on this and explore how the original number of twenty-six “may be made compleat according to the first institution and purpose of the order.” This was something the king evidently agreed with, and the investigation was ordered. In the event nothing came of it, but Charles’s determination to increase the number of “poor knights” was apparent in instructions he issued to Palmer, the deputy chancellor, to pursue Crane’s executor for the promised endowment.⁶⁶ This level of support for the “poor knights” during the 1630s is instructive because it suggests a king and successive chancellors who understood the martial traditions of the order and were determined to uphold them as an essential expression of its identity. The “poor knights” did have a quasi-religious role, but in the post-Reformation era this was much diminished: their main function now was to parade themselves as living reminders of the order’s reverence for valiant service in combat.

To understand Charles’s continuing association of the Garter with matters military, it is important to recognize the pivotal role the order played in his adolescent experience. He was elected to the order as Duke of York on 24 April 1611 at the age of ten, well before he began to make his mark as heir to the throne. His presentation of “the bezant” (the king’s offertory) at the feast day service in April 1612 was probably the earliest occasion on which he played a significant role in court ceremony.⁶⁷ When Prince Henry died in November 1612, he suddenly found himself thrust into the role of senior knight companion under the sovereign, which meant that he was required to act as the king’s lieutenant in the annual round of feast day services and rituals. In this capacity, he appeared as one of the two supporters of his new brother-in-law, Frederick of the Palatinate, when he was installed at Windsor in May 1613.⁶⁸ These early experiences appear to have made a deep impression on the young prince, and the chivalric associations of the order accorded closely with his enthusiasm for martial endeavors.

⁶⁴ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 158–65; Begent and Chesshyre, *Order of the Garter*, 35–45.

⁶⁵ Petitions of Poor Knights 1634–42, Ashmole MS 1132, ff. 186, 190–282, Bod.

⁶⁶ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 164–65; papers relating to Poor Knights, 1637–38, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 95, 128, 131 Bod.; MS 1113, ff. 69, 176–77, Bod.

⁶⁷ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 330; Garter Feasts 1610–12, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 85–87 Bod.; opinion on where the Duke of York was to sit in Garter Chapel, Ashmole MS 1132, ff. 5–6, Bod.; *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1610–13*, 153–54.

⁶⁸ Garter Feast, 6 February 1613, Ashmole MS 1108, f. 88, Bod. He continued to act as the sovereign’s lieutenant at the annual feast days and was ever present in his attendance, except in 1623 when he was in Spain. Garter Feasts, 1612–24, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 88–94, 174–75 Bod.

The chivalric revival of the Jacobean period has generally been linked exclusively with Charles's elder brother, Prince Henry, and his own role has been disregarded. This appears to have been largely because Charles was the more reserved of the two and was less impressive when it came to projecting an image of martial vigor.⁶⁹ But there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that he was keen to follow in his brother's footsteps. As a nine-year-old, he was complimented by the Venetian ambassador on his interest in war and military affairs, and he told his father and the Earl of Salisbury that when he grew up he wanted to become a soldier in the service of the republic.⁷⁰ This was just the sort of high-spiritedness and martial enthusiasm that contemporaries looked for in young princes and noblemen, and that Charles was eager to foster in his own son. He himself embarked on the conventional quasi-military training at an early age, taking riding lessons alongside Henry, under the French master M. De St. Antoine, and exercising with the pike as soon as he was strong enough to hold it.⁷¹ Frederick's New Year's present to him in 1613 was a rapier and spurs, and a few weeks later at the festivities that celebrated the Palatine prince's marriage to his sister Elizabeth, Charles greatly impressed onlookers by his prowess in the knightly exercise of "running at the ring." At the Accession Day Tilt in 1620, he performed a feat that his brother had never been old enough or accomplished enough to achieve: he led the procession dressed in full armor and then jousted with various offspring of the aristocracy. Again, this made a considerable impact and seemed to confirm the impression that he had taken on the chivalric mantle that his brother had laid down.⁷²

Charles also displayed the same admiration as his elder brother for military men. An interesting insight into this is provided by the suffrage papers that he filled in between 1612 and 1615, nominating his candidates for the next vacant stall in the order. In Charles's case, the choices were slanted toward those with martial connections. Among "the earls," his two most frequent "picks" were Francis Manners, Earl of Rutland, and Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset, both regular participants in the Jacobean tilts; among "the barons," they included Lord Howard of Walden, another leading jousting knight who had seen service at the siege of Julich and was captain of the band of gentleman pensioners; and among "the knights," Sir Horace Vere, Sir Edward Conway, and Sir Edward Cecil, all veterans of the English army in the Netherlands.⁷³ Charles evidently admired such men and believed that their rightful place was among the Garter knights.

These early impressions did much to shape the king's attitude toward the Garter through the 1630s, in spite of the military disappointments of the 1620s. Charles had embarked on war with Spain and France with high hopes of repeating the

⁶⁹ Roy Strong, *Henry Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (London, 1986), 9; Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (London, 1986), 140.

⁷⁰ *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1610–13*, 3, 115, 120.

⁷¹ Strong, *Henry Prince of Wales*, 41–43. For a painting of the young Charles in pike armor, see Government Art Collections, UK, A1.154 (I am grateful to Andrew Thrush for drawing this to my attention).

⁷² N. M. McLure, ed., *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1939), I:403; Alan Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* (London, 1987), 38–40, 207.

