



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

CRAIGAVON PERSONAL PAPERS

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Craigavon Personal Papers (D1415)

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Summary

Personal papers of James Craig (1871-1940), 1st Viscount Craigavon, statesman and Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, and of his wife, Lady Craigavon (1880-1953), 1884-1940. Comprising some 300 documents, volumes, photographs and newspaper cuttings, the collection provides an interesting insight into the life and career of the man who was to play a critical and integral role in the evolution of Northern Ireland as a separate political entity. Born at Sydenham, a suburb of Belfast, he was the youngest of six sons of James Craig, J.P., of Craigavon and Tyrella, Co. Down, a successful businessman in Belfast. Educated at a private school in Holywood, Co. Down and afterwards at Merchiston Castle, Edinburgh, the younger Craig became a stockbroker. However, with the start of the Boer War in 1899 he ceased formally to be a member of the Belfast Stock Exchange and took a commission in the 3rd (Militia) Battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles. Serving with distinction as a lieutenant with the Imperial Yeomanry, he was captured by the Boers but survived the barren conditions of a concentration camp and returned home with a firm and lasting faith in the British way of life.



Politics

After South Africa, Craig turned to politics and represented East Down and Mid-Down respectively as Unionist MP between 1906 and 1921. His skills were fully recognised at Westminster where he served as parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Pensions and parliamentary and financial secretary to the Admiralty, 1919-1921. However, his time in Parliament was mainly occupied in a struggle against the Irish separatist movement and when, after 1910, the Government committed itself to another Irish Home Rule Bill, he played a leading role in the bitter opposition that ensued as the chief lieutenant of Sir Edward Carson. Craig dealt chiefly with organising the means of resistance in the form of the creation of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the signing of the Ulster Covenant. Although the 1914-1918 war intervened, the Home Rule Bill had been placed on the Statute Book and when the Government of Ireland Act was passed in December 1920 (promoted by Lloyd George as head of the coalition Government), Craig who had been a baronet since 1918, became the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.



The Papers

Items of particular note include a series of personal letters and diaries, 1900-1902, relating Craig's experiences of the Boer War in South Africa, where he served under the banner of the Royal Irish Rifles; an exceptionally good run of 59 volumes of newspaper cuttings, 1903-1941, which are valuable not just as a record of Craigavon's life and evolving political career (he first secured parliamentary success in 1906), but as source material for one of the most important periods in Irish history, that of Ulster Unionist opposition to Home Rule, the establishment of Northern Ireland etc. As regards the Ulster Volunteer Force there are typescript copies of descriptions by Captain Agnew and Colonel Fred Crawford of the famous gun-running at Larne in 1914.

Much of the material in the collection, however, emanates from Lady Craigavon such as a memorandum written by her about her husband's crucial visit to meet Eamon De Valera in Dublin in May 1921. There are also typescript copies of portions of her diaries, 1883-1900 and 1905-1940, important in documenting the important role played by women in rallying support for Unionism particularly after the extension of the franchise to women over thirty in 1918. Other items in the collection include: photograph albums of family and official visitors, 1920-1940, and of cruises taken by the Craigavons, 1905-1914; numerous programmes and booklets relating to the Unionist campaign against Home Rule; visitors' books of the various Craig homes which include records of landmarks in Ulster history such as the signatures of all the notable guests assembled for the signing of the Ulster Covenant on 28 September 1912.

It is important to note that the Craigavon Papers do not contain any political correspondence. However, the researcher should be made aware that PRONI holds a highly significant number of political papers of Viscount Craigavon under the reference number T3775.

