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CONTENTS

Editorial	5
Hamilton & Inches: A Unique Record <i>Ian Cawood</i>	9
Optimising a Threadbare Archive: Researching and Publishing on J. & P. Coats Ltd, c.2000-Present <i>Kirsten Kininmonth and Sam McKinstry</i>	37
The Journal of the Business Archives Council Scotland, 1977 to 2019: a Summary and Evaluation <i>Sam McKinstry</i>	61
The Business Archive Council Scotland, 1957-1976: Foundation and Consolidation <i>Anthony Slaven</i>	75
Business Archives Council of Scotland, 1977-2011: The Coming of Age <i>Lesley Richmond</i>	91
Business Archives Council of Scotland, 2011-2022: Adapting to New Realities <i>Kiara King</i>	107

Hamilton & Inches: A Unique Record¹

Ian Cawood

Introduction

As private businesses become increasingly aware of the commercial potential of their archives, professional archivists are often employed on short-term contracts to catalogue their collections and to carry out further research to supplement the surviving materials. The history presented here of the Edinburgh jewellers, Hamilton & Inches, which has been trading for over 150 years, results from such an exercise. It provides a useful case study of the ways in which a private business history can complement more general histories, which frequently emphasise public institutions and neglect the commercial sector. Such histories can also illuminate aspects of business history that macro-studies omit, especially the civic roles of business leaders and the significance of trade with the British Empire to specialist retail firms.

In 2016, the jewellery and silversmith company of Hamilton & Inches, which has a famous showroom with integral workshops on George Street in Edinburgh's New Town, celebrated its 150th anniversary. With support and encouragement from the Business Archives Council of Scotland, the company subsequently took the opportunity to catalogue its extensive business archive by employing an archivist on a short-term contract who would also investigate the company's history further through local, national and on-line archives and databases. The research also revealed the significance of the Inches family in the civic

¹ I am grateful to Amy Cawood, project archivist at Hamilton & Inches, for sharing her research findings and assisting in the preparation of this article.

history of Edinburgh, especially the contributions of Robert Kirk Inches, the company's founder and his daughter, Isabella (known as Ella), Scotland's first female councillor. This bears out Michael Schafer's observation that, in Edinburgh in the early 20th century, local government was 'dominated by businessmen, house-owners and master artisans' (Schafer, 2007, 97).

As with many long-standing business archives kept in private hands, the collection is rather haphazard both in content and organisation (Wiltshire, 2017). Although it contains no material relating to the first thirty years of the business, the Hamilton & Inches archive contains material dating back to the 1890s including financial and employee records, a small number of historic design books and drawings and a large collection of digital photographs of finished products and order records. There are a number of architectural and property records relating to the shop at 87 George Street, to which the company relocated in 1952. There are only a few photographs of the exterior and interior of the company's second retail premises at 87/88 Princes Street, despite the business trading from there for over sixty years. There are almost no governance records for the company before the 21st century and only a very limited amount of advertising material relating to the history of the company, much of which lacks dates, locations and further corroborating detail. Reconstructing the history of the company required research into public and institutional records far beyond Edinburgh, with many famous stories surrounding the company proving impossible to verify. A company history was published in 1966 to mark the 100th anniversary of the company, but it was based largely on the oral testimony of the Inches family and the company's employees and lacks footnotes or references of any kind, so it has proved remarkably difficult to verify much of the information it contains (Bland, 1966; Green, 2001, 12).

The founding of Hamilton & Inches

As Ross Petty observed in his recent history of the Hamilton and Robertson cotton bleachworks, the human aspects of a family business are crucial in explaining the success or failure of such a small company (Petty, 2014, 47). This section of the paper will therefore explore the initial years of the Hamilton & Inches businesses through a study of the Inches and Hamilton families and will illustrate the success of the company through the increasingly prestigious social and civic circles in which Robert Kirk Inches, the business's founder and first owner moved, culminating in his election as Edinburgh Lord Provost in 1912.