⁷³ For the suffrage papers, see MS X.7, ff. 120, 122v, 123v, 124v, 127, WCLA. For the careers of these individuals, see Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, 72–73; tournament lists 1613–16, Harleian MS 1368, 44–46; tournament lists 1610–11, Additional MS 14, 417, ff. 11, 23, British Library (BL).

feats of the Black Prince and the young Henry V.⁷⁴ His war effort, however, had been a signal failure. This had prompted him to adopt a much more cautious and peaceable approach to foreign policy, which was accompanied, as John Adamson has demonstrated, by efforts to distance himself from those aspects of the Elizabethan military tradition associated with hostility to Spain and support for the “Protestant cause.”⁷⁵ Yet, at the same time, he was still very evidently drawn to the notion that the supreme expression of noble and princely honor lay in the performance of heroic feats of battle and that his identity as a king was ultimately tied up with success in war. Van Dyck’s 1633 portrait of him with his riding master, clad in jousting armor, wielding the baton of command and riding through a triumphal arch, was a powerful articulation of this ideal.⁷⁶ Such aspirations did much to define his attitude toward the Order of the Garter. The indications are that, while seeking to promote its religious and sacerdotal aspects, he continued to envisage it as a body of martial men, dedicated to celebrating military achievement.

Perhaps the clearest of these indications is his selection of new companions for the order. Opportunities to exercise the sovereign’s power of election were restricted because the number of stalls was limited to twenty-six, five of which, in addition to the sovereign’s stall, were generally reserved for princes of the royal family and foreign princes or nobles; vacancies only occurred at the death of an incumbent. This exclusivity helped to ensure that election was seen as a highly prestigious mark of royal favor.⁷⁷ Most elections were made either to woo foreign princes and influential noblemen, for diplomatic reasons, or as a reward for service at court and in civilian office. It was comparatively rare for an individual to be chosen because of his military achievements. Sir Henry Lee had been elected in 1597 because of his service in tournament and tiltyard as the Queen’s Champion. But this was the exception, and it would be difficult to identify any election made during James I’s reign primarily because of the candidate’s soldierly accomplishments.⁷⁸ James tended to reward either foreign princes or his own courtiers, and the majority of Charles’s choices followed a similar pattern.⁷⁹ During the 1630s, however, he did elect a number of new knights with strong military associations,

⁷⁴ Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge, 1989), 194; Adamson, “Chivalry,” 167–69.

⁷⁵ Adamson, “Chivalry,” 169–73.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, chap. 2; Cust, *Charles I*, 159–60.

⁷⁷ *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1629–32*, 331; *The Earl of Strafford’s Letters and Dispatches*, 2 vols., ed. William Knowler (1729), I:427.

⁷⁸ G. F. Beltz, *Memorials of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (London, 1841), clxxxiii–clxxxviii; Euan Fernie, “Sir Henry Lee, 1533–1611,” in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁷⁹ The majority of those elected over the reign as a whole were favored courtiers (like Buckingham’s clients, Dorset, Holland, and Lord Andover, appointed in May 1625, or the Earl of Northumberland, the queen’s favorite, chosen in April 1635) or distinguished civilian officeholders (like Lord Treasurer Portland elected in April 1630 or the president of the Council of Wales, the Earl of Northampton, elected in September 1628) or members of the royal family (like the king’s fourteen-year-old nephew, Charles Louis, Elector Palatine, chosen in May 1633, or his twenty-one-year-old cousin, James Stuart, Duke of Lennox, chosen at the same time) or else foreign princes (such as Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and Frederick Henry Prince of Orange, both elected in April 1627 at a time when Charles was casting around for Protestant allies in the wars against France and Spain). For these elections, see Beltz, *Memorials*, clxxxvi–clxxxviii; for biographies of all these individuals (except Gustavus Adolphus, Frederick Henry, and the Earl of Northampton), see Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

and by the end of the decade the order had a more martial flavor than at any previous stage in the early seventeenth century.

The first of the “martial companions” was Robert Bertie, Earl of Lindsey, elected in April 1630 and belonging to one of the great military dynasties of the period. He commanded English regiments in the Low Countries in the early 1620s and then took over as vice-admiral of the English fleet in the abortive efforts to relieve La Rochelle in the late 1620s. But he was also someone who enjoyed sufficient favor at court to be appointed lord high constable in 1631.⁸⁰ More clear-cut examples of preferment for solely military reasons were provided by Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby and William Douglas, Earl of Morton, both elected in November 1633. Among the press of senior courtiers and noblemen seeking the honor, neither had a particularly strong social or political claim, but both were distinguished soldiers. Danby was a veteran of the Elizabethan wars and more recently a member of Charles’s council of war. His claim to distinction, according to the annals later compiled by Edward Walker, Garter king of arms, was that “in his youth [he] had given evident proofes of his courage and conduct in the wars of Ireland.” Morton had been commander of the Scots regiments deployed during the wars of the 1620s and, to emphasize this connection, at his installation in April 1634 he paraded through London with “all the Scottish Colonels” who had been fighting alongside the Swedes in the Thirty Years’ War.⁸¹ But the most instructive example here is the election of James, Marquess of Hamilton. Hamilton was the king’s cousin, and a personal favorite, and there is little doubt that sooner or later he would have been elected to the order. His investiture and installation, however, took place in a hurry in October 1630, after a stall had become vacant on Northampton’s death. This haste appears to have been closely connected to the fact that the previous month Charles had approved his command of a levy of six thousand volunteers to serve Gustavus in Germany. By conferring this honor on his cousin, as the Venetian ambassador observed, Charles could signal that although he was reluctant to support Gustavus with subsidies, he thoroughly approved of Hamilton’s expedition. He was also making it clear that this was the type of service that he associated with membership of the order.⁸²

By the end of the 1630s, the order had a markedly more military complexion than had been the case at the start of Charles’s reign. It included two of the leading Scots commanders who had recently seen service on the continent, former vice-admiral Lindsey and current lord admiral Northumberland, promoted to the position in April 1638, and a veteran of the Elizabethan wars in Ireland.⁸³ The growing pervasiveness of the military ethos was also evident in the suffrage papers filled in by the

⁸⁰ Andrew Thrush, “Robert Bertie, Earl of Lindsey, 1582–1642,” in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Barbara Donagan, *War in England, 1642–1649* (Oxford, 2008), 47.

