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INTRODUCTION

O'RORKE, MCDONALD & TWEED PAPERS

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O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed Papers (D1242)

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Summary

The O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed papers consist of 632 deeds and volumes, 1630-1969, relating to this firm of solicitors and its clients. The archive is arranged in two different sections: the first comprises organisational files of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed; whereas the second comprises individual client files which are listed by family.

Since its establishment in 1839, the firm under a succession of names had offices (some of them part-time only) at various times in Ballymena, Belfast, Antrim, Larne, Crumlin, Ballyclare, Glenarm and Ballycastle. At present there are two full-time offices at 37-39 Church Street, Antrim, and at 29 The Roddens, Larne, and two one-day attendance offices at Ballyclare and Glenarm. The office at Ballyclare is attended on Tuesday morning each week and the Glenarm Office is attended on Monday afternoon each week.



Alexander O'Rorke

The firm was established by Alexander O'Rorke who was enrolled as a solicitor of the High Court of Justice in Ireland in 1839, and is presumed to have been practising under his own name. The O'Rorke family resided at Ballybollen House, Aghohill, and it therefore is understandable that Alexander O'Rorke practised in Ballymena. He was later joined by his son, Alexander O'Rorke Jnr, who enrolled as a solicitor in 1879. They practised under the name of Alexander O'Rorke & Son. The Law Directory for 1881 shows that Alexander O'Rorke had extended his practice to Belfast, where he was based at 111 Donegall Street, and the same Directory shows his son, Alexander O'Rorke Jnr, was practising in Ballymena.



Donald McDonald

After the death of Alexander O'Rorke, his son continued practising under the name of Alexander O'Rorke & Son in the offices at Belfast, Ballymena and Antrim. He entered into partnership with Donald McDonald, a resident of Belfast, on 28th May 1891, when the firm became known as A. O'Rorke & McDonald. At that time the partnership was extended to include Glenarm as Donald McDonald had connections in that area and may have already been practising there prior to entering into partnership with Alexander O'Rorke Jnr. The partnership between Alexander O'Rorke Jnr and Donald McDonald was terminated by an agreement dated 30 August 1901 when Alexander O'Rorke effectively retired on the terms stated in the agreement. He died on 30 October 1901. Donald McDonald continued to practise on his own account certainly in Antrim and Glenarm, but it may have been about this time that the Ballymena office closed, as the Ballymena connection had always been through the O'Rorke family.



James Carmichael Tweed

James Carmichael Tweed was admitted as a solicitor in 1905 and almost immediately entered into partnership with Donald McDonald, when the name of the firm was changed to the present style of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed. During that period, the two partners decided to open an office in Larne. McDonald continued to be responsible for the Antrim and Glenarm offices and Tweed oversaw the new Larne office.

During the 1930s McDonald became less involved in the running of the practice. As a result, Tweed sought for a recently qualified solicitor to take over the Antrim office and the practice of Donald McDonald as solicitor to The Railway Company (London Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS)) which at that time had extensive railway lines and property interests in Northern Ireland. This resulted in James Owen Wylie joining the firm as an assistant solicitor in 1934. The connections with LMS appear to date back to the days of Alexander O'Rorke Jnr. In 1939, Donald McDonald went to live in England, and the partnership between him and James Carmichael Tweed ceased on 1 April 1938.



Solicitors to the Earls of Antrim

The most significant client of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed was the McDonnell family, Earls of Antrim. Donald McDonald acted as solicitor for the Glenarm section of the Antrim estate and was related to the Earl's agent, Alexander McDonald. Further O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed records are contained in the Earl of Antrim papers, D2977/5/2/17/1-D2977/5/2/17/10, which include correspondence between the solicitors and the estate office.



Organisational files

The O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed papers contain 52 volumes of records relating to the firm itself and to the running of the firm, separated into 13 distinctive sections. These include: 21 letter books, 1904-1969; two diaries, 1915-1924; two receipt books of Wilmont rent and tax receipts, 1897-1913; two volumes giving details of mortgages in the Co. Antrim area, possibly kept by Archibald McKay, a Co. Antrim property agent, 1901-1925; one Insurance Book of Archibald McKay, 1917-1934; nine ledgers of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed, 1921-1969; five cash books of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed, 1908-1937; one rent journal of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed, 1950-1963; one deed instruction book of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed, 1907-1914; and one agency account book of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed, 1905-1923. Also included are a number of interesting extraneous volumes including a 1901-1919 will book of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed. The practice of writing transcripts of wills in volume form is almost unheard of in Northern Ireland. O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed have also deposited with PRONI a 1923-1942 volume entitled 'Antrim Town Commissioners Book' and an Antrim Quarter Session Book, 1908-1936.



Family case papers

The 558 documents of client papers of O'Rorke, McDonald & Tweed have been catalogued according to family with a number of exceptions. The section listed as records of various businesses' (D1242/2) includes ledgers, accounts, and day books of a number of Antrim businessmen, including grocery and spirits firms, 1859-1914. There are four volumes of the Antrim Gas-Light Company, 1855-1928, consisting of minute books, letter books and statements of accounts (D1242/23). Election records include a canvassing book used by canvassers working on behalf of Colonel James McCalmont, Unionist candidate for the East Antrim Division, 1900, and one election file belonging to James Tweed, Antrim, who served as election agent for Hugh Minford, candidate for the Antrim constituency in Northern Ireland parliamentary elections, 1938 (D1242/24). There are also two interesting files of the Coronation Celebration Committee, Antrim, 1902 and 1911, detailing preparations for the coronations of Kings Edward VII and George V (D1242/25).

