



Public Record Office  
of Northern Ireland

# **INTRODUCTION**

# **NORMANTON PAPERS**

November 2007

# Normanton Papers (T3719)

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Agar's posthumous reputation .....	4
Agar's archive .....	8
A re-assessment of Agar? .....	12

## Introduction



Walpole's Administration (1743)  
Bookplace of Charles  
Agar, Earl of Normanton

The Normanton papers, which run from 1741 to 1809, are the letters and papers of Archbishop Charles Agar, 1st Earl of Normanton (1735-1809), third son of Henry Agar (1707-46) of Gowran, Co. Kilkenny, by his wife, Anne (1707-1765), daughter of Welbore Ellis, Bishop of Meath, and a younger brother of James Agar, 1st Viscount Clifden (1734-1789). The Agars of Gowran owned c.20,000 statute acres in Co. Kilkenny, and controlled the two south Kilkenny boroughs of Gowran and Thomastown. This gave them a minimum of four seats in the Irish House of Commons, plus a fifth when an Agar was elected for the county of Kilkenny. On the strength of this considerable parliamentary influence, Charles Agar's eldest brother, James (1734-1789), was created Baron Clifden in 1776 and Viscount Clifden in 1781.

Charles Agar's ecclesiastical career began with his appointment in 1763 as first chaplain to the Lord Lieutenant, the 2nd Earl of Northumberland, and as rector and vicar of Ballymagarvey and Skryne, diocese of Meath. He was then, successively, dean of Kilmore (and rector of Annagh, alias Belturbet, Co. Cavan, in the same diocese), 1765-1768, bishop of Cloyne, 1768-1779, archbishop of Cashel, 1779-1801, and archbishop of Dublin, 1801-1809. He was the Church's leading spokesman in its efforts to resist the progressive dismantling of the Penal Laws against Irish Roman Catholics, and he was the leading defender of a Church Establishment under frequent political attack from anti-clerical or greedy Anglicans in the Irish House of Commons, as well as from Roman Catholics, who remained outside parliament until twenty years after his death, but were restored to the parliamentary franchise in 1793. For the quarter of a century and more between c.1770 and 1800, he was very prominent in the Cabinets of successive lords lieutenant of Ireland and a formidable speaker, intellect, man of business and tactician in the House of Lords. His highest ambition, the archbishopric of Armagh, eluded him, but he did have the consolation of a remarkable accumulation of temporal as well as spiritual honours, to say nothing of the accumulation of great wealth. He was created Baron Somerton in 1795, Viscount Somerton in 1800, and Earl of Normanton in 1806, and died possessed of an estate which his wife reckoned was worth £10,000 a year (a considerable underestimate, because in addition to landed property of nearly that annual value, it comprised something like £350,000 in investments). Agar's wife was Jane (1751-1826), daughter of William Benson of Downpatrick, Co. Down, sometime a merchant in Abbey Street, Dublin, but a member of a well known clerical family in the diocese of Down and Connor. Agar had married her in 1776 and they had three sons and a daughter.



Cashel Palace Hotel, information leaflet

For the younger son of a substantial squire, whose origins, even by Irish standards, were recent, this was a quite remarkable achievement. In the process of making it, Agar needless to say made enemies: fellow-churchmen and fellow-politicians who were envious of his almost universally acknowledged ability; country gentlemen with parliamentary influence who resented the way in which he frustrated their efforts to fleece the Church; Catholics who hated him for his efforts to oppose or at the very least delay measures for placing them on a footing of religious, civil and political equality with protestants; English ministers, whether holding office in Great Britain or, more usually, Ireland, who leaned on him and yet feared him, and who recognised that, while generally amenable to their behests, there were some issues on which he was likely to dig in; opposition politicians, again in Great Britain as well as Ireland, who thought the contrary, and that he was time-serving and a trimmer; and so on. He also, it should be emphasised, had many admirers.