⁸¹ J. J. N. McGurk, “Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby, 1573–1644,” and James Sizer, “William Douglas, Earl of Morton, 1582–1648,” in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Walker’s Annals, Ashmole MS 1110, f. 156, Bod.; *Strafford Letters*, I:242.

⁸² James Scally, “James Hamilton, 1st Duke of Hamilton, 1606–49,” in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; election of Hamilton to the Garter, 6 October 1630, Ashmole MS 1108, f. 179, Bod.; Garter Scrutiny, October 1630, MS X.7, f. 171, WCLA; S. R. Gardiner, *The History of England, 1603–1642*, 10 vols. (1883–84), 7:174–75; *Calendar of State Papers Venetian, 1629–32*, 432.

⁸³ G. A. Drake, “Algernon Percy, 10th Earl of Northumberland, 1602–1668,” in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

companions when they were called on to make their nominations to the sovereign.⁸⁴ Many of the nominations were, predictably, of friends, relations, and personal allies. Holland, for example, invariably nominated his brother, the Earl of Warwick, and Hamilton his brother-in-law, Lord Feilding. But over the period 1625–39, there was a nucleus of names that appeared again and again and that seem to have commanded general approval. Most of these were military men. In the category of “earls,” Essex and Warwick were the most frequent nominees, the former a commander in the Low Countries and on the Cadiz expedition during the 1620s and the latter an experienced naval commander. Head and shoulders above the other nominees in the “barons” category, until his death in 1635, was Horace Lord Vere, the most renowned English commander of his day. Among the “knights,” the three most frequently nominated candidates were Sir Charles Morgan, who commanded the expeditionary force to Denmark in 1627 and was still serving in Germany during the 1630s; Sir Robert Mansell, a veteran of naval campaigns back to the 1590s; and Sir John Ogle, another long-serving commander in the Netherlands.⁸⁵ The perception of the companions themselves appears to have been that the order they belonged to was one in which military distinction should continue to command the highest degree of honor and respect.

An interesting perspective on the character of the order is provided by the portrait paintings of the knights executed by Van Dyck and his studio during the 1630s. Twelve of these survive, and the styles used can readily be categorized as either “civilian” or “military.” The “civilian” version showed the knights with the new robes designated in 1626 and the Garter star prominently displayed, while the “military” version depicted the companion wearing full tournament armor, or else the breastplate of the cavalry commander, and the George worn on either a ribbon or a chain. Charles was portrayed in both styles, as were Hamilton and Arundel. Lennox, Weston, and Pembroke and Montgomery were portrayed as civilians, but Dorset, Holland, Northumberland, Charles Louis, and the young Prince Charles were all depicted using the “military” style, as ready for battle.⁸⁶ In Dorset’s case this was remarkable because there is no other indication that he had any military pretensions. But this is surely testimony to the resonance of the genre.⁸⁷ However, perhaps the most striking portrait of all was that of Danby. He was painted in the blue and crimson robes of the order used as formal dress rather than in armor. But there was no mistaking the formidable battle scar high on his left cheek or the grizzled features that contrasted so markedly with the courtly elegance of the majority of Van Dyck’s sitters.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 269–83.

⁸⁵ For suffrage papers, 1625–39, see MS X.7, ff. 152, 157, 163, 169, 171, 185, 187, 192, 205, WCLA, and Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 101, 124–25, 130, 140, Bod. For the careers of these individuals, see Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸⁶ Barnes et al., *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue*, 436–37 (Arundel), 461–475 (Charles I), 483 (Prince Charles), 485 (Charles Louis), 517 (Hamilton), 535 (Holland), 566–67 (Northumberland), 569–72 (Pembroke and Montgomery), 585 (Lennox), 632 (Dorset), 633 (Hamilton), 639 (Weston).

⁸⁷ Walker described him in his annals as “fitter for counsell than action.” Ashmole MS 1110, f. 165, Bod. Beyond a visit to the European war zone in 1613 there is no mention of military involvement in his biography. David Smith, “Edward Sackville, 4th Earl of Dorset, 1590–1652,” in Matthew and Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸⁸ Oliver Millar, *Van Dyck in England* (London, 1982), 62–63.

Martial values, then, played a prominent part in the ethos of the order during the 1630s. In part, this was a function of the fact that by 1640 the proportion of the British peerage who had experience of some sort of military service stood at nearly 70 percent, significantly higher than had been the case in 1600. But it was also a consequence of the shifting climate of ideas in which martial endeavor was once again coming to be seen as the most prestigious form of service for a member of the aristocracy, what Roger Manning calls a process of “remilitarization.”⁸⁹ There were various reasons for this. The upbringing of upper-class boys still had a pronounced martial dimension, from the reading of chivalric romances and the brawls and mock battles of their schooldays to the fencing lessons and study of fortification provided by noble academies. The English public was also fed a continuous diet of news about wars and feats of arms on the continent, particularly after the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War.⁹⁰ But the most important reason for the strength of the martial ethos was the growing prestige attached to serving the state as a soldier rather than as a courtier or a governor. Influenced by the ongoing debate in France about the merits of the *noblesse d’epée* and the *noblesse du robe*, favorable comparisons were increasingly drawn between “swordsmen” and “gownmen.”⁹¹ Going to war in defense of one’s country or in support of one’s sovereign was cited as the most demanding, and also the most honorable, service a nobleman could perform. Indeed, courage in combat was acclaimed as the supreme validation of his status, and soldierly “honesty” was increasingly contrasted with courtly artifice and trickery.⁹² After the challenge presented by sixteenth-century humanist critiques of the ignorant and overmilitarized aristocracy, soldiering was being rehabilitated as the supreme vocation of the nobleman. This shift had a significant impact on the Order of the Garter.

