



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

MURRAY OF BROUGHTON PAPERS

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Murray of Broughton Papers (D2860)

Table of Content

Summary	2
Background.....	3
The papers.....	4

Summary

The Murray of Broughton Papers comprise c.1000 documents (correspondence, legal papers, rentals, surveys, etc), c.1625-1918 (but mainly 1664-1802), relating principally to the Co. Donegal estate of the Murray family of Broughton, Wigtownshire, and Cally, Gatehouse-of-Fleet, Kircudbright.



Background

The Murray family obtained a Plantation grant of lands in south-west Donegal in 1610, and by 1620 had engrossed most of the baronies of Boylagh and Banagh (minus churchlands) and secured their erection into the two manors of Castlemurray and Ballyweel by royal patent, of which there is an early 17th century transcript among the papers. As Dr Graeme Kirkham remarks, in an article cited at the end of this description of the archive, the estate was situated '... in parcels around Donegal town, Ardara and Killybegs, including large parts of the parishes of Killaghtee, Killymard, Killybegs, Killcar and Inishkeel. ...'

Even in the late 18th century, it contained over 40,000 statute acres, with a further 25,000 let to Lord Conyngham - the Conynghams claimed in perpetuity and the Murrays claimed by determinable leases. Part of the archive is taken up with documentation of this and other major lawsuits over title. The outcome of the Conyngham lawsuit is not recorded, but the Conynghams appear to have retained possession of the disputed lands. The principal places of note on the estate were the town and parliamentary borough of Killybegs, and the village of Mount Charles, where the Conynghams had a seat and from which they took one of their titles.



The papers

The papers' principal significance lies in the light they throw on economic conditions in a remote area of Ulster, particularly in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The survey material is especially noteworthy. Of the correspondents, those who are of interest in their own right include William (Speaker) Conolly of Castletown, Co. Kildare, General Henry Conyngham of Slane, Co. Meath (d.1706), Conyngham's widow, Lady Shelburne, and Conyngham's descendant, William Burton Conyngham (d.1796), a founder of the Royal Irish Academy and of the Kildare Street Club, Dublin, and the developer of Burton Port at The Rosses, Co. Donegal.

The letters, which run from the late 17th century to the late 18th century are mostly from Robert Spence of Donegal town, Capt. Thomas Knox, James Hamilton of Mount Charles, Co. Donegal, Andrew Patton and Henry McDowell, successive estate agents, and contain many shrewd comments on the development of the estate. The shortage of money in 1704 provokes this comment to Alexander Murray from Lady Shelburne, wife of General Henry Conyngham, Murray's largest single Irish tenant and head agent for the Irish property, who was then serving in Spain: '... Mr Conyngham told you there was so great an arrear upon your estate and that he could not get ready money enough out of both his and yours to pay the crown rent. This I can aver, that out of a year and a half's rent (1,500) due in that country I cannot at this time command 50 in money but am forced to take cattle, butter, etc, at such rates as the tenants will please to give them and after being at the expense to bring them to Dublin, sell them at five or six shillings in the pound less, and even this way have no hopes of getting in the arrear...!'

The famine of 1728-1729 caused the devastation of estates in this region because, as James Hamilton reported: 'Capt. Henry Conyngham's tenants, though bound in firm leases for four years ending next May, are throwing them up daily. I have written pressingly to him to Brussels, where he now is, to come over this spring and give his tenants abatement - otherwise he will have a waste estate. Col Montgomery's tenants have many of them run away - it was so high set that I could not get the rents collected so I quit it at last All Saints. There's a ship lying now at Killybegs belonging to New England that has indented with as many passengers as she can carry ...!'

The agent complained about the inactivity of the Murrays during the crisis. But immediately thereafter the disappearance of many tenants compelled them to a re-assessment of estate policy based on a detailed survey of the estate (transcribed in full in PRONI's list) by Thomas Addi of Donaghadee, Co. Down. This was conducted in 1731, and alongside it are the comments made on it by Alexander Murray to James Hamilton. To procure tenants for the estate Addi advertised in Armagh, Antrim, Lurgan, Lisburn, Belfast, Randalstown, Newtownards, Ballywalter, Greyabbey, Bangor and Comber as well as in every town within a forty-mile radius of the estate, the advertisements being 'as cautiously and well worded as possible'.

The late 18th century correspondence is concerned inter alia with the renewal of the Conynghams' huge leasehold interests under the Murrays, the unprofitability of James Murray's Donegal estate and the desirability of selling it.

Some of the papers of the period c.1625-1699 relate in whole or in part to the Murrays' Scottish estates. From an early date the link between the Killybegs estate and the Murray seats in southern Scotland (Broughton and Cally) was provided by several merchants from Donaghadee, notably Sam Smith, William Pinkstan and Francis McMinn, as well as Isaac and George Macartney of Belfast during the early 18th century. They also looked after the material comforts of the family, which were supplied from Dublin.

This archive complements the Broughton and Cally archives in the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, whose range and quality is indicated in an article by D.A. Verschoyle entitled 'The Background to a Hidden Age', in *The Donegal Annual*, Vol. vi, No. 2, 1965. There has been a recent and important study of the Murray of Broughton estate in Co. Donegal by Dr Graeme Kirkham, entitled "'No more to be got off the Cat but the Skin": Management, Landholding and Economic Change on the Murray of Broughton Estate, 1670-1755', published in *Donegal History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, edited by William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy (Geography Publications, Dublin, 1995).