## Agar's posthumous reputation

Expression to the wildest contemporary animosities against Agar was given in the obituary of him published in Watty Cox's *Irish Magazine* for September 1809 (Agar had died on 14 July of that year), and in a mock-epitaph on him in verse form, published in the same issue of that journal.

The history of this man's political and religious life forms a disgusting picture of avarice, ambition and an abject servility to the measures and politics of the English Cabinet. The unfortunate Catholics, in other words the people of this prostrated country, were the objects of his contempt and ridicule, .... whom he designated as so stupid a race that they professed a religion only fitted for knaves and fools. ... So sordid was his mind that to accumulate wealth, after his passion for power and titles, was the most prevailing feeling of his heart.

And so on, with increasing coarseness and virulence. The mock-epitaph is in places too excruciating as poetry to be reproduced, and in other places not altogether comprehensible. The memorable lines are:

Adieu, thou mitred nothingness, adieu!  
Thy failings many and thy virtues few.  
More true to speak: to every vice a slave,  
A niggard, bigot and a wily knave. ...  
Affliction never bade your heart expand,  
And love of lucre clenched your griping hand.

There then follows a ponderous play on the meaning of the expression, a 'good, fat living'.

Fat have I said? 'Tis rich, 'tis rich I mean.  
Your Grace has showed that **rich folks** can be **lean**.  
In early youth the leech-like avarice tore  
Your little heart and sucked the yielding gore,  
Dried each fine fibre, shrivelled every vein,  
And filled the vacuum with deceit and spleen.  
The sordid wretch life's fleeting treasure prized,  
And lived detested as he died despised.

It should be emphasised that Watty Cox was a former United Irishman and specialised in obituaries which de-constructed 'establishment' figures.

Character-assassination or not, Cox's obituary has had a major influence on how Agar has been viewed by subsequent writers. Cox's better lines have been re-cycled, for example by the mid-nineteenth century nationalist compiler of biographical *pot-pourris*, W.J. Fitzpatrick; and, stripped of offensive language, some of Cox's charges have a grain of truth in them, particularly the charges of 'avarice, ambition ... [and a] passion for power and titles'. These are not attractive, far less romantic, failings; and the repeated attribution of them to Agar has served to dampen interest in him. In any case, the most important outcome of Cox's indecent attack was that Agar's son and heir, the 2nd Earl of Normanton (1778–1868), who must have been familiar with the

obituary, became hypersensitive on the subject of his father's reputation and irrationally unhelpful to historians. Nothing else can explain the response of this well educated and civilised man, to requests for access to archival material. In 1815, William Monck Mason, who was researching an archiepiscopally sanctioned *History of St Patrick's Cathedral* (which was published in 1820), approached him with an entirely innocent request to borrow 'the **original** of the Black Book or Registry of the Archbishops of Dublin', which he stated that Agar had taken into his private possession while archbishop. Lord Normanton refused. When he was told that he was impeding the public service, and as good as told that he had no right to the manuscript volume (which was true), he relented only to the extent of agreeing to lend it if requested to do so, in writing, by the Dublin archiepiscopal authorities.

After the treatment meted out to Monck Mason, it is not surprising that John D'Alton, author of *The Memoirs of the Archbishops of Dublin* (Dublin, 1838), had cause to complain, which he did very bitterly, of 'the inability or reluctance of his Grace's relatives to afford any materials for this memoir'. More generally, but clearly with Lord Normanton in mind, D'Alton explained:

The brevity of these memoirs, in reference to the later archbishops, is not to be attributed to any neglect or omission of their compiler in applying, both by public advertisement and by private letters, for fuller and authentic materials; and he confidently hoped that the magnitude of the undertaking in which he was engaged, with such a devotion of his time, his researches and his money, would be cheerfully responded to by every competent authority. In the above important instance, however, his expectations were utterly extinguished and, with the single exception of Mr Cobbe of Newbridge [Donabate, Co. Dublin, descendant of Charles Cobbe, Archbishop of Dublin, 1742–1765], the individuals applied to either refused to answer; or, as in the instance of one other more intimately connected with a memoir, absolutely refused to communicate what he could not but have well known.

