



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

CAMPBELL ALLEN PAPERS

November 2007

Campbell Allen Papers (D1558)

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Summary

The Campbell Allen papers consist of c.3500 documents.

The central figure in the archive is William John Campbell Allen and the bulk of the papers relate to him and reflect his career and interests .He was born on 22 October 1810, the only son of Thomas Allen and Jane Campbell. Thomas Allen was a merchant with premises in North Street, Belfast and died while his son was still young. William John was educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and went on to practice law in Dublin. However, he had little success and moved into business. He married Isabella Marshall in 1838 and they had three children, two daughters, Isabella and Jane and a son, Andrew James who was Senior Wrangler at Cambridge in 1879 and became a Church of England clergyman [see D1558/1/6/].



American connections

Campbell Allen had close connections with the United States and visited it in 1831 and again in 1838 with his wife. He had investments in banks in Georgia and was also involved in the cotton trade. These American links were useful during the famine years as Campbell Allen arranged for the shipment of corn to Ireland for free distribution [D1558/4/1/9-10]. There are also a lot of letters from the United States and Canada giving information about emigrants and the political and economic situation [see D1558/1/1/]. His business career was divided between the Ulster Railway Company and the Ulster Bank. He was appointed a director of the Ulster Railway Company in 1839 and resigned in 1865 to devote himself to the bank, becoming senior director in 1868. He remained in this position until his death on 18 January 1884 [see D1558/5/4/ & D1558/5/5/].



Politics, education and religion

His main interests were in the fields of politics, education and religion. He was a Liberal in politics and the archive contains two 1837 election registers for Belfast [D1558/9/1-2] one marked with short hand notes by him. The general correspondence section also contains letters from Robert Tennent about the Liberal cause in Belfast and government policy towards Ireland. Campbell Allen had a deep-seated interest in education serving as secretary to the Joint Board of Managers of RBAI from 1838 to 1878. The archive has a section on his involvement with RBAI and there are also letters in the general correspondence section which relate to the school. He was the first registrar of Queen's College, Belfast, being appointed in 1849 and resigning in 1852 after some apparent conflict with Pooley Shuldham Henry, President of the college. The Belfast Government School of Design was another of his educational forays, of which he was treasurer. There are a large number of receipts for the school some signed by Charles Lanyon [see D1558/5/3/].



Dissenters and missionaries

He was a prominent Unitarian/Non-Subscriber, belonging to the 1st Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street, Belfast. He was a part of the deputation that went from Ulster to lobby parliament over the Dissenters' Chapels Act in 1844 and there is a run of some fifty letters to his wife which provide an illuminating insight into their activities including a meeting with Sir Robert Peel [see D1558/1/3/354-400]. Allen was also secretary of the Unitarian Domestic Mission to the Poor of Belfast. These papers are found in two sections D1558/2/3 and D1558/6/2/. The first is the diary of the Rev. Anthony McIntyre, the missionary, and contains vivid descriptions of the poverty and social conditions in Belfast from 1853 to 1856.

This document has been virtually transcribed in full, being one of the few initially listed when the collection was first deposited. As a result it has been widely used and thus it seemed pointless to move or renumber it.



Isabella Campbell Allen

Although most of the archive relates to William John Campbell Allen an important part of the collection consists of the papers of his wife, Isabella. She was the daughter of Andrew Marshall M.D. and Isabella Drummond and had a host of friends and relatives worthy of DNB entries. These include: her maternal uncle, William Hamilton Drummond; her governess, Frances Knowles, sister of James Sheridan Knowles; her sister Margaret who married John Scott Porter, biblical scholar and Unitarian divine; and her sister, Rosa, who married Richard Rothwell, painter and assistant of Sir Thomas Lawrence. There is a considerable amount of correspondence from Richard Rothwell to William John, conveying his artistic doubts and financial difficulties.

Her general correspondence and that with her husband is in a lively, chatty style and covers a wide range of subjects and people. These include: literature; religion; politics; visit of Daniel O'Connell to Belfast; theatre, etc, etc.

Meeting the President of the USA

Isabella kept a diary of her honeymoon visit to the United States in 1838 and it is remarkable for her prophetic observations on the future growth of the country. She also writes of meeting the President and describes the many cities visited [D1558/2/2].

During the famine years she was involved in the Belfast Ladies Association for the Relief of Irish Destitution and these papers include printed reports and correspondence related to her work as treasurer to the Industrial Committee which helped finance and sell locally made linen and knit wear [D1558/7/1/]. Isabella suffered from ill-health during much of her later life and it is likely that it was during this period that she wrote poetry and novels. There is a box of mostly novels and short stories by Isabella, mother and daughter, including one printed volume of poems for private circulation by the mother and oriental stories with illustrations by the daughter [see D1558/10/1/].

In conclusion, this is a remarkably complete collection combining an unusually wide breadth and high quality of material relating to William John Campbell Allen and his family. The archive is dominated by the correspondence sections which overlap with the later more specific subject classes and as a whole produce a fascinating and personal perspective of life in Belfast and further afield during the nineteenth century.

