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INTRODUCTION

PRIMATE BERESFORD PAPERS

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Primate Beresford Papers (D664, D3278 and T2772)

Table of Contents

Summary	2
Background.....	3
Benefactor in Education and Religion.....	4
Politics	5
The Papers: D664.....	6
The Papers: D3279.....	7
The Papers: T2772	8

Summary

c.4,500 documents, 1739-1902, comprising the papers of Lord John George de la Poer Beresford, 1773-1862, who was Primate of all Ireland from 1822 to his death in 1862. A smaller part of the collection consists of c.500 documents, c.1823-1902, relating to the Dunbar family of Woburn, Millisle, Co. Down - the Dunbar connection to the Beresford archive is explained by the fact that one of Beresford's nieces married George Dunbar, D.L., of Woburn, who was M.P. for Belfast, 1835-41, and Beresford, who never married, spent his final days at Dunbar's Woburn seat.



Background

Beresford was a younger son of George de la Poer, second Earl and first Marquess of Waterford. He was born at Tyrone House, Dublin, and educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford where he graduated with RA, April 1793, M.A., March 1796, and D.D., by diploma, 11 March 1805, in view of his consecration, 24 March, to the bishopric of Cork, ten years after he had been ordained as a deacon. He was translated to the see of Raphoe in August, 1807, and to that of Clogher in September, 1819. In April, 1820, he was created archbishop of Dublin and in the following month was appointed a Privy Councillor in Ireland. Finally he was translated to the archbishopric of Armagh and the primacy of all Ireland on 17 June, 1822. In 1829, the Primate succeeded Lord Manners as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dublin, and continued in that office until his election to the Chancellorship left vacant by the death of the King of Hanover on 19 November, 1851.



Benefactor in Education and Religion

Primate Beresford stands out as a great benefactor in the fields of education and religion. He erected, at a cost of £3000, a campanile in the great quadrangle of the University of Dublin in 1853 and gave £1000 in 1853 and again in 1861 towards the founding and maintenance of a chair of ecclesiastical history. He also gave over £6000 to the college of St Columba, near Stackallan, which was opened in 1844 and for which he was visitor and patron for several years until December, 1853. He was even more generous to the Church by restoring the cathedral of Armagh at an expense of nearly £30,000 and improved the services by his own donations. He held the patronage of 120 livings and in ordinary times he gave to the clergy, in the way of salaries to curates and augmentations of small incomes, not less than £1800 a year. During the Tithe War of the 1830s it is believed that many of the clergy and their families were saved from actual starvation by his generosity.



Politics

Beresford was a conservative in politics and opposed the Roman Catholic Relief Bill of 1829, against which he seconded the motion of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the House of Lords. His speech on that occasion, one of his very few printed publications, was published in 1829. As a member of the powerful Beresford family, the Primate was also an interested party in the manipulation of several Parliamentary seats controlled by the family. The main constituent of the archive, under the reference number D664, illustrates this control well especially with regard to the Derry election in 1830. This section of the collection also documents in detail the Primate's involvement in such questions as Catholic Emancipation, the National Education scheme and the Maynooth grant. Correspondents include the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in April 1845, left the Primate in no doubt as to the strict control which should be exerted over the teaching of Roman Catholicism at Maynooth College: 'It would be certainly well if we could have that religion inculcated in its mildest and most tolerant and enlightened form and a Government may fairly require that the principles of sedition and turbulence should be carefully excluded from the College and pains taken to imbue the students with a feeling of submission to the authority of the State. ...'



The Papers: D664

This main section of the archive also contains much correspondence of the Primate pertaining to the administration of the archdiocese of Armagh, the management of church lands and the progress of such schemes as the restoration of Armagh Cathedral, to the financing of which he contributed heavily. His role as a generous patron to St Columba's College and Trinity College Dublin (see above) is also well documented as is his support of his own clergy through the medium of such organisations as the Clergy Orphan Society and the Society for the Relief of the Irish Society left destitute by the Tithe War.