D'Alton did not indulge in the venomous style of denunciation characteristic of Watty Cox. But he did allude to a controversial episode in Agar's career of which Cox had made no mention, the allegedly large amount of money Agar had made out of one lease of the see lands of Cashel (a transaction which D'Alton completely misunderstood). More damningly, D'Alton concluded: 'Ambitious and avaricious, he entirely neglected his episcopal duties for affairs of State and, while the curates of Dublin were starving on £50 per annum, he amassed so much wealth himself that he died worth £400,000.' This was demonstrably unfair as regards the pay of curates and the alleged neglect of episcopal duties. Elsewhere, D'Alton did in fact acknowledge that Agar, before his translation to Dublin, had been a very efficient archbishop of Cashel. In short, it looks as if Lord Normanton unintentionally did his father a disservice, and that D'Alton's memoir of Agar was the more unfavourable for Lord Normanton's non-cooperation.

Perhaps made wiser by this experience, Lord Normanton welcomed with open arms Sir Charles Ross, the editor of the forthcoming *Memoirs and Correspondence of Charles, 1st Marquess Cornwallis* (lord lieutenant of Ireland, 1798–1801), published in three volumes in 1859. When approached by Ross in 1856, he conducted a search

for Agar-Cornwallis letters, and found and actually **lent** no less than thirty-two. Clearly, he was anxious to predispose Ross to make favourable mention of Agar. He quoted to Ross the somewhat improbable sentiments of the late Duke of Wellington (a Hampshire associate of Lord Normanton) that Agar 'had the clearest and soundest head of a[ny] statesman in Ireland from the time of the Duke of Portland [1782] to the time of the Duke of Richmond, when I was there in office [as chief secretary, 1807–9]'. Ross, on receipt of the 32 letters (which he returned, because they are among Agar's papers today), commented reassuringly: 'there are none which do not do credit to both parties'. This was true, as far as it went. However, as Cornwallis had been slow to appreciate Agar's good points and enlist him in the campaign to carry the Union, and as the archbishopric of Armagh had fallen vacant at the beginning of 1800 and been the subject of not a little lobbying in Agar's favour, the references to Agar in the Lord Lieutenant's letters to other people are not uniformly creditable.

His one minor attempt at the rehabilitation of Agar having fallen flat, Lord Normanton died, at an advanced age, in 1868. His son, the 3rd Earl (1818–96), appears to have been the first of Agar's descendants to take any interest in Agar's papers. Lord Normanton went through them, scribbling attempted identification of writers on them and making other comments, many of them misleading or actually mistaken. His contributions, however, do at least denote some interest in the subject. Nevertheless, in his time Agar's reputation suffered further damage. In 1876, the Harleian Society published Colonel Joseph Lemuel Chester's *The Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Registers of the Collegiate Church or Abbey of St Peter, Westminster* (ie. Westminster Abbey, where Agar is buried). In a devastating footnote to the entry for Agar's burial, Chester wrote:

It is to this prelate that the world is indebted for completing the destruction, commenced by his predecessor [actually by Arthur Price, Archbishop, 1744–1752], of the magnificent old cathedral on the Rock of Cashel; for, there is no evidence to sustain the assertion of his friends that he made a vain attempt to restore it, and felt compelled to supplant it by the erection of a new cathedral. The devotion to this purpose of a comparatively small portion of the immense fortune which he acquired in a most extraordinary manner, the loss of which he could scarcely have felt, would have sufficed to preserve for future ages one of the greatest medieval relics of the three kingdoms.

