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INTRODUCTION

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Staples Papers (D1567)

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Summary

The Staples papers comprise c.7750 documents and volumes, 1683-c.1935, deriving from the baronetial family of Staples of Lissan, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, and Dunmore, Co. Leix. Most of the material relates to the family's estates and business and political interests in Cos Tyrone and Londonderry (which the Lissan estate straddled) and in Co. Antrim. But there is also some estate material relating to the Dunmore estate in Co. Leix, and also to the Molesworth estate in Dublin City and County and in Co. Offaly.



Background

Tony McAuley, in an article in 'Omnibus' (autumn/winter, 1994), gives the following account of early family history, based on information given him by Mrs Hazel Radclyffe Dolling. '... Her maiden name was Staples and she is a direct descendant of Thomas Staples, who left Bristol in the early 17th century to settle in ... Moneymore. He acquired land and began mining for hematite ore. He built an iron forge on the banks of the Lissan Water, which marks the county boundary between Tyrone and Derry, and he set about felling the great oaks covering that part of mid-Ulster to make charcoal for the fires in his forge. Thomas Staples was made an Irish baronet in 1628 [the warrant of 1628, signed by Charles I and directing Lord Deputy Falkland to pass the patent creating the baronetcy is preserved at Lissan, in spite of some 20th-century vicissitudes – [see D1567/F/13/17]. He married a rich young lady called Charity Jones [only child of Sir Baptist Jones of Vintnerstown (Bellaghy), Co. Londonderry] and thereby acquired a large cash settlement and hundreds of acres of good land.

His son, Robert, built the great house [at Lissan] He constructed farm buildings, byres, gardens and orchards, water mills for cutting timber, a large fishpond, good stone bridges over the tumbling river, and even ornamental cascades. ... The peace and ease of Lissan House has never been disturbed. It escaped the ravages of the 1641 rebellion and, although for many it was a symbol of plantation and supremacy, it remained intact. No one quite knows the full reason [perhaps the O'Neills wanted the house for themselves], but on 22 October 1641 Neil Og O'Quinn of Lissan parish was ... [ordered by] Sir Phelim O'Neill ... "to take and to guard the Staples house at Lissan and to keep the family safe from pillaging". The order was obeyed. ...'



Lissan House

The house at Lissan was not so fortunate as to survive subsequent ravages of time and taste, and it may be convenient to attempt at this point a summary of its subsequent building history. Alistair Rowan in his buildings of North-West Ulster (Harmondsworth, 1979) calls it 'A large and rather confusing house, basically of the 18th century but dull in appearance'. He also suggests that Davis Ducart, who apparently worked on a bridge and other ornamentations to the demesne at Lissan in the late 1760s, may have been involved in a re-working of the house in the same period. The building history of Lissan is certainly confusing, but it does not appear that architectural historians have hitherto looked closely at the house, outside and in, or considered all the evidence which survives. This latter includes five paintings or drawings of the house, all of them preserved at Lissan, one of them dated c.1799-1803 and the rest 1876-pre-1888. The Ordnance Survey, which for this part of Co. Tyrone is dated 1833, is also helpful. The following account is a combination of the observations and work of Mrs Dolling and Professor B.M.S. Campbell of the Economic and Social History Department, Queen's University, Belfast.

The earliest written description of Lissan comes in Thomas Ashe's report on the estates of the Archbishop of Armagh (including Lissan), dated 1703 (PRONI, T848/1). Ashe described it as an '... extraordinary good stone house; the rooms are very noble, lofty and large. There is a very handsome common hall; a large dining room, a large parlour (which is wainscotted in oak), a pretty closet and a good kitchen and good cellars on the first floor and under it, with larders, etc. There is also a handsome staircase, which leads up to the chambers in the first storey, which are lofty and handsome, square rooms suitable to those below. There are good garrets over those chambers. The rooms are all well boarded or floored; the windows large, regular and proportionable to the building. The house is well shingled, and very near to it stands a small tenement which has three or four pretty rooms in it. This was formerly the dwelling house ...'.

