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INTRODUCTION

SCHOMBERG MacDONNELL PAPERS

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Schomberg MacDonnell Papers (D4091)

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Summary

This archive incorporating the papers of Sir Schomberg MacDonnell, Louisa Countess of Antrim, Sir John Stuart and the Stuart family of Dalness, comprises c.2000 documents. It brings together a range of interesting and important personality from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and provides valuable insights into political and court life. Most of it relates to Schomberg MacDonnell, fifth son of the 5th Earl of Antrim, and covers virtually all of his life (1861-1915) in varying detail.



The Papers

Some explanation of how this rather disparate archive came together may be useful. It was found in a bedroom and the attics of Glenarm Castle, seat of idle Earls of Antrim, and thus a quite separate location from the main Antrim family estate archive (D2977), which came to PRONI via the Estate Office in the early 1970s. These locational differences explain the variance in the nature of the two collections. D2977 is a huge landed estate archive with little in the way of personal family papers, whilst this new deposit consists almost exclusively of private family material.

The papers relating to Sir John Stuart and his family are perhaps the most surprising appearance in the archive. They derive from the friendly relationship between the widowed daughter-in-law of Sir John, Mrs MacDonald Stuart and Sir Schomberg MacDonnell. The papers do not show exactly how their friendship began but does contain correspondence in which Mrs MacDonald Stuart tells of her desire to leave her estate at Dalness in the Scottish Highlands to Schomberg MacDonnell. Unsurprisingly, he gladly accepted. It was presumably after his death in 1915 that his papers and the Stuart family papers were uplifted together and brought to Glenarm. Thus, this collection includes letters from the young Disraeli to Sir John Stuart.

The collection falls more or less neatly into three main sections, the Schomberg MacDonnell papers making up section A, the Louisa Countess of Antrim papers comprising section B and the papers of Sir John Stuart and his family section C. Section D is a catch-all for various Antrim family members and relatives who do not fit any of the previous sections. It is mainly composed of material relating to the Hon. Arthur Schomberg Kerr, fourth son of Charlotte Countess of Antrim and younger brother of the 4th and 5th Earls, and to Kerr's wife and their daughter.



Schomberg MacDonnell



Schomberg MacDonnell

The bulk of this archive, as already mentioned, relates to the career of Schomberg MacDonnell. He was the fifth son of the 5th Earl of Antrim and was born at Glenarm Castle on 22 March 1861. He has been called the only successful MacDonnell and his career as principal private secretary of Lord Salisbury marks him out as a man of ability. Lord Salisbury wrote in 1888 asking him to become his private secretary: '... I think the employment is not a bad one. The work is interesting and not too hard ...' [see D4091/A/3/1/]. MacDonnell accepted and a close relationship developed between himself and Lord Salisbury. This can be seen in the letters from Salisbury just before he retired with MacDonnell's help 1902 [see D4091/A/3/1/]. MacDonnell appears to have been much more than just a private secretary providing administrative support. He sifted through the incoming correspondence, highlighting important sections for Lord Salisbury's attention and attaching summaries for even greater ease of use. Moreover, as his diaries reveal, he regularly frequented the Carlton Club and would have provided an invaluable inside source of information about what was going on in the Conservative party. The correspondence between MacDonnell and Sir Redvers Buller, dating from 1899 to 1903, provides a fascinating insight on how he was able to use his position to considerable advantage [see D4091/A/3/1-D4091/A/3/11].

His good working relationship with Lord Salisbury is further evidenced in his administration of the distribution of honours. His papers contain a fascinating volume covering the period 1897 to 1901, which gives details of potential candidates for honours, and those who nominated them, etc [see D4091/A/3/4/1]. MacDonnell was also intimately involved in the preparations for the coronation of Edward VII serving on the executive committee. This work provided him with further experience of dealing personally with members of the royal household and family. Therefore he was ideally suited to his new position as secretary of the Office of Works, a position which he took up shortly before Lord Salisbury retired from the political scene.

MacDonnell served in the Office of Works from 1902 to 1912, and as a result this archive contains much interesting material and memorabilia pertaining to the funeral of King Edward VII and the coronation of George V [see D4091/A/6/]. He retired from the Office of Works in 1912 due to failing health. However, it appears that there was another explanation which is alluded to in one of the many letters he received from friends and colleagues on his resignation. Lord Burnham, a close friend, wrote, '... you are equally right in your determination to marry one who is devoted to you and to whom, I am sure you are absolutely devoted. I think that Mrs Harrison and you may both look forward to a life of undisturbed peace ...'. Mrs Harrison, was an American, whom he went on to marry. According to the reminiscence left by his nephew, John Balfour, he appeared in the divorce courts as a co-respondent during her case [see section E]. Thus, it seems more likely that his resignation from his high profile position was perhaps due to this scandal rather than ill-health.

A more platonic relationship of Schomberg MacDonnell's, which has already been mentioned above, was that with Mrs MacDonald Stuart of Dalness. He referred to her as his ancestress and indeed she left her estate to him so that it would remain in the family name of MacDonald. The correspondence between them is chatty and entertaining and they apparently shared a strong dislike of the suffragette movement [see D4091/A/9]. Schomberg appears to have possessed an impetuous and patriotic streak, characterised by his enlistment in the City of London Imperial Volunteers in 1900. He served with them during the Boer War and his letters reveal much about the routine of the early campaign. The letters also give a lot of detail on the state of his men and the difficulties which they encountered against the Boers [see D4091/A/4]. Along with his patriotism, Schomberg seems to have had a touch of vanity, going by the number of photographs of himself in the collection. Most of the photographs are of Schomberg in various uniforms including that of the City Imperial Volunteers [see D4091/A/10]. However Acre is also a fascinating group of photos which depict various members of the Royal family enjoying a day's sport at Balmoral in 1910. These pictures show Edward VII, the future George V, future Edward VIII and future George VI, and emphasise the intimacy which Schomberg MacDonnell enjoyed with the Royal family.



