



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

CRAIGAVON POLITICAL PAPERS

November 2007

Craigavon Political Papers (T3775)

Table of Contents

Summary	2
Background.....	3
The Papers	4

Summary

238 documents, 1907-1953, comprising the political correspondence of Sir James Craig, 1st Viscount Craigavon, statesman and first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland (1871-1940).



Background

James Craig trained as a stockbroker in Belfast and fought in the Boer War before he entered politics becoming Unionist MP for East Down in 1906. Although his skills were recognised at Westminster where he served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions and the Admiralty 1919-1921, he is best remembered for his leading role in the bitter struggle against Irish Home Rule after 1910 when, as the chief lieutenant of Sir Edward Carson he organised the means of resistance. Despite the intervention of the 1914-1918 war, the Government of Ireland Act was eventually passed in December 1920 and Craig, a baronet since 1918, became the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. After the Treaty of December 1921 which led to the 'opting out' of Northern Ireland, a great deal of difficulty and instability for Craig followed in the form of rampant lawlessness and the boycotting by nationalists of the new institutions. For nineteen years, until his death in 1940, Craig, raised to the peerage as Viscount Craigavon of Stormont in 1927, remained Prime Minister. and gradually steered the small ship of state into calmer waters, introducing important legalisation in the fields of housing, education, industry and agriculture.



The Papers

Craigavon's political papers are full of important documentation and information relating to the turbulent period in Irish history in the early decades of the twentieth century. They represent a very significant complement to the other Craigavon Papers in PRONI's custody (ref. D1415) which do not contain any letters of a political nature. Amongst the most important are 28 letters, 1911-33, from Sir Edward Carson, discussing practical arrangements and political developments during the years of opposition to Home Rule and the early years of the Northern Ireland state. There is also much correspondence around the period 1912-1914 from leading English figures and Conservative lights such as the Duke of Devonshire, Lords Salisbury, Selborne, Charles Beresford and Hugh Cecil. Other letters are from a Belgian diplomat called E. de Carier de Marchienne and Lord Kitchener about the sale of UVF guns to Belgium.

The views and role of the monarchy during the Irish crisis are also represented in the papers. There are letters from King George V and his private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, including a four-page typed memorandum by Craig of his private conversation with the King after the breakdown of the Buckingham Palace Conference on 24 July 1914 and a 'Private and confidential' letter from Stamfordham to Craig, 17 September 1914. Another important correspondent was David Lloyd George who wrote to Craig on a number of occasions between 1917 and 1921; he also invited Craig and De Valera to a conference in London to find a settlement, 24 June 1921. For this same crucial period, 1921-1922, there are 'personal and secret' letters to Craig from Sir Hamar Greenwood, Chief Secretary for Ireland, pertaining to: a secret meeting between Craig and De Valera about terrorist outrages; papers about Craig's various meetings with De Valera, May-June 1921, and his subsequent agreement with Michael Collins in January 1922, including the original of that agreement [the Craig-Collins Pact].

The correspondence continues through the 1920s and 1930s. There are eight letters, 1924-1940, from Neville Chamberlain about issues such as Craigavon's proposal that Britain should invade the Irish Free State in June 1940. Other correspondents included the Irish Prime Minister, W.T. Cosgrave, Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson and the 2nd and 3rd Dukes of Abercorn. Also there is a letter from Stanley Baldwin paying tribute to the recently deceased Craigavon in 1940: '... He was like a rock in times of trouble, and a talk with him was always a refreshment. The world might not have classed him as an intellectual! but he had a clearer political mind and ... a wisdom that together are priceless in a statesman'.