As Agar's papers show, most of this was incorrect. But because Chester did not display the obvious animus and the deplorable taste of Watty Cox, his attack was the more damaging for its pseudo-magisterial tone. The distinguished, late nineteenth-century, Liberal-Unionist historian, W.E.H. Lecky, had anticipated some of Chester's charges against Agar in a short and misleading footnote in his *Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland*, published in 1871. However, in a broader historiographical sense, Lecky and his predecessor and *bête noire* as an interpreter of eighteenth-century Ireland, J.A. Froude, did Agar much more damage than this. 'The received opinion of the application, or indeed the misapplication, of the [eighteenth-century] bishops [of the Church of Ireland] to matters spiritual and ecclesiological has, in the main, been formed by the nineteenth-century strictures of Froude and Lecky, whose standards of expectation had been very much widened [*sic* – raised?] by the many evangelical and theologico-reformational changes which Protestantism had undergone throughout the first half of that century.'

Watty Cox had bracketed Agar with 'the FitzGibbons, Fosters, Beresfords and other scourges that irritated and humbled a suffering country'. By the late nineteenth century, all of them had fared decidedly better in reputation than had Agar. John FitzGibbon, 1st Earl of Clare, Lord Chancellor of Ireland (1782–1802), had won some grudging praise from J. Roderick O'Flanagan in O'Flanagan's *Lives of the Lord Chancellors*, published in 1870; and a succeeding, but very different, lord chancellor of Ireland, the 1st Lord Ashbourne, devoted a fulsome chapter to FitzGibbon in his *Pitt: some Chapters of his Life and Times*, published in 1898. (Ashbourne on FitzGibbon is like a mouse's life of a lion.) John Foster, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons (1785–1800), had been praised as well as criticised in Henry Grattan Junior's hagiographic, five-volume *Life and Times of the Rt Hon. Henry Grattan*, published in 1839–46; essentially, Grattan Junior did for Foster what O'Flanagan was to do for FitzGibbon. A mid-1870s proposal to publish a *Life of Foster* sub-titled 'The last Days of the old Irish Parliament', came to naught; but Foster, as the leader of the opposition to the Act of Union, was always receiving vicarious tributes from confused nationalist writers. Finally, John Beresford, Chief Commissioner of the Revenue (1780–1802), had an adroit grandson who published a two-volume *Correspondence of the Rt Hon. John Beresford* in 1854. This portrayed its hero as an astute politician, a diligent administrator and the centre of a wide circle of intelligent and agreeable correspondents. Beresford's point of view was also fully represented in *The ... Correspondence of William [Eden], Lord Auckland...*, published in 1861–2, as was FitzGibbon's and, to a very slight extent, Agar's. But, broadly speaking, not a good word was said for Agar in the whole nineteenth-century historiography. The 3rd Earl of Normanton's annotations may have been preliminary to a *Memoirs and Correspondence of Archbishop Agar* which never materialised: in the absence of that or any other Agar-orientated publication, his reputation sat by the close of the nineteenth century, and sits today, at the low level to which it had been sunk by Watty Cox, John D'Alton and Colonel Chester. He is still regarded as a good example of what was worst and worldliest in the late eighteenth-century Church of Ireland. He is seen as a political appointee, as having neglected his ecclesiastical responsibilities in the pursuit of political power and personal advancement, and as having been avaricious to the point of misappropriating part of the see lands of Cashel.



## Agar's archive

And yet, all along, the corrective lay in Agar's own papers, and was not applied because of the misguided protectiveness and/or ignorance of his descendants. Agar's, like most people's, papers on the whole speak well of him. They include frequent panegyrics from obsequious and expectant clergymen, as might be expected, but also from more disinterested sources, lay as well as ecclesiastical, who pay consistent tribute to Agar's ability, judgement and energy. Their tendency is to establish his good record as an ecclesiastical improver and administrator and his claim to be 'infinitely the first ecclesiastic' in late eighteenth century Ireland (as his friend, John Scott, described him in 1778). They also convey the impression that Agar regarded his archive as the insurance policy for his reputation. This is not to suggest that it is in any way doctored or concocted. He was an exceedingly meticulous man of business, to whom it was second nature to make memoranda of transactions in which he was concerned, and *précis* of the contents of letters he received which he endorsed on, or docketed with, those letters. What is significant is that, in these memoranda and *précis*, he almost always uses the third person – 'The Archbishop did such-and-such', 'On receipt of this letter, the Archbishop wrote such-and-such'. This way of recording things denotes an eye to posterity. It looks as if the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Normanton not only did Agar a disservice, but failed to follow his fairly clear intentions, by not allowing his archive to speak for itself.