It would, however, be misleading to suggest that these martial values dominated to the exclusion of other elements—just as it is misleading to argue that there was a shift away from them to a more peaceable and spiritualized version of the order. Like any cultural activity, the ceremonies and traditions of the order could signify different things to different participants on different occasions. During the 1630s, all three of the central themes of knighthood and chivalry—the honoring of men of courage and loyalty, the companionship of men of honor, and the responsibility to uphold true religion—were kept in play, and indeed were given renewed vigor by Charles’s enthusiasm and commitment to the order.

The interaction of these themes can be illustrated by looking in more detail at the rites that accompanied the Saint George’s feast. The round of Garter observance and ritual organized around the three-day feast of Saint George, which normally took place on 22–24 April (Saint George’s day is 23 April) constituted the most important annual event in the court’s ceremonial calendar.⁹³ Traditionally, the feast had taken

⁸⁹ Roger B. Manning, *Swordsmen: The Martial Ethos in Three Kingdoms* (Oxford, 2003), 17–19.

⁹⁰ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, 44–62; Donagan, *War in England*, 33–40.

⁹¹ Roger Mettam, “The French Nobility, 1610–1715,” in *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Hamish Scott, 2 vols. (Harlow: Longman, 1995), I:114–20.

⁹² Manning, *Swordsmen*, 28–29. See, for example, Sir Robert Naunton, *Fragmenta Regalia*, ed. J. S. Cerovski (Washington, DC, 1985), 48, 52, 55, 61–62, written in the 1630s, which contrasted the “militia” and “togati” among Elizabeth’s leading nobles to the advantage of the former.

⁹³ The feast was sometimes prorogued to a later date because of plague or the sovereign’s other commitments.

place at Windsor Castle, but Elizabeth abandoned this and preferred to hold it at Whitehall, or sometimes Greenwich.⁹⁴ In 1603, however, James moved it back to Windsor and thereafter it was celebrated at either of the main locations.⁹⁵ Under Charles, eight of the traceable feasts were held at Windsor, seven at Whitehall, and one (in April 1642) at York.⁹⁶ Whatever the venue, however, the format of the feast remained constant.

At 3 pm on the eve of Saint George's Day, the sovereign and companions assembled to hold the opening chapter, at which business relating to the order was reviewed and, where there was a vacancy, a scrutiny was conducted. This was followed by evening prayer and the eve of feast supper. Charles, unlike Elizabeth and James, made a point of attending this service, and it was generally there that the achievements of deceased companions were offered up at the altar.⁹⁷ On the morning of Saint George's Day itself, the companions and officers attended the king in his presence chamber and formed into a solemn procession that proceeded first to the chapter house and then on to the chapel at Windsor or Whitehall. Here they attended an elaborate service that combined three elements of the Church of England liturgy: matins, the Ante-Communion, and the collect and blessing, while omitting the celebration of communion itself. Under Elizabeth and James, this was divided into the "first" and "second service" with the sovereign only attending the latter; but, as we have seen, Charles insisted on being present from beginning to end. The climax of the service was the offertory. The sovereign would approach the altar led by a procession of Garter king of arms, register, chancellor, the nobleman holding the sword of state, and the senior companion present bearing the king's offertory. The sovereign would then kneel, the companion would hand him the offertory, and he would place it in the "great bason" proffered by the prelate of the order. The other knight companions would then come to the front two by two, kneel, and make their offerings.⁹⁸

At a convenient point, the service would be interrupted for what Ashmole described as "the most illustrious part of the whole ceremony": the Grand Procession. This consisted of "poor knights" to the fore, followed by the choristers and dean and canons of the chapel; the heralds; the knight companions marching two by two; the chancellor, register, and prelate of the order; the nobleman bearing the sword of state; and finally the king himself. To stress the significance of the occasion, the sovereign would parade under "a rich canopy of cloth of gold" borne by twelve gentlemen of the Privy chamber. At Windsor, they would process out of the west door of the chapel, down to Henry VIII's gate in the lower court, back past the poor knights' lodgings, and in again at the west door. At Whitehall,

⁹⁴ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 474–75; Strong, "Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter," 249.

⁹⁵ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 475, 549; Garter Feast, 1603, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 64–65, Bod.

⁹⁶ The traceable meetings in Charles's reign were April 1625 (Windsor), April 1627 (Whitehall), September 1628 (Windsor), April 1629 (Whitehall), October 1630 (Windsor), October 1631 (Windsor), April 1632 (Whitehall), April 1633 (Whitehall), April 1634 (Windsor), April 1635 (Whitehall), April 1637 (Whitehall), October 1637 (Windsor), May 1638 (Windsor), October 1639 (Windsor), March 1641 (Whitehall), April 1642 (York). Ashmole MS 1108, Bod.; MS X.7, WCLA.

⁹⁷ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 508, 512–13, 516–20, 540–46, 629–30; Begent and Chesshyre, *Order of the Garter*, 262, 274–75.