In 1852, an Edinburgh stabler, Robert Inches, died at the age of forty-five, leaving his family with no father and then, in 1856, their mother, Sarah (nee Hamilton), died of tuberculosis. By 1861 the four Inches children were living with their aunt and uncle, Elizabeth and James Hamilton, at 7 East Adam Street. Uncle James Hamilton worked as a goldsmith's assistant (or salesman) for the long-standing jewellers of Mackay Cunningham & Co, situated at 54 Princes Street. Although it is not clear how or why he did so, other than through his uncle's patronage, it was around this time that the oldest of the children, Robert Kirk Inches, moved to London, training as a clock and watchmaker, before returning to Edinburgh in about 1866 (*Scotsman*, 2 August 1918). In May 1866, Robert Kirk Inches and his uncle, James, opened the business of Hamilton & Inches at 90a Princes Street, although, once again, the archives do not shed light on how the young man and his salesman uncle acquired the necessary capital to open a shop on one of the most prestigious streets in Edinburgh filled with highly expensive jewellery and silverware (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 26 May 1866). One of the earliest records of the business at this time is a silver claret jug bearing the Hamilton & Inches hallmark and dated 1866 (National

Museum of Scotland [hereafter NMS], H.1996.150). On 1 June 1866, the new company registered their hallmark with the Edinburgh Assay Office (Incorporation of Goldsmiths, 1847-1902). Liquidity was clearly very limited in the early days of the business, as Robert Kirk Inches' obituary noted, 'it is indicative of the more modest and personal methods in the conduct of Princes Street businesses half a century ago that he [Robert] acted for two years as his own night watchman, sleeping under a counter in the shop' (*Scotsman*, 2 August 1918). However, there must have been an improvement in the family fortunes because on 18 June 1868, Robert Kirk Inches married Mary Gray Morison. Mary Morison, born in 1847, was the daughter of John Morison and Isabella Morison (née Kerr). John Morison was sole partner in the business of J. & J. Morison (Brewers), 160 Canongate, Edinburgh (*Edinburgh Gazette*, 14 September 1894). During the fifteen years that followed, Robert Kirk and Mary had seven children and Hamilton & Inches became a well-established business in the city.

By 1876, Robert Kirk's brother, James Inches (listed as goldsmith and jeweller in his contract), then aged thirty-four, joined the business (Bland, 1966, 13). In late 1878 the City of Glasgow bank collapsed, and James Hamilton lost over £2,300 (about £260,000 today). The collapse was one of the biggest financial scandals of the Victorian age (Forbes Munro, 2003, 253-278; Carroll, 2002, 10-15).

This great social and commercial disaster - the result of utterly reckless and dishonest speculation on the part of the Glasgow Board of Directors - was made public late in the evening of the 1st of October [1878], by the resolution of the Directors to close their doors on the following morning. When the announcement appeared in the newspapers of Wednesday, 2 October, the public was completely taken by surprise; and some days elapsed

before it could be realised what a crushing blow had fallen on the unfortunate shareholders, and on the credit of the country (City of Glasgow Bank, 1878, 5).

James Hamilton was a witness at the trial of the bank's directors, and it was reported that he continued to deal with the bank 'to the last, believing it was in a flourishing condition.' (*Dundee Courier*, 28 January 1879). A few years later, in 1883, James retired from the business, aged about seventy-one and he died later that same year, possibly as a consequence of this financial disaster. These events did not, however, appear to have had much impact on the business of Hamilton & Inches. In 1887, the business moved to larger premises at 87/88 Princes Street. Robert Kirk Inches' wife, Mary, died on 6 November 1893 when her youngest child, Mary, was only ten years old. Few personal papers survive from this period, so it is difficult to know the impact the death of Mary Gray Inches had on the family, but Robert seems to have thrown himself into business, as in the same year the business of Robert Bryson & Sons was transferred to Hamilton & Inches (Bland, 1966, 14; *Scotsman*, 8 November 1893). That same year, Robert Kirk Inches was awarded the Royal Warrant and ancient appointment from Queen Victoria (dating back to reign of James I and VI) of 'His Majesty's Clockmaker, and Keeper and Dresser of His Majesty's clocks, watches and pendulums in His Majesty's ancient kingdom of Scotland;' a post he held for the rest of his lifetime (*Scotsman*, 2 August 1918). Given the challenges that the British watchmaking industry was facing with cheap imports from America and Switzerland at this time, it was an astute business move on Kirk Inches' part to choose to focus on the high-quality segment of the market, where the Royal Warrant would help to justify the premium prices that he would charge for his watches (Landes, 1979; Davies, 1993). Hamilton & Inches continue to hold a Royal Warrant as clock

specialists to Her Majesty the Queen until her death in September 2022. In 1886, Robert Kirk's brother, James Hamilton Inches, left the company. He later became one of the directors (listed in the minutes as 'retired jeweller') of the newly-established company, the Bruntsfield Links Golfing Society Ltd, which held its first statutory meeting in March 1898 and which became one of the most significant and prestigious golf clubs in the city, where businessmen would meet to socialise and transact business in a less formal setting (Colledge, 2012, 69).