From at least the start of the twentieth century, there can surely have been no difficulty about access to Agar's papers, if any historian had sought it. It does not appear that any did – partly because the Earls of Normanton, though eminently traceable to Somerley, near Ringwood, Hampshire, which had been their seat since 1829, were by this time completely divorced from any connection with Ireland. From 1957, when the 5th Earl of Normanton deposited all his family and estate papers in the Hampshire Record Office (ref. 21 M 57), there certainly has been no difficulty about access. For Irish historians, access has been easier still since the mid-1980s, when the 6th and present Earl of Normanton allowed PRONI to obtain photocopies of the correspondence section of Agar's papers.

In spite of this, Agar is now possibly the most important figure in late eighteenth-century Irish public life who has received no kind of biographical treatment. His papers have been dipped into for other and particular purposes; an awareness of his importance and of his ability has become widespread; but though his name has been frequently mentioned, it has usually been with the qualification that, as well as being able, he was ambitious, avaricious, unscrupulous, worldly, wily, and so on, or any combination or permutation of such epithets. It may be that historians, without giving the matter much thought, have been fearful that his failings were too many and his virtues too few to make for a rounded biography. It may be that political historians have been deterred from attempting his biography because he was a churchman, and the unfamiliar waters of church history were beyond their navigational skills. For whatever reason, an important subject has been for too long unattempted and an important archive untapped.

The correspondence section of Agar's archive alone (Hampshire RO, 21 M 57/C: PRONI, T3719/C) contains c.1500 documents, 1767–1809, but unevenly spread over that period. In general, the correspondence becomes more voluminous as time goes on, with the earlier years being particularly sparse in their documentation. But it is not obvious why – for example – there should be 51 letters for 1779, six for 1782, 56 for 1788, 12 for 1790 and 24 for 1791. The explanation may be provided by a remarkable letter which has turned up among the papers of the 2nd Earl of Normanton. Writing to him in May 1836, a man called Henry Carter, who seems to have been a former servant, confessed that many years ago (perhaps in 1817), when he was clearing the attics of Agar's house in St Stephen's Green, Dublin, he came upon a 'large' trunk of considerable weight full of papers. They had been labelled 'Important' by Agar himself, and included 'copies of letters written by him, Lord Landaff's correspondence, Lord Mendip's and Mr Pitt's, and they were very voluminous'. Carter, having previously assured Lord Normanton that there were no more papers in the house, was loath to admit his error, and so burnt the lot! It is not clear why he was now prepared to make this much more serious admission. Perhaps it was because he had ceased to be in the employment of the family or was in the process of making his peace with his Maker as well as with Lord Normanton. The gaps in Agar's correspondence are certainly redolent of random destruction of this kind.

Yet the material which remains is wide-ranging in content. It includes discussion of family and domestic matters (particularly diseases, disorders and medical prescriptions), but is dominated by local and national politics and the affairs of the Church of Ireland. Throughout the period 1767–1800, there are important references to the local politics of Co. Kilkenny, where the inherited electoral influence of the Agar family, and their two boroughs, Gowran and Thomastown, were located. The earliest letters, however, relate to the borough of Callan, Co. Kilkenny, where the principal electoral interest belonged to Agar's uncle, James Agar of Ringwood, Co. Kilkenny, who was killed in an election duel with his rival for control of Callan, Henry Flood, in 1769. During the lord lieutenancy of the 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire (1776–1780), there are important letters from Agar to his maternal uncle, former guardian, and political mentor, Welbore Ellis, 1st Lord Mendip (1713–1802), protesting against the practice of sending over a money bill as a cause for summoning the Irish Parliament (1776), and criticising the Catholic Relief Act of 1778, the repeal of the Test Act in 1780 and Buckinghamshire's general handling of the Irish situation over the same period. These letters are inextricably mixed up with Agar's campaign to get himself promoted to the archbishopric of Cashel or, preferably, to that of Dublin. In the mid-1780s, with Cashel the ecclesiastical province affected by the Rightboy movement, the correspondence is occasionally revealing about that movement and highly revealing about the measures proposed in consequence of it in the period 1786–1788. The correspondence of 1788 also reveals the long-standing and growing tensions between Agar and his ecclesiastical superior, Richard Robinson, Archbishop of Armagh (1765–1794).