⁹⁸ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 548–50, 563, 576–87; Begent and Chesshyre, *Order of the Garter*, 260–61.

they would leave the chapel by the door nearest the river, move up the right-hand side of the Great Courtyard, back down the left-hand side, into the hall porch, and back into the chapel. It was an occasion of what Ashmole describes as spectacular “state and pomp,” with the companions richly attired in their formal robes and headdress, the sovereign covered by his canopy, the choristers chanting the liturgy, and large crowds in attendance, whether the venue was Whitehall or Windsor.⁹⁹

Once the service was over, the party processed back for the feast day dinner, normally held in Saint George’s Hall at Windsor or the Whitehall Banqueting House. Here the sovereign would dine alone under the canopy of state, with companions at a separate table and visiting dignitaries coming up to present themselves to the sovereign. At the climax of the feast, the attendants would be cleared away and the sovereign and companions would stand up and each would drink to the others’ health. Following the dinner, a second chapter would be held, and there would be another round of evening prayers.¹⁰⁰ The third and final day of the feast was generally the day when new knights were invested with their Garter and ribbon in a ceremony that took place in the chapter house. They would then accompany their companions to matins, again with Charles in attendance. On returning to the chapter house the feast would be at an end.¹⁰¹

The central elements of the ceremony and celebrations accompanying the feast appear to have altered little from Elizabeth’s to Charles’s reign, in spite of Roy Strong’s suggestion of a shift of emphasis. Charles was more punctilious in his attendance at services, and some of the trappings had become more elaborate. He had a more splendid canopy in the feast day procession, borne by twelve gentlemen, not six, as had been the norm under Elizabeth; the plate used in the service was much more opulent after 1638; and the mantles and outer robes of the companions were more carefully standardized. But the attendance of “poor knights,” canons, heralds, and officers; the chanting choristers and musical accompaniment; the solemn procession of the pairs of companions; and, for nearly half the feasts, the Whitehall setting remained constant.¹⁰²

The element of continuity was also apparent in another aspect of the Garter ceremony where Strong and others have detected change: the processions that accompanied the feast and other rites of the order.¹⁰³ To understand what was happening here, it is important to recognize that there were three different types of

⁹⁹ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 563–66, 570–72, 576. For illustrations of the processions in 1578 and c. 1672, see *ibid.*, 514, 576. Van Dyck’s famous sketch in oils of c.1638 probably represented not a drawing of an actual procession but an idealized reconstruction employing a certain amount of artistic licence as Sir Oliver Millar has pointed out. The classical architectural setting appears to be fictionalized, members of the procession were missed out, the companions march bareheaded, whereas they would have been wearing their elaborate feathered headdress, and there were only four canopy bearers. Millar, *Van Dyck in England*, 86–87. For the crowds, see Strong, “Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter,” 251–52; L. Jefferson, “A Garter Installation Ceremony in 1606,” *Court Historian* 6 (2001): 148.

¹⁰⁰ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 589–92, 598; Begent and Chesshyre, *Order of the Garter*, 261–63.

¹⁰¹ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 599–602, 629–36.

¹⁰² Strong, “Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter,” 249–52, 255.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 266–67; Malcolm Smuts, “Public Ceremony and Royal Charisma: The English Royal Entry in London, 1485–1642,” in *The First Modern Society*, ed. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James Rosenheim (Cambridge, 1989), 87–88.

ceremonial procession associated with the order. The Grand Procession on Saint George's Day was, as we have seen, a decorous and restrained affair. But the other two—the procession of knight companions at the beginning and end of the feast and the cavalcade of elect knight companions as they set out from London for Windsor on the occasion of their installation—were much more showy and public. These took place on the streets of London before large crowds, with the companions decked out in all their finery and accompanied by entourages of servants, retainers, and friends.¹⁰⁴ A contemporary description of the opening of the Whitehall feast in April 1629 conveyed the theater of the occasion:

Upon the morning of the feast day the earl of Dorset came from Dorset house with a brave show of men very rich in jewels, chains and clothes, being directed by Somerset herald and Rouge Dragon. And soe at Arundel house took up my Lord of Arundell and went along the Strand, took up the earl of Rutland and his men, and the earl of Northampton and Salisbury and Suffolk and their men who rode in this manner unto court: first the earl of Northampton's servants and himself after, as the youngest knight; next to him Rouge Dragon; next [to] him the earl of Suffolk with his trayne before him and Rouge Dragon; then the earl of Dorset with his company, [and] Lancaster [herald]; last came Rutland and Arundel together; before them rode Chester, Somerset and York heralds. They alighted at the court gate. They wore robes of the garter.¹⁰⁵

With its heralds, its rich costumes, its bands of liveried retainers, and its sheer size, as it snowballed on its way down the Strand, this procession must have resembled the great noble entries of a bygone age.¹⁰⁶

There was a strong element of competition on such occasions, particularly at the installation cavalcades. Ashmole describes how the companions elect would take up lodgings in the Strand “to the end [their procession] might pass through some of the eminent streets to the people's satisfaction.” On the day of the procession, they would pull out all the stops, recruiting friends and allies to join them, decking out their servants and retainers in the costliest dress they could afford, and providing sumptuously decorated coaches. The whole event would generally take place in the presence of the sovereign who, on two occasions during the 1630s, was reported to have borrowed Viscount Wimbledon's house on the Strand for the day so that he, the queen, and Prince Charles could watch the procession from the balcony.¹⁰⁷ George Garrarde, the London correspondent of Viscount Wentworth, compared the installation cavalcades of Danby and Morton in April 1634 to a celebrated occasion nearly twenty years earlier when Lord Knollys and Viscount Fenton had “a secret vy” to see who could put on the more spectacular show. This time, Garrarde reckoned that Danby had won the day. By clothing “fifty men in tissue doublets and scarlet hose thick laced,” providing two coaches “set out

¹⁰⁴ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 338–40, 509–10; Strong, “Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter,” 253.

¹⁰⁵ Garter Feast, 22–24 April 1629, Ashmole MS 1110, f. 106, Bod.

¹⁰⁶ For earlier noble entries see, Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1640* (Oxford, 1965), 211–14.

¹⁰⁷ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 338–39; *Strafforde Letters*, I:242, 427; *Calendar of State Papers Venetian*, 1635, 389.

bravely,” and recruiting “all the ancient nobility of England that were not of the garter” to ride alongside him, he trumped Morton’s parade of Scottish colonels and nobles.¹⁰⁸ A year later, Garrarde was able to report that the installation cavalcade of the Earl of Northumberland had surpassed even these.¹⁰⁹ But of all cavalcades of the 1630s, the most impressive was the one planned for the installation of Prince Charles in May 1638.