Robert Kirk Inches: Businessman and Public Figure

Under the leadership of Robert Kirk Inches, Hamilton & Inches was set to become a byword for luxury and elegance in the city, creating fine jewellery and silverware for the most prestigious of clients, such as the Duke of Edinburgh (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 August 1881), and for important historical events such as opening of the Forth Rail Bridge (*Graphic*, 8 March 1890). Robert was actively involved in the professional business community of late 19th and early 20th century Edinburgh and had a longstanding involvement in the Merchant Company from 1877, becoming its Treasurer from 1917 (*Scotsman*, 2 August 1918). In 1903 he co-founded the Edinburgh Association of Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Watchmakers, formally constituted on 5 February 1906, later becoming its chairman (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 May 1906). In 1896 he was admitted to the Freedom of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, London (by redemption) and, as a result, was also 'admitted into the Freedom of this City [London] by Redemption in the Company of Clockmakers.' From about 1895, Hamilton & Inches also styled themselves 'chronometer makers to the Admiralty.' However, as the title was not clearly defined, it is difficult to confirm when and for how long the company continued to use this

designation, although the Curator of Time at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich has confirmed that several of Hamilton & Inches' chronometers were successfully tested by the Observatory, as the Admiralty required, prior to purchasing them for the Navy (Akkermans, 2020).

At this time, Robert Kirk Inches also rose to prominence as a public figure in the city of Edinburgh. In 1900 he was elected representative for Morningside ward on the town council (*Scotsman*, 1 November 1900) and was elected Bailie in 1906 (*Scotsman*, 31 July 1906). This was typical in Edinburgh, where commercial tradesmen and merchants, rather than industrial manufacturers, had dominated the civic life of the city since the days of Archibald Stewart, the wine merchant who, as Lord Provost, had surrendered the city to Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 (Madgin and Rodger, 2014; Lea, 1970, 82). Kirk Inches was prominent in public work outside the town council, sitting on the boards of the Gas Commission as well as serving as Convenor of the Public Parks Committee for some time (*Scotsman*, 2 August 1918). He was also a representative elder on the Assembly for the Burgh of Tain (*Scotsman*, 27 April 1903), as well as being prominent in calling for radical improvements to the Reformatory system for juvenile offenders in Scotland (*Scotsman*, 4 April 1907). Robert Kirk Inches was also a significant figure in Scottish Freemasonry for over 57 years, being admitted as an apprentice mason in 1861 and rising to the office of 'Grand Jeweller' by 1896 (*Scotsman*, 26 May 1896). He became a member of the Grand Lodge in 1894 and was appointed to the Grand Committee in 1897 (*Scotsman*, 3 August 1918). Robert Kirk Inches was dedicated to the provision of high quality industrial and technical education across Edinburgh, both in his capacity as a civic leader, but also as a member of the business community, where there was concern at the paucity of training for apprentices and industrial education for

young workers. In 1912, Robert Kirk Inches, by this time Lord Provost, was part of a committee to improve apprenticeship training across the city of Edinburgh, which was felt to be, in many cases, 'defective, and that in view of modern conditions it is desirable that apprentices should, as far as possible, take advantage of the courses of instruction provided in continuation classes and technical and art colleges' (*Scotsman*, 10 January 1913).