Events leading up to the 1798 Rebellion are well documented, as is the whole process of decision-making in 'the Irish Cabinet' of the 1790s. Agar's lengthy and very precise endorsements are particularly valuable in this latter respect, as they often state precisely when Cabinets (and he uses the term) were held and who

attended them. He himself was the only member of the inner Cabinet who had no *ex officio* reason for being there (other members were the Lord Chancellor, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the law officers, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Commissioner of the Revenue) – proof in itself of Agar's political importance. His contribution to the evolution of the crucially important 'Coronation Oath' argument and its inculcation in the mind of George III in early 1795 is also fully documented, as are the winning of his adherence to the proposed Union in 1798–1799, his efforts to promote the Unionist cause in Co. Tipperary and elsewhere in his archdiocese and metropolitan province, and his contribution to the drafting of some of the provisions of the Act of Union, particularly as regarded the Church of Ireland, between January and July 1800.

Obviously, Agar's principal correspondents, Welbore Ellis included, were 'political' correspondents. Among them are the lords lieutenant and chief secretaries of the day, four of whom, the 4th Viscount Townshend, Sir George Macartney, later Earl Macartney, William Eden, 1st Lord Auckland, and the 10th Earl of Westmorland, became friends of Agar's. Moreover, because of Agar's endlessly praised ability and judgement, and the value constantly and it would seem genuinely placed on his advice, he received letters from the occasional secretary of state and prime minister. 'Family' correspondents, apart from Welbore Ellis, include the 1st Viscount Clifden and his eldest son and heir, Henry Welbore Agar, later 2nd Viscount; their letters are a mixture of politics, patronage, money and genuinely family matters. The ladies of the family – Lady Clifden, Agar's wife, Jane, and his unmarried sister, Diana – all have a distinctive voice and a definite turn of phrase. The Agars, however, even by late eighteenth-century standards, were a male-dominated family, and the women of it usually make themselves heard only under exceptional circumstances. The other principal correspondents are mainly members of Agar's personal and political circle in Ireland, notably John Scott, later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Clonmell; their correspondence with him, while it is characterised by a slightly *risqué* sense of humour granted that the recipient was a churchman, also shows a genuine sense of culture and good taste. Agar maintained a life-long interest in his *alma mater*, Christ Church, Oxford, and while – as one might expect – he was frequently beset with begging letters from clerical dons, his concern for the academic and architectural state of the institution (which, incidentally, eagerly sought, and obtained, his portrait) was clearly genuine.

The archive contains much more besides correspondence. The following is the general description of it given in the introduction to the Hampshire Record Office's list: 'Agar endorsed and bundled his ... [papers] meticulously, and kept copious notes for speeches, etc, which unfortunately are not easy to follow or arrange. The papers have been divided into four sections: political, religious, correspondence, and personal. The correspondence section relates to all the sections. Generally speaking, he separated his correspondence from other papers, though there are a few letters in the other sections and of course papers enclosed with letters appear in the correspondence section. The correspondence is arranged in chronological order. The political and religious papers are also in approximate chronological order, but because some of the bundles cover a wide time span, this is not exact.'