Preparation for this event began well in advance, at the chapter on 4 October 1637, when the king announced his intention that his son should be the next knight of the order. The original idea was that before being invested he should be made a Knight of the Bath, as his father had been before him. Arundel, as earl marshal, drew up the plans for the elaborate ceremony, which involved the prince and his twenty-six companions being undressed, shaved, and bathed, then dressed in a hermit’s hood and made to keep a nocturnal vigil before taking their solemn knightly oaths and eventually being dubbed by the king. This was all supposed to happen at Westminster, in the days leading up to the prince’s investiture on 25 May 1638. His installation procession from Somerset House to Windsor on the following day was planned to be as majestic as possible. The prince would be accompanied by all the knight companions of the order, his fellow Knights of the Bath, and an array of senior peers.¹¹⁰ Pembroke, as lieutenant of the order, wrote to several nobles, signifying that the king, “having formerly taken notice of some slacknes among the lords in giving their attendance upon his royall person in the place of publique solemnity, and expecting to have it more frequently observed in the future,” specifically requested their attendance.¹¹¹ In the event, a decision was taken late in the day to move the feast to Windsor, and, as a result the ceremony of the knightship of the Bath and the installation cavalcade were canceled. Instead, Charles was created a knight batchelor on 20 May, alongside four senior peers, then invested and installed on the following day.¹¹²

The size and opulence of these processions provide further indications of how Charles viewed the Garter and saw it as enhancing the prestige of his kingship. In many respects, they bucked the contemporary trend, identified by Lawrence Stone and others, of a decline in the scale and showiness of aristocratic pageants. Reductions in the size of noble households, a decline in the attendance of young gentleman, and a taste for greater privacy and less public ostentation had led to the passing of the grand noble entry.¹¹³ However, as Malcolm Smuts has pointed out, such costly and lavish display was still very much a feature of Crown-sponsored processions, as both James and Charles sought to channel the power of magnificence and

¹⁰⁸ *Strafforde Letters*, I:242. For the Knollys/Fenton cavalcade, see *Chamberlain*, I:597.

¹⁰⁹ *Strafforde Letters*, I:427; Garter Installation of Northumberland, 13 May 1635, Ashmole MS 1110, ff. 109–10, Bod.

¹¹⁰ Earl Marshal’s Order of February 1638, Phillips MS 13084, vol. 14, unpaginated, College of Arms; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 341–42.

¹¹¹ Pembroke to peers, May 1638, Ashmole MS 1113, f. 212, Bod.

¹¹² Earl Marshal’s Orders, May 1638, Phillips MS 13084, vol. 14, unpaginated; Heralds VI, ff. 305–6, College of Arms. The reasons for the cancellation are unclear. Kevin Sharpe has suggested that it was due to the onset of the Scottish crisis (*Personal Rule*, 222), but this seems unlikely since the preparations to meet this were not yet having an impact on other areas of government.

¹¹³ Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 209–14, 583–84; Smuts, “Public Ceremony and Royal Charisma,” 82–87.

display to amplify the majesty of their kingship.¹¹⁴ The Garter processions are a good example of this since they show both kings making conscious efforts to harness the possibilities offered by the installation cavalcade. Ashmole records a 1606 decree by which James ensured “that the ancient custom, which for some years have been intermitted, wherein at the solemnity of this feast all the knights companions were wont to go attended each with a large train, was recalled and brought back again into use.”¹¹⁵ This resulted in some spectacular Jacobean processions.¹¹⁶ However, in 1616, prior to the installation of Sir George Villiers, James issued another decree “for saving of charge and avoiding of emulation,” which forbade the wearing of livery coats. It may initially have been intended to spare his young protégé the embarrassment of having to compete with the Earl of Rutland, who was installed at the same time. But the economy drive caught on, and two years later the knight companions’ attendance was limited to fifty.¹¹⁷ This relatively austere approach appears to have lasted until 1629, when the Earl of Northampton mounted a cavalcade with well over a hundred attendants, including a full complement of household servants dressed in blue livery coats; chaplains, officers, heralds, eighty gentlemen and yeomen; and an array of senior nobles. The annals record that at the next chapter, Northampton was “thanked for his gallant attendance and a decree issued that knights elect should doe the like.”¹¹⁸ This was the cue for the spectacular processions of the 1630s.

The reasoning behind this decree, and the extravaganza planned for his son in 1638, was not recorded, but a clue surely lies in Pembroke’s remark that the king wished to ensure more frequent “attendance upon his royal person in place of publique solemnities.” This was an abiding concern for Charles. Elsewhere he made extensive provision for noblemen to participate in the regular round of ceremony at his court and to encourage a large and impressive attendance. Part of this involved expanding noble involvement in the Garter rites. Under Elizabeth, most of the feast day duties had been assigned to officers of the order or gentlemen pensioners, but Charles drew on the larger body of the peerage.¹¹⁹ A senior peer (in 1628 the Earl of Dover, in 1632 the Earl of Stamford, and in 1633, just before his election, the Earl of Danby) was assigned the task of carrying the sword of state; the sovereign’s train was supported by young noblemen (in 1638 Lords Russell, Herbert, and Cranborne); and waiting duties at the feast day dinner were again assigned to senior peers. The Earl of Essex acted as cupbearer on several occasions, and the “Great Bason” used for the solemn ceremony of washing the king’s hands was presented in 1638 by the Earls of Bedford, Hertford, Clare, Viscount St. Albans, and Lord Herbert of Raglan.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Malcolm Smuts, “Art and the Material Culture of Majesty in Early Stuart England,” in *The Stuart Courts and Europe*, ed. Malcolm Smuts (Cambridge, 1996), 90, 93–96.