In 1904 he was appointed to the governing body of the George Heriot Trust where he served on the Finance, Property and Law committee and the Heriot Watt College (later the Heriot Watt University) committees (HWC/1/2/23, 1909). In 1913 he was elected chair of the Board of Governors, a position he held until 1916 (HWC/1/2/32, 1918). Hamilton & Inches' connection with Heriot Watt University has continued until the present. In 1965, the company created the university mace, used at its inaugural ceremony when it became a university in 1966. A communion set was commissioned from Hamilton & Inches by the university in around 1965, described as 'modern silver communion set of circular two-tier form containing twenty-four glasses, double loop handle, silver-gilt crown shaped central finial with the Heriot Watt University crest...in fitted wooden case' (HWU/9/3/1, 1992). In 2010, the company was commissioned to create an international or travelling mace for use at the Heriot Watt Campuses in Dubai and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Robert Kirk Inches was also a founder member of the board of management for the newly established Edinburgh College of Art (hereafter ECA) (*Scotsman*, 18 January 1908). He had previously been a part-time lecturer in jewellery design at its predecessor institution, the Edinburgh School of Applied Art, to which post he had been invited by Robert Rowand Anderson the architect, the school's founder (McKinstry, 1991, 143). The ECA initially belonged to the Corporation of Edinburgh and was controlled

by the Lord Provost, magistrates and council of the city. Eventually, the art department of Heriot Watt College was transferred to the 'New School' [ECA] and included the training of 'engravers, art metal workers, silver chasers' amongst others. The new College of Art was officially opened on 6 January 1909 (ECA/1/2/1/1, 1908-09). Robert Kirk Inches served on the committee responsible for appointing the director of the new school (ECA); he was also appointed to the Heriot Watt College (hereafter HWC) committee in November 1908 and was involved in overseeing the discussions between HWC and ECA. Following his appointment as Lord Provost in 1912 (and therefore ex-officio chairman on the ECA board of management), the board minutes record:

On the motion of the Vice-Chairman, it was unanimously resolved to record and expression of the Board's congratulations to Judge Inches on his appointment as Lord Provost of the City, of their appreciation of the valuable services he had for many years rendered to Art Education in Edinburgh, especially as a member of the Board of the College, and in the negotiations which had led to its formation, and their satisfaction that for the next three years the College would have the advantage of his experience and interest as Chairman of the Board (ECA/1/2/1/5, 1912-13).

Lord Provost Inches

Elected as Lord Provost of Edinburgh in 1912, a post that he was supposed to hold until 1915 but which was extended by a year owing to the First World War, Robert Kirk Inches rose to the highest position in Edinburgh civic life. Although this may appear to be a remarkable personal journey for the orphaned son of a stabler, it seems from

research into similar urban elites, that those who rose from humble backgrounds appear to have been warmly welcomed into civic leadership roles in cities such as Edinburgh, Norwich and Belfast (Johnson, 2016; Doyle, 1999; Schafer, 2007, 113-14). Kirk Inches, despite his advanced age, was confronted with the immense challenge of providing manpower from the city to support the war effort after 1914. The first calls for a regiment of volunteers from the city of Edinburgh appeared in the press within a week of the declaration of war and followed the formation of special battalions in Glasgow (*Scotsman*, 12 August 1914). This was followed by an article on 11 September by Lord Provost Inches, announcing the formation of a battalion for Edinburgh:

In a time like the present the historic city of Edinburgh could not be found lagging behind, and the public will be glad to know that, in response to a widely expressed desire, an Edinburgh battalion is to be formed for the new Army. The Lord Provost appeals to the young men of the city to show themselves worthy of the great history of the city by taking their places in the ranks to help their country in the present crisis (*Scotsman*, 11 September 1914).

Robert Inches was keen to see a designated Edinburgh regiment that would be the equal of the Glasgow battalions. Then, as now, rivalry between the two Scottish cities was great and, in this instance, it resulted in the formation of two battalions which served alongside the Royal Scots as 15th (1st City of Edinburgh, Service) and 16th (2nd City of Edinburgh, Service) (Royle, 2006). In May 1917, Lord Provost Inches made a four-day visit to the front line in France, meeting with wounded soldiers and experiencing at first hand conditions in the trenches (*Sunday Times*, 7 May 1916).

Some critics, however, vilified Inches for his lack of action and lack of leadership. During summer 1915 the *Edinburgh Evening News* published a series of articles attacking the Lord Provost (Robert was by this time 75 years old) and his circle for being too complacent in the face of the war's demands. Before the war, the first article claimed, Lord Provost was 'asked to do little and did it quite well' but now 'a lead was needed, and the Lord Provost has not given a strong lead.' The article went on to relate anonymous complaints from the city's councillors that 'the Lord Provost has neither invited nor encouraged co-operation or co-ordination from his colleagues...[consequently] Edinburgh has not made an adequate response to the nation's call' (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 2 June 1915; Peacock, 2017, 303). In July 1915, an anonymous article by a town councillor in the same newspaper described the proposal to extend the Lord Provost's term of office by a year as 'disastrous' and went on to state that

the advent of war found out the weak spot in the City Chambers, the Necropolis of Progress. Without a dominating personality to direct its activities, it has muddled through with a hand-to-mouth existence. The clarion call to civic duty did not resound from the Royal Exchange. The hour had come, but not the man (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 2 July 1915).