Agar's papers other than correspondence run from 1741 to 1809 and include: accounts of the state of the dioceses of Cloyne, 1771, Cashel, 1755, and 1779–1804, and Dublin, 1801–1809; rentals, accounts and papers about the leasing power of the archbishop, all concerning the see lands of Cashel, 1755, 1771 and 1779–1804; rent and account books containing a mixture of episcopal and private accounts, 1765–1809; an account of the state of Irish schools, [c.1788–1790]; four notebooks containing Agar's notes – some of them a unique record – of evidence heard before the Secret Committees of the House of Lords appointed to inquire into the United Irish and other subversive societies, 1793 and 1797–8; printed bulletins and orders relating to the '98 Rebellion; a notebook containing *précis* of Agar's out-letters, 1800–1803; and numerous speech notes, *recipés*, accounts and plans for cathedral, church and parsonage building, verse and worse, printed matter, *etc.*, c.1775–1809.



## A re-assessment of Agar?



Cashel Cathedral, Fryday.

*Cashel Cathedral*

One effect of an immersion in Agar's archive is a refreshing re-assessment of his role in Irish Church history. His achievements as an ecclesiastical improver and administrator can, however crudely, be quantified. In the archdiocese of Cashel alone he was responsible for completing the cathedral and building or rebuilding 17 churches and 22 parsonages, and while he was archbishop of Cashel he was responsible for framing 17 acts of parliament for the benefit of the Church of Ireland (excluding his important contribution to the 'Church' articles of the Act of Union). One of these acts, passed in 1795, was actually known as 'the Archbishop of Cashel's Act'. To this catalogue should be added his successful endeavours from 1778 onwards to obtain parliamentary grants for the Board of First Fruits (the then equivalent in Ireland of the Church Commissioners), which included a wonderful windfall of £45,000 at the time of the Union.

At least until the Union, Agar's bishopric or archbishopric was not commensurate in seniority or income with his leadership role in the Church and in the House of Lords. Even Cashel was only third among the four archbishoprics in seniority, and poorer than a couple of the bishoprics in terms of income. Agar was twice passed over for the top job in the Church, the archbishopric of Armagh – once in 1794 and once in 1800: for the duration of the eighteenth century, and beyond, Armagh was sacred to Englishmen. Nevertheless, until his last years his energy and motivation did not flag, in spite of the frustration of having to carry – in fact to fill the void created by – inferior men who were archbishops of Armagh or Dublin mainly on the strength of being English. The most mistaken description of Agar ever penned was that he was 'an English ecclesiastical adventurer'.

Agar's papers establish other important facts about him and dispel other myths. They show that the medieval cathedral on the Rock of Cashel was too far gone by Agar's time to be capable of restoration, and that he did the next-best thing by shoring it up against further deterioration and by completing, partly at his own expense, the half-built Georgian cathedral in the town of Cashel which was another of the problems he inherited in 1779. They show also that he had seriously contemplated restoring the old cathedral and, when that proved impracticable, marked his appreciation of it by lowering the windows on the principal floor of the garden front of the Palace at Cashel, so that the Rock would act as what one architectural historian has called 'a stupendous eye-catcher'. His papers show that, though he made a huge fortune, he did not do so by alienating Church lands, or abusing his trust as archbishop of Cashel (Chapter Nine). Instead, he made it on the stock market. The riches amassed



*Gardens at Cashel Palace Hotel*

by a number of contemporary ecclesiastics are not so easy to explain innocently. His papers show that his politics – outside the already-mentioned area of his political defence of the Church of Ireland – were not as bloodthirsty before and during the 1798 Rebellion and not as self-interested at the time of the Union, as has hitherto been believed. His papers do not acquit him of all the charges which have been levelled against him – for example, his will is a damning document, in that it contains not a single bequest to the Church or to a charity. But they permit a balanced, rounded and on the whole favourable assessment of him to be made.

**NOTE**

For Sections A, B, D and MP see Register of Irish Archives. The originals are held at the Hampshire Record Office.