¹¹⁵ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 509.

¹¹⁶ Jefferson, “A Garter Installation Ceremony in 1606,” 141–50; Garter Installations 1605–6, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 81–82, Bod.

¹¹⁷ Garter Installation, 5 July 1616, Ashmole 1108, f. 91, Bod.; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 339.

¹¹⁸ Garter Installation, 1629, Ashmole 1110, ff. 107–9, Bod.; Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 339–40; Garter Installation, 1629, MS X.7, f. 166, WCLA.

¹¹⁹ Ashmole, *Order of the Garter*, 589, 593, 596–97.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 514; Peers attending Garter Feasts, 1632, 1638–40, Ashmole MS 1110, f. 35, Bod.; Ashmole MS 1112, ff. 63–64, Bod.

This association of leading nobles with the central rites of his monarchy was, as he recognized, an important means of enhancing his prestige and authority.¹²¹

The same principle applied to the Garter processions. Both James and Charles readily understood that public pageants in which monarchs and noblemen paraded before the people with all the trappings of wealth, power, and status were one of the principal means of cultivating an appropriate sense of respect, reverence, and support for those in authority. The Earl of Newcastle explained how this worked in a letter of advice to his young charge, Prince Charles, in the late 1630s. “What preserves you kings,” he said, is

ceremony, the cloth of state, the distance people are with you, great officers, heralds, drum, trumpeters, rich coaches, rich furniture for horses, guards, martial men making room . . . even the wisest . . . shall shake of his wisdom and shake for fear of it; for this is the mist is cast before us and masters the commonwealth.¹²²

In the case of the Garter, although the display was being put on by the nobles, it was not only for their own aggrandisement but also to honor the order of which the two monarchs were sovereign. Charles has been depicted as rather neglectful of this aspect of his kingship, shying away from the ceremonial entries that Elizabeth used so successfully to enhance the power and attractiveness of her monarchy.¹²³ But the evidence presented here suggests that he could readily embrace such occasions. He may not have been a participant in the parade, but as principal spectators, the king and his family would have become almost as much a focus of attention for the crowds as the noble entourage passing before them. The whole march past could be seen as a powerful affirmation of the loyalty and companionship of his leading nobles, which was such a central component of the ethos of the order.¹²⁴

An analysis of the Garter processions and cavalcades, then, provides further support for the argument being presented here: that while the king was introducing reforms which highlighted the spiritual and moral aspects of the order, in doing so he still remained wedded to the martial ideals and noble companionship that played such a prominent role in its traditions and values. It is instructive to place this view of the Garter alongside John Adamson’s important account of the refashioning of chivalric ideals more generally during the 1630s. Adamson shows the king distancing himself from the culture of tournament and tiltyard, the hostility to Spain, and the identification with the “Protestant cause” that had characterized “Elizabethan” versions of chivalry and done much to shape his own adolescent fantasies. Chivalry was redefined to accentuate a more refined, purified, and spiritualized version of chivalry based on a revival of ancient traditions of heroic knighthood. The knight was no longer seen “principally as a prosecutor of war, but now as the guardian of the

¹²¹ Smuts, “Art and the Material Culture of Majesty,” 88–89.

¹²² H. Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, 1st ser., 3 vols. (1894), III:290.

¹²³ Smuts, “Public Ceremony and Royal Charisma,” 65–93; Judith Richards, “‘His Nowe Majesty’ and the English Monarchy: The Kingship of Charles I before 1640,” *Past and Present* 113 (1986): 77–86. As Mark Kishlansky has demonstrated, the extent of Charles’s shying away from ceremony has been exaggerated. Mark Kishlansky, “Charles I: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” *Past and Present* 189 (2005): 60–69.

¹²⁴ For the prominence of the leading spectators on such occasions, see the contemporary drawing of the procession accompanying the queen mother’s entry into London in 1639. Jean Paget de la Serre, *Histoire de L’Entrée de la Reyne Mere du Roy . . . dans La Grande Bretagne* (London, 1639).

Caroline peace.”¹²⁵ Much of this fits very well with the Garter reforms and observances promoted by Charles. There is the same emphasis on restoring the “primitive” purity of the Garter, enhancing its dignity and order, and associating it more closely with the religious ideals of Christian knighthood, understood in terms of a high church, “Laudian,” spirituality rather than the Calvinist values of the “Protestant cause.” However, the suggestion that chivalry was being redefined in a way that downplayed its warlike and military aspects does not accord with the evidence presented here. By the late 1630s, military themes were more conspicuous than at any other point in the early Stuart history of the order, reflecting a wider “remilitarization” of the aristocracy. The revival of the “poor knights,” the election and investiture of new members, and the processions and rites and ceremonies celebrated courage, martial prowess, and knightly companionship more, rather than less, prominently, than in previous decades. In all this it is important to stress again that the practices and traditions of the Garter continued to carry multiple layers of meaning. They could signify different things to different contemporaries in different contexts. To suggest that change was simply moving in one direction, toward emptying the order of much of its military significance, would be to misread the way in which the Garter developed during the 1630s.