The council came to the Lord Provost's defence at a meeting on 26 July, disowning the articles, the authorship of which was never established. Robert Inches thanked them for their support and commented, acidly, that 'it was only a scandalous rag of a paper that could possibly have put [the accusations] in...He had done his best and could do no more' (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 27 July 1915).

Speaking at the end of Robert Inches' term as Lord Provost in November 1916, the former Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, paid tribute to his work during the war:

[It] was a new situation for the Lord Provost, but he [Rosebery] thought none could say that he [Inches] did not rise to the occasion. The funds raised under his auspices were enormous, and he raised a battalion on behalf of the city, which had been one of the most successful. It was impossible to enumerate all the tasks and duties which had devolved upon him in consequence of the war. Everybody present knew that the Lord Provost as a war Provost had exceeded their expectations (*The Times*, 1 November 1916).

Lord Provost Inches did not live to see the conclusion of all that he had achieved to support the war effort and alleviate the suffering it caused. He died of sudden heart failure, aged 78, on 19 July 1918 (National Records of Scotland, 1918).

Hamilton & Inches: the legacy of Robert Kirk Inches

As Shaw et al have argued, a firm-level study of a retail company can provide an understanding of the international, national and regional factors in assessing the reasons for such a business's success or failure. (Shaw, Alexander, Benson and Jones, 1998). Hamilton & Inches certainly benefited from the expansion of the trading networks of the British Empire, being able to buy imported raw materials, most significantly silver from Latin America, and making access to important markets easy and cost effective. This appears to have been a common pattern among specialist Scottish manufacturers, with the Penicuik papermaker, Cowans, making use of imported esparto grass from the 1860s and branches in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand

(McKinstry and Ding, 2013, 726-7). An examination of the Hamilton and Inches' early account books suggests that Robert Inches' business acumen was keen. As well as investing in diamond and gold mines, other luxury goods and commodities such as coffee and whisky feature in the accounts, together with financial organisations, hotels (and tea rooms) and companies in the United States (HI/2/1/1; HI/2/1/2); all of which give the impression of a business which was thoroughly embedded in the commercial networks and the culture of the 'gentlemanly' capitalism of the British Empire (Rodger, 2004, 167).

An entry in the 1894-1901 Hamilton & Inches accounting book refers to the purchase of shares in the Royal Forth. (HI2/1/1/). It appears that the Royal Forth was one of the last great sailing ships constructed in the Leith docks. Built in 1893 by Ramage and Ferguson of Leith, it was a four-masted steel barque (rigged with a royal sail above double top and topgallant sails) and weighed 3,130 tons; it seems to have plied the North Atlantic trade route under a Captain Cooper (University of Washington archives, PH Coll 318.582). Hamilton & Inches' investment in transatlantic shipping was short-lived, however, as the ship was sold in May 1900 to a German company owned by H. H. Schmidt, Hamburg, which indicates that the purchase of shares was merely an abortive investment rather than an attempt to purchase shipping for the company's raw materials and/or finished products. As the *Henriette*, the ship was interned at Antofagasta, a port city of northern Chile, during the First World War in c.1914; then in 1919 it was delivered to Italy as war damage compensation. Finally, in 1924 it was broken up at Genoa (Bruzelius, c.1997).

In Britain, the company also contributed to the development of commercial infrastructures in Scotland, buying shares in the Caledonian Railway Company, which ran a line to the Leadhills and

Wanlockhead mines in South Lanarkshire - one of the richest mineral deposits in Scotland (Kellett, 1979, 224-28; Gillanders, 1981). Between 1700 and 1958, the mines produced 400,000 tonnes of lead, 10,000 tonnes of zinc and 25 tonnes of silver, the latest of which provided a valuable source for the Edinburgh jewellers (Northern Mine Research Society, n.d.; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 30 August 1938). Hamilton & Inches were able to source other precious materials from Scotland as well. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the company used Scottish pearls in some of their finest jewellery, including an 'extremely fine Scotch pearl surrounded with diamonds and mounted as a bracelet,' which was given to Princess Louise of Wales (eldest daughter of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) as a wedding gift (*Scotsman*, 26 July 1889).