*Schomberg MacDonnell
in uniform of City Imperial
Volunteers, 1900*



*Schomberg MacDonnell with
George V*

The period after MacDonnell's resignation in 1912 from the Office of Works and his subsequent marriage to Mrs Harrison, are not covered in the collection, except for 4 items dating from 1915. By this time Schomberg MacDonnell was back on military service having given up his staff position in London and joined the 5th Cameron Highlanders. The archive includes his field message Book which he used at the Western front [see D4091/A/11]. He was mortally wounded in Flanders and died on 23 November 1915 at Abeelle, where his remains were interred.

Schomberg MacDonnell was a fascinating character and this collection gives a wealth of information on the various facets of his personality and career. Peter Marsh who drew upon MacDonnell's papers in his book *The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft, 1881-1902* (1978), described him as '... an indispensable cogged wheel relating the larger rotations of the prime minister and the 'wirepullers'. Similarly, in *Salisbury: the Man and his Policies* (1978), edited by Lord Blake and Henry Cecil, a call is made for a separate study on MacDonnell, who is again described '... as an essential cog which never slipped ...'. Finally, it seems fitting to end this section of the introduction about Schomberg MacDonnell with a quote from a letter of Louisa Countess of Antrim [Schomberg's sister-in-law]. She wrote in 1900 telling him of a conversation with Queen Victoria: '... she began to talk about you and how badly she thought Lord Salisbury wanted you ... she thinks Lord Salisbury's present secretary is not the man requires and that

many things have gone wrong owing to no one understanding the little ins and outs ...'.



Louisa Countess of Antrim

The papers of Louisa Countess of Antrim are in many respects similar to those of Schomberg MacDonnell. They were both on intimate terms with the royal family whom they served. Louisa was the daughter of General Charles Grey who had been appointed Prince Albert's private secretary in 1849 and, after the Prince's death, Queen Victoria's. Her grandfather was the Prime Minister Earl Grey of the 1832 Reform Bill. The collection contains some papers relating to both Louisa's father and grandfather. There is a plethora of notes and envelopes of autographic interest including one from William IV [see D4091/B/1]. Perhaps the most important are those from Queen Victoria from 1854 to 1866. These notes to General Grey include telegraph messages concerning the illness and death of her half brother, Charles 3rd Prince of Leiningen, and her distress over the Austro-Prussian War. Writing in the third person, she ends a letter about her desire to write to the King of Prussia: 'She can't sit with folded hands without saying something, she feels it would be wrong.' [see D4091/B/1]

It seemed natural that Louisa Grey, later Countess of Antrim after her marriage to the 6th Earl in 1875, should be appointed a Lady in Waiting to Queen Victoria in 1890. There is a wealth of correspondence covering the period during which she served as a Lady in Waiting. After Victoria's death in 1901, she was invited to continue by Queen Alexandra, which she did until the death of Edward VII in 1910. The royal correspondents include: Princess Beatrice; Princess Helena; Queen Amelie of Portugal; Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught; Princess Victoria [daughter of Edward VII], etc., etc. [see D4091/B/3]. This correspondence is complemented by MIC615, a microfilm of Louisa's diaries from the period. The diaries have been used by Elizabeth Longford for her book, *Louisa Lady in Waiting: the personal diaries and albums of Louisa, Lady in Waiting to Queen Victoria and Queen Alexandra* (1979). Each chapter of the book is lavishly illustrated and is preceded by an introduction containing quotations from the diaries.

Of more local interest are Louisa's papers relating to Home Rule, to which she was vehemently opposed. In 1893, she organised a women's petition against Home Rule in County Antrim to go to Queen Victoria. The papers include names and addresses of the local representative and the amount of signatures which came in from each locality. The correspondence also reveals much about the local feeling of the county and the involvement and support of Lady O'Neill, Viscountess Templetown and Viscountess Massereene and Ferrard [see D4091/B/4]. Louisa has also left accounts of the 1912 Belfast home rule meeting addressed by Winston Churchill and the anti-home rule meeting addressed by Andrew Bonar Law [see D4091/B/6]. As a whole the papers of Louisa Countess Antrim provide a fascinating insight into life at the royal court whilst also possessing a strong Irish dimension.



Sir John Stuart

The papers of Sir John Stuart and his family make up section C of the archive and their existence in the collection has already been explained above. Sir John Stuart was born in 1793, a son of Dugald Stuart of Ballachullish, Argyllshire. He pursued a legal career and was called to the bar in 1839 [see D4091/C/1]. He succeeded W.E. Gladstone as MP for Network in 1846 and retained the seat until 1852. It is mainly from this period that the correspondence from Benjamin Disraeli dates. The two principal letters date from 1849 and 1850, the first discusses a speech he made about protectionism and his thoughts on the leadership of the Tory party. In the second, he writes about his efforts to counteract the impact of Lord John Russell's letter on the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England [see D4091/C/2]. Money Penny and Buckle's life of Disraeli includes a letter from the same period in which he writes to his wife: '..I dined yesterday with Stuart, who is excellent and of great use. He is also a good advisor, being of judicial mind' [p.229, vol.3].

Stuart was appointed Vice Chancellor in 1852 [see D4091/C/1] and gave up his recently won seat of Bury St. Edmunds to take up the new position. He served as Vice Chancellor until 1871, in which year he was made a privy councillor and granted an annuity of £3500 for life. He died in 1876. The rest of the papers mainly relate to his daughter-in-law, Elizabeth, and consist of a mixture of personal and estate correspondence.