The Beresford connection with the Dunbar family of Woburn as outlined above is represented in particular in this part of the collection by the correspondence of George Dunbar, M.P. for Belfast, 1835-41. It is, however, slight in political content and is chiefly concerned with the management of the family estates at Woburn, with the developing dock area of Belfast and with family and financial affairs. He receives accounts of the Great Famine in the Culdaff area of Co. Donegal, 1846-47, and is in correspondence with the Primate, his uncle by marriage, over the Armagh election of 1855. Finally, under the reference D664, there are c.30 documents relating to the Orr family, Coleraine, Co. Londonderry, 1739-1827, which include detailed accounts and correspondence of the family's activities as linen merchants and bleachers, 1765-1804, and the will of Charles Church, Coleraine, 1739.



The Papers: D3279

Smaller in quantity, but also of much significance, are those papers of Primate Beresford to be found under the reference number D3279. They comprise c.1400 documents and two volumes, c.1750-1862, and are not differentiated on any logical principle from the contents of the rest of the archive except their different provenance. Consequently, similar subjects are covered and they are notable for, though not unique in : letters and papers, 1823 and 1832-9, about tithe composition and reform and about agitation and protests against the collection of tithe, including an account book of the Clerical Relief Fund, 1832-9, and discussion about the plight of the distressed clergy of the diocese of Elphin; letters and papers, 1825-56, about National Education, conflicts with the Church and Diocesan Education Societies, etc., etc., including voluminous correspondence on the subject, occupying most of the first half of June, 1845, between Beresford and the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel; letters and papers, 1826-44, relating to elections and local politics in the various constituencies dominated by the Beresford family –Counties Londonderry and Waterford, and Coleraine borough; letters and papers, 1830-51, concerning the propagation of the Protestant religion through the medium of the Irish language, the Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish, etc.; and letters and papers 1831-5, about Irish Church reform, with particular reference to the Commission of Ecclesiastical Inquiry, the Irish Church Bill of 1833, etc., including draft memoranda by Beresford about the value of Church livings and of archbishoprics and bishoprics.

Other notable correspondents in this part of the collection include the novelist, William Carleton, who was assisted financially by Beresford in his early literary career and who, writing in 1843, claimed to '... have been the means of creating a protestant and constitutional literature in this country'. There are also letters from: the 1st Duke of Wellington and his brother, Richard, Marquess Wellesley who wrote magniloquently in 1825 asking Beresford to perform Wellesley's marriage ceremony; John Wilson Croker who writes in 1850-1 about 'the Papal aggression'; the 14th Earl of Derby; Robert Knox, Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore who writes about Belfast Cathedral, a theological college for Belfast, the revival of Convocation, etc., 1852-61; Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin; and Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford who writes about his visit to the diocese of Tuam in 1861.



The Papers: T2772

A final constituent of the Beresford archive comprises a miscellany of Beresford material which has been copied with the permission of other institutions who hold the originals, such as Armagh Public Library, the Representative Church Body Library, Dublin and Meath Diocesan Registry. These copies are all to be found under the reference T2772 and date from 1740 to 1865. Taken as a whole, these copies cover a wide range of topics and information and constitute a useful addition to the main part of the collection as already described. Subjects include politics, patronage, charities, education, tithe composition, special services to be held throughout Ireland in connection with the failure of the potato crop, funds for missionary work in Ceylon, Malta and Turkey and the maintenance of Church buildings and lands. Of interest is a substantial amount of correspondence and reports about various schools which are useful for the researcher examining the state of education in Ireland in the period just before the introduction of the National System of Education. Inevitably, this material concentrates heavily on the issue of religious influence in the schools: a report on Dunleer school, Co. Louth, in March, 1824, for example, states that it is 'much impeded in its progress by the hostility of popish priests.' There are also estate papers and sundry local census records which include: a list of names of the Protestant householders in Ballygawley, Co. Tyrone, 1827; a census of Protestants in the parish of the Chapel of the Woods, 1829; various maps and rentals of areas such as Drumcar Parish, Co. Louth and the townlands of Lisnagree, Co. Armagh and Cullentragh, Co. Cavan, 1840-63. Other elements present which are not documented in the other sections of the archive include correspondence about emigration from Co. Tyrone, 1849 and papers concerning the death of Charles Dickinson, Bishop of Meath, and the appointment of Edward Stopford as his successor, 1842.