Ella Millar (1869-1959)

Although Robert Kirk Inches left a considerable business legacy, he also bequeathed a tradition of public service to his children which was epitomised in the ground-breaking career of his oldest child Isabella (known as Ella) Morison Inches. Ella had worked alongside her father during his Provostship 'promoting and managing many of the voluntary organisations' (*Scotsman*, 4 January 1919). She was awarded an MBE by King George V in 1918 for her war efforts (*London Gazette*, 7 January 1918). The Edinburgh retail business remained heavily patriarchal even into the early 20th century as Stana Nenadic has demonstrated, so Ella chose to enter politics instead and in 1919 she was elected as Edinburgh's first woman town councillor and the first woman councillor in Scotland (*Scotsman*, 15 January 1919; Nenadic, 1998). Prior to this, women in office in Scottish cities had only served on school, parish council or parochial boards (Baxter, 2013, 270). Following her successful election to the same ward of Morningside as

her late father, Ella Millar campaigned throughout her career on issues such as housing, public transport, child welfare, public health and the treatment of juvenile offenders. She also served on the Central Midwives Board for Scotland, as well as Edinburgh College of Domestic Science and the Public Libraries Committee (*Scotsman*, 31 March 1949). She was elected the first woman Baillie (magistrate) in 1923, an occasion of great significance to the Edinburgh Women Citizens Association of which she was an active member, mainly because many male councillors believed that police court work was not suitable for a woman. When those who objected said that they couldn't bear to see her sitting on the bench, she replied 'if I can bear it, I don't see why you can't' (Innes, 1998, 221). If Ella Inches' career has been neglected by historians, this is possibly due to her political affiliation as a Unionist, as the majority of studies of gender politics in Scotland in this period, tend to focus on the Liberal, Labour and ILP parties and therefore concentrate on the politics of Glasgow (Hughes, 2010; Orr, 2013; Smyth, 1992; Burness, 2010). Ella retired from the town council in May 1949 and was known affectionately as 'Mother of the Council' (*Scotsman*, 6 November 1936). Ella Morison Millar died at the age of 89 in 1959 (*Scotsman*, 26 February 1959).

Edward Inches (1877-1934)

Robert Kirk Inches' youngest son, Edward Inches was already in the Territorial Army when the First World War broke out in 1914, but at first he concentrated on continuing the Inches' family tradition of civic service and became a Justice of the Peace in October 1914 and was commissioned as a Deputy Lieutenant of Edinburgh in 1915 (*London Gazette*, 22 March 1915). By that year, in common with other young civic figures in Edinburgh, he had responded to the increasingly desperate calls for volunteers to go to the Western Front and he joined

the 1st Lowland, 2nd Battery, 57th High Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 1917 and ultimately reached the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. On his return from France, he picked up the business reins once more, receiving the Royal Warrant by King George V following his father's death in July 1918:

Scottish Office, Whitehall, October 4th, 1918.

The KING has been pleased, by Warrant under His Majesty's Royal Sign Manual, bearing date the 3rd instant, to appoint Lieutenant Colonel Edward James Inches, D.S.O., Clockmaker, of Edinburgh, to the Office of His Majesty's Clockmaker, Etc., in Scotland (London Gazette, 8 October 1918).

At a meeting of the Edinburgh Merchant Company in February 1927, Edward was re-elected its vice-chairman. This particular meeting discussed the important issue of industrial relations in the wake of the 1926 General Strike in a tone that demonstrated that the attitude of the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, was shared by some businessmen:

A good deal of the present trade depression, which, in other words, meant industrial unrest, was undoubtedly caused because of the suspicion that existed between employers and employees...if a better spirit could be introduced between employers and employees a very great deal would be done towards bringing about a trade revival (*Scotsman*, 5 February 1927).

