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INTRODUCTION

TRENCH PAPERS

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Trench Papers (D4141)

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Summary

Benjamin Bloomfield Trench's papers comprise four volumes and c.400 letters and papers, 1756, 1865 and 1868-1875, as Bath agent, manager of the Cavehill Railways & Quarries Co., and agent to Charles Augustus Verner of Threadneedle Street, London, and his aunt, Miss Anna Verner, 1854 and 1870-1876.



Background

Trench (1846-1926) was a versatile man of business (successively railway and quarries manager, land agent, stockbroker and company chairman), and because he was a younger son of a younger son of a younger son, he needed to be so because he had to make his own way in the world. In this respect, he resembled his much more celebrated cousin, William Steuart Trench, author of 'Realities of Irish Life by W. Steuart Trench, Land Agent in Ireland to [the] Marquess of Lansdowne, Marquess of Bath and Lord Digby, with Illustrations by his Son, J. Townsend Trench' (London, 1868), of which B.B. Trench's copy is inscribed '... from his affectionate friend and cousin, the author, 11 December 1868'. Both were members of the branch of the Trench family of which Lord Ashtown was the head, but the 'Ashtown' entry in Burke's Peerage and Baronetage is so long and bewildering complicated that their precise relationship is not easy to establish. In their correspondence, W. Steuart Trench writes to 'My dear Ben' and B.B. Trench to 'My dear Mr Trench', which suggests that their cousinage was somewhat remote, as well as reflecting the generation gap between them.

Shortly after he left the employment of the 4th Marquess of Bath in 1875, B.B. Trench, in the course of applying for another employment, gave a useful resume of his activities up to that date:

'... I was educated at Eton. I then went to Maudsley & Fields and served my time there (3½ years) as a mechanical engineer. I then went out to America, where I travelled for 2 or 3 months. I then [1868] returned to this country [Ireland] and went to my cousin, the late Mr W. Steuart Trench, the author of the Realities of Irish Life, and served my time, about 2 years, in his land agency office at Carrickmacross. I then made the acquaintance of Mr Charles Verner of the firm of Verner & Holleborne, stockbrokers, 1 Threadneedle Street, [London], who offered me the management of some limestone and whinstone quarries in the Co. Antrim. These I managed for upwards of 2 years with a degree of success financially far in excess of what had been previously the case. I was then [1872] offered by Lord Bath the agency of his Irish estate in the Co. Monaghan. This agency had been vacant by the death of W. Steuart Trench. On my being offered this appointment at a salary of £800 a year, with free house, garden, etc (so good an offer that of course I could not decline it), my employer, Mr Verner, wishing to retain my services, consented to allow me to continue as manager of these quarries in Antrim, though I was resident in Monaghan. Of course I had to appoint a resident deputy to assist in carrying out my views. ... I was for 2¼ years agent for Lord Bath, when, I believe, over-zeal on my part for his Lordship's interests led him to the conclusion that it was not desirable I should longer continue to represent him, owing to his not having sufficient confidence in my judgement; and this opinion, being confirmed by the advice of his friends, led to my dismissal. But at the same time, Lord Bath is pleased to ... "express my high sense of your personal character and my conviction of the zeal with which you have devoted yourself to the interest of the estate" ..., while I am able to demonstrate by facts and figures that the material interest of his property were never more successfully looked after. ...'

It was probably because Trench was 'preparing himself' to demonstrate by facts and figures how successful his management of the Bath estate had been that he removed from the estate office, known as 'Essex Castle', Carrickmacross, what must have been from the point of view of the subsequent management of the estate an inconveniently large amount of documentation. This includes a stray lease of 1756, an important 'Comparative statement [of 1865] showing the several rentals of the Bath estate in the several years since William Steuart Trench Esq., was appointed the agent, viz. in 1851 [actually they go back to 1845]', and fairly extensive correspondence between Trench, on the one hand, and W. Steuart Trench, Lord Bath and others on the other, 1868-1875. Perhaps the most important part of the archive is a bound 'Report, accounts, etc, 1 December 1872-1828 February 1875', presented by B.B. Trench to Lord Bath under the headings 'Tithe rent charges', 'Farney Tenants' Defence Association', 'Finance', 'Annacroff Farm', 'Compensation on Surrender', 'Schedule of Exceptional Items', 'Law' and 'State of the Country'; together with a draft in B.B. Trench's handwriting of the same report, an undated and much rougher draft in handwriting of another report, and a copy, with emendations, of his last report, 19 March 1875, made following Lord Bath's decision to dismiss him.



The Papers

The earliest document in Trench's papers as manager and agent for Charles Augustus Verner and Miss Anna Verner is a copy lease, 1854, from the 3rd Marquess of Donegall to Thomas Verner of the Cavehill quarries (which were at Islandmagee, Co. Antrim, as well as on the Cavehill, Belfast). This is the subject of subsequent correspondence, 1871-1875, between Lord Donegall, and Lady Harriet Ashley (his daughter and heiress, later Countess of Shaftesbury), on the one hand, and their cousin and aunt respectively, Charles Augustus Verner and Miss Anna Verner, on the other, about attempted arbitration and ultimately a lawsuit over the quarries. A newspaper cutting of 20 January 1876 states: '... This was an action to recover damages from the defendant [Charles A. Verner] for having, as alleged, given up possession to the plaintiff [Lord Donegall] of the Cavehill quarries and railway on the expiration of the term of the lease of those premises which the defendant held from plaintiff, in a dilapidated and improper condition. ...' Trench's own letters and papers, 1870-1876, about the railway and quarries consist of accounts, inventories of plant at Ballytober, Ballydown, Blackhead, and Ballysillan and Whitewell, correspondence with the Verners, correspondence with J.B. Kingscote, Belfast, etc, etc.