The last full-scale Garter feast took place at Whitehall on 1–3 March 1641. Thereafter, the onset of the political crisis made it impossible for the order to function as it had done in the 1630s. From January 1642, Charles was cut off from access to Whitehall and Windsor, the two focal points of the Garter rites, and four of the knight companions (Pembroke, Salisbury, Holland, and Northumberland) sided with Parliament in the developing conflict. A final feast was held at York on 18–20 April 1642 as part of the king’s campaign to draw leading nobles to his northern court. But it was a much diminished, almost embarrassing affair. Most of those summoned chose to stay in London, citing an order from the House of Lords that they were required to give precedence to “the weighty affaires of the kingdom discussed in parliament”; only four knight companions attended, and a special dispensation was required to hold the chapter because it was inquorate. The only significant business transacted was the election to the order of James, Duke of York. Following this, Charles bowed to the inevitable and no more feasts were held while he was sovereign.¹²⁶

Of the many indignities suffered by the king as a result of the onset of civil war, the collapse of the observances of the Order of the Garter must have pained him more than most. The feast had become the premier event in the royal court’s annual ceremonial calendar, and it stood for everything that the king valued most about knighthood, aristocracy, and honor. He continued to visualize the knight companions as a brotherhood in arms, bound to him by ties of fidelity and exemplifying the old-fashioned martial virtues of valor and steadfastness, while at the same time being responsive to the knightly obligation to defend the church and true religion. Charles’s

¹²⁵ Adamson, “Chivalry,” 170–77.

¹²⁶ Garter Feast, 18–20 April 1642, Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 146v, 148, 180, Bod. Two chapter meetings were held at the king’s headquarters at Christchurch, Oxford, 17 January and 2 March 1645. Ashmole MS 1108, ff. 153–54, 156, 159–60, Bod.

devotion to the order cannot be doubted. But what does this tell us about the broader dynamics of his kingship?

From this perspective, the most important aspect of the Garter was that it was a chivalric order made up of the leading noblemen of the realm. It embodied what has been described as “the bond of equal standing in chivalry” among men of honor, virtue, and renown, coming together to celebrate their companionship and loyalty to their sovereign. This was a relationship that Charles sought to establish at the center of his rule. He looked on the nobility as his natural partners in government, standing alongside the Laudian bishops as one of the twin pillars on which rested order and stability. He made it a priority during the 1630s to do everything he could to promote their loyalty and welfare. He set out to encourage noble attendance at court, to make them fit for service to the Crown through schemes like the new noble academy in Covent Garden, and to safeguard their interests against those who slighted their honor. He also set out to enlist their political support, most notably in the aftermath of the 1629 Parliament when he appealed to the House of Lords to join him in partnership to defeat the forces of disorder and “popularity.” In all this, he sought to privilege an image of aristocracy that accorded with the ideals of “ancient nobility” embodied in the Garter: men of courage, virtue, and ancient lineage standing alongside him as knightly companions, offering counsel, fellowship, and faithful service.¹²⁷ On three occasions, at moments of political crisis between 1639 and 1642, he looked to these values and these relationships to rescue his monarchy.

The first was in January 1639 when he issued a quasi-feudal summons to his peers to join him at York with their armed retinues ready to fight the Scots. This was the first time in nearly a hundred years that a royal army had been recruited in this way, and it harkened back not only to the campaigns of Henry VIII—the last time an English king had fought at the head of his army—but also to the traditions of personal fidelity and companionship in arms embodied by the Garter. Contrary to the view of some historians, the summons was a considerable success. Of the ninety-three peers whose responses are known, a third attended Charles in person and more than 80 percent offered contributions to the service. This was sufficient to rescue the faltering military preparations and also to rally the leaders of the political nation behind the war effort.¹²⁸

The second occasion was in September 1640, after defeat in the Second Bishops War, when the king summoned a Great Council of Peers to York to advise him on how to steer a course out of the crisis. This time it was the counselling role of the aristocracy that Charles called on, manifest in the practices of the Garter chapter meetings. Over a period of nearly four weeks, more than sixty lay peers performed their role as *consiliarii nati*, discussing, debating, and advising in the presence of the king. They eventually reached a consensus on a series of proposals that led toward a negotiated settlement but that at the same allowed Charles to keep his army together, avoid a capitulation, and preserve his honor. The king pronounced

¹²⁷ These themes are discussed more fully in my forthcoming book, *Charles I and the Aristocracy, 1625–1642* (Cambridge, 2013).

¹²⁸ For Charles’s letter and the responses of many of the peers, January–March 1639, see TNA SO1/3, ff. 114–15; SP 16/413/117. The implications of the summons are dealt with more fully in Cust, *Charles I and the Aristocracy*, chap. 4, i.

himself well satisfied with the proceedings, and over the following months they were regularly referred to as a model of how the king and his peers could work together to protect Crown and nation.¹²⁹

The third occasion was in the summer of 1642 when he once again summoned his peers to York to provide him with the political and military support needed to revive a faltering royalist cause. After the abortive attempt to persuade peers to appear at the Garter feast in April, he tried again with a personal summons to each of them, on their “allegiance,” to attend on him and provide the benefit of their counsel. This time he succeeded. A majority of the politically active peers, more than forty, made the journey north, in many cases specifically citing their sense of loyalty and obligation to their sovereign. There they signed an “Engagement” to defend the king’s “person, crown and dignitie,” offered men and money that would provide the basis for a royalist army, and then set off to their shires to execute the king’s Commission of Array.¹³⁰ It was the rally of peers at York that rescued the royal cause at a time when it appeared to be on the verge of collapse, giving it the political credibility and momentum that made it possible to fight a civil war. Once again, it highlighted the importance of Charles’s bond with his leading nobles and the core values of loyalty and companionship, counsel and military service that sustained it. Nowhere was this more powerfully articulated than in the traditions and observances of the Order of the Garter.

¹²⁹ For proceedings at the Great Council, see *Hardwicke State Papers*, 2 vols. (London, 1778), II:208–98; Cust, *Charles and the Aristocracy*, chap. 4, ii.

¹³⁰ *His Majestie’s Declaration made the 13th of June 1642 to the Lords Attending his Majestie at York...* (London, 1642); Cust, *Charles and the Aristocracy*, chap. 5, ii.