Edward's leadership qualities, principles and empathy probably did much to steer Hamilton & Inches through the difficult inter-war years. The concern for fair treatment amongst the Edinburgh business community at the time was attributed, in part, to the number of Royal Warrant holders in Edinburgh, leading the Rev. Dr Fisher to state in 1924 that 'all association with the King and Court meant an elevation

of business principles in the community.' In his reply, the chairman of the Association of Edinburgh Royal Tradesman stated that it was the responsibility of the Royal Warrant holders to set an example to other tradesmen (*Scotsman*, 1 April 1924). In 1925 Edward Inches was himself elected as President of the Association and later commented that the Royal Warrant was 'a patent of commercial nobility' (*Scotsman*, 15 November 1930).

A Second War and the Move to George Street

On Edward's death in 1934, his son, Campbell Inches, became sole proprietor at the young age of 22. Campbell stepped into his father's shoes, representing Hamilton & Inches and the Edinburgh branch of the Royal Warrant Holders Association at its annual dinner in London in 1935. At this event, the Duke of York [later King George VI], talked of the 'great economic storm' that had raged across the world. However, he felt the nation had 'met those trials with steady courage and in a fine spirit of mutual cooperation' and had come through safely. He went on to say that the Empire could not afford to 'rest on its oars' whilst there was still 'a tragic volume of unemployment and of unprofitable production' (*Scotsman*, 21 February 1935). Sadly, worse was to come; four years later, Britain was again at war with Germany.

The war brought with it many obstacles; not least a shortage of silver. During the 1940s a number of Edinburgh jewellers, including Hamilton & Inches, advertised for 'gold and silver for remanufacture' 'owing to a shortage of these metals' (*Scotsman*, 6 January 1940, 18 December 1941, 7 May 1942, 15 September 1945). Despite that, Hamilton & Inches continued to trade advertising a wide range of 'military jewellery...crest brooches with regimental badges in gold or silver..[or made to] order designs in gold and diamonds (*Scotsman*, 3 February

1940); engagement rings; wedding gifts and watches throughout the war:

Watches designed for active service.

Serviceable Watches in chrome and stainless steel at £2 10 0. also Model with seconds hand in centre for Nurses... Gold Wristlet Watches...and a model specially recommended for Officers at £10 10 0 (*Scotsman*, 20 July 1940).

Hamilton & Inches also entered into the 'make do and mend' spirit, offering to have

Your jewellery fashionably remounted. New settings for your old jewellery...Let us create modern designs in place of these heavy unfashionable mountings' (*Scotsman*, 24 February 1940).

Shortly after the Second World War, Campbell Inches was president of the National Association of Goldsmiths. He was keen to stress the ongoing importance of the jewellery trade and its role in the manufacture of precision instruments during the war. At a meeting of the London Wholesale Jewellers' Association, he remarked that 'jewellers were still good citizens and not merely purveyors of unnecessary luxuries' and that those jewellers had 'thrown a necklace round the Empire' (*Scotsman*, 26 March 1946). A few months later he gave the following rousing speech to the industry, in which he joined with the British Housewives' League in calling for an end to austerity:

What Britain needs to cure post war drabness, in the opinion of R. Campbell Inches, Chairman of the National Association of Goldsmiths, is 'a national tonic— a tonic of gaiety, sunshine, new clothes, fun and happiness.' 'I suggest that as a nation we have overplayed the austerity hand', he said. 'We appear to have only one idea— to

balance the national budget. 'Viewed from the shores of a foreign country, Britain to-day resembles not a shining gem in a grand ocean setting, but a muddy little island peopled with grim people of chill mien and shabby appearance.' 'How can this outlook sell the lovely fabrics, the beautiful gowns, and the precious jewels that are the products of our skill in developing our Empire's resources?' "British fashion is one of the greatest sales forces of our entire national trade. Yet it is still almost a crime for a woman to be seen in a pretty frock' (*Daily Mercury* (Mackay, Queensland, Australia), 23 September 1946).

Campbell sold his interest in the company to his brother, Ian, after the war.

Shaw et al have argued that a crucial factor in a retail firm's success is the question of shop location, which, in the case of Hamilton & Inches, has only changed twice in the history of the company (Shaw, Alexander, Benson and Jones, 1998). In 1951, after Ian Inches bought his older brother's share in the business, he purchased the showroom of J. & G. Hunter Marshall, 'jewellers, silversmiths, watch makers and opticians,' which had occupied 87 George Street from about 1835, when the property was remodelled by the young architect, David Bryce, and converted into a commercial premises (Simpson & Brown Architects, 2010, 9). The interior of the showroom was elaborately decorated with fine plasterwork and joinery that has largely remained intact over the last 180 years. Hamilton & Inches proudly announced its transfer to its new premises in January 1952, where it hoped to continue the 'tradition of craftsmanship, beauty and quality associated with all our goods and services,' and where customers were invited to 'select in comfort and at leisure' (*The Times*, 28 January 1852). The

new owner made some further alterations, undertaken by the architects, Heggie & Aitchison, including another new shop front in imperial blue granite, polished hardwood and bronze fittings (Simpson & Brown Architects, 2010, 0). The upper rooms were used as workshops for the growing number of craftsmen employed by Hamilton & Inches. Today the building still retains 'the most impressive and interesting of all George Street shop interiors' in the opinion of the editors of the Edinburgh volume of the Buildings of Scotland series (Gifford, McWilliam and Walker, 2003, 303).

Buy-outs and survival

In order to 'safeguard and foster the private family nature of the business,' Hamilton & Inches was formed into a limited company in 1965, with Ian Hamilton Inches as the managing director, his wife, Deirdre (Betty) Inches, as a consultative director and Mr Ian Kinnear as executive director. Ian Inches continued to be a prominent figure, not just within Hamilton & Inches, where he sustained the company despite increased pressure from large national and international competition. From 1962 to 1965, he served as president of the Association of Edinburgh Royal Tradesmen, as his father and grandfather had done before him. His presidential medal is held in the Hamilton & Inches archive. He was appointed as a member of the Scottish Committee of the Council of Industrial Design in 1963. He was formerly a member of the Scottish Design Council (*Financial Times*, 29 May 1963). In 1977, Ian received the Royal Warrant holders' Silver Jubilee medal, commemorating the 25th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation; incidentally, this was 80 years after his grandfather had received a similar medal marking Queen Victoria's jubilee.

Although the Hamilton & Inches archives and other business records cannot be used, given the issues of business confidentiality and the closure of recent records, it is possible to map out the modern, turbulent history of the firm by consulting the Financial Times' digital archive. After Ian Inches retired in 1992, the Financial Times reported that Hamilton & Inches was to be taken over by the London jewellers, Asprey, which had also recently acquired Garrard, Mappin & Webb (whose shop in Edinburgh stood opposite Hamilton & Inches in George Street) and the French company René Boivin. Hamilton & Inches was described as being 'under-capitalised and feeling the recession' and it was later revealed that Asprey paid £1.3M for its 'Pearl of the North,' as it was described by Asprey's then managing director, Naim Attallah (*Financial Times*, 22 April 1992). However, the financial situation at Asprey was increasingly untenable as their profits fell by 20 per cent in 1992 (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1992). After losses described by the Financial Times as 'disastrous,' the company was rescued in a bailout of £243M by Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei in 1995 for twice the company's stock market value. As the Financial Times later put it, 'Asprey had piled a lot of après-Fabergé diamond eggs in very few baskets' (*Financial Times*, 4 April 1998). In June 1996, Hamilton & Inches was put up for sale by Asprey (*Financial Times*, 24 June 1998). With potential purchasers put off by the Asprey farrago, the company faced an uncertain future until the Financial Times announced a management buy-out by the directors of Hamilton & Inches in August 1998:

The buy-out is financed by Bank of Scotland and private equity is led by Julia Ogilvy, managing director and directors Denzil Skinner, Stephen Paterson and Malcom Gillan. Gavin Reed, chairman of John Menzies, will be chairman (*Financial Times*, 18 August 1998).

Hamilton & Inches may have ceased to be a family firm, but it was in more sympathetic and competent hands as the new millennium dawned and it has managed to maintain its position as the most prestigious jeweller in Edinburgh through careful marketing, nurturing of local craftsmanship and prudent management, despite the successive economic challenges since the financial crisis of 2008. The archival materials catalogued and supplemented by the project archivist could provide a vital commercial asset as the company seeks to weather the challenges of the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as offering avenues for scholarly inquiry into the jewellery and retail trade of Edinburgh and the contribution of commerce to the city's historic and civic development, both of which have hitherto been neglected in academic research.

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