An inspection of the cellar, as it is today, broadly speaking establishes the boundaries of the house which Ashe described. The house occupied a rectangle, taking in one or at most two bays to the left of the now front door, and three to the right. Only the three bays to the right - the wooden-floored part of the house - were over the cellar. Ashe's dining room and parlour equate to the present drawing room and library (though which way round is not quite clear). His 'pretty closet' must have been in the right-hand end of the present staircase hall, adjoining the now drawing room. The 'handsome common hall' certainly equates to the now dining room, but probably it took in the then staircase hall (much smaller than the present) as well. The front door gave access to a stone-floored entrance hall, probably a screens passage, with a door into the hall directly facing and another into the stone-floored kitchen off to the left-hand side of the house. It is unclear what there was to the immediate left of the entrance hall/screens passage at that stage. The staircase which Ashe saw and admired, from the evidence of the supports in the basement and still to be seen in the floor, and from the evidence of a drawing by Robert Ponsonby Staples, artist and future 12th Bt, c.1880, took its rise in the middle of the staircase hall, whence it rose towards the outside wall, turned left and rose again, turned left

and rose back up to the first-floor landing. It was probably a late-17th century elaboration of the c.1630 staircase, which must surely have been a more simple affair (possibly occupying the space where the closet was by 1703). Since the house, then as now, was deep, a shingled roof most have had a very high pitch, and the garrets probably had tall dormer windows.



Georgian Lissan

In the course of the 18th century, probably c.1740-1770, the house described by Ashe was Georgianised. The stylistic evidence of a shouldered architrave in the bedroom to the extreme right of the entrance front, of plasterwork in that room, in the drawing room below and in a bedroom at the opposite end of the entrance front, and of grates in various parts of the house (not necessarily in their original position), suggests the 1740s rather than the 1760s. However, in this very remote part of Ulster, a stylistic time-lag of some duration is perfectly possible.

Events in family history do not resolve the problem. Sir Alexander Staples, 6th Bt, died in 1742, leaving one son, Sir Robert, 7th Bt, a little boy of two. Sir Alexander's youngest brother, the Rev. Thomas Staples, Rector of Derryloran, Co. Tyrone, is described in the Peerages as 'of Lissan'. Possibly he acted as caretaker of the house and, for a time, guardian of the minor. Ultimately, he or his son, the Rt Hon. John Staples, succeeded to Lissan, after Sir Robert, 7th Bt, inherited Dunmore, Queen's County, in 1758 and went to live there. This inter-familial arrangement must have been the easier to effect/maintain because Sir Robert married one of the Rev. Thomas's daughters, Alicia, in 1761. Possibly the Rev. Thomas undertook the Georgianising of Lissan, out of resources husbanded during the long minority (and also to provide accommodation for his large family of twelve children): possibly it took place after the Rev. Thomas's death in 1762 and after the marriage of his son, the Rt Hon. John Staples, in 1764. John Staples's first wife was a daughter of William Conolly of Castletown, Co. Kildare, and (in view of the wealth of Conolly family) he must have received with her a considerable marriage portion. Davis Ducart, the Sardinian engineer-cum-architect, first appears in Ulster in connection with a colliery canal in Co. Tyrone; and, as the Staples papers show, the Staples family were extremely active in colliery development. The Georgian Lissan is not a Castletown Cox or a Kilshannig (two of Ducart's major country house achievements in the South). But it may be that Ducart, who would have valued the patronage of John Staples and his grand connections, at least advised on the alterations to the house.

What these primarily consisted of was extending the entrance front by one or two bays to the left of the front door (depending on how many bays were there in 1703), so that the front door was for the first time positioned in the middle of the facade. Then, or perhaps earlier in the 18th century, it was encased in handsome Tuscan columns. The staircase hall was probably walled off, to separate it from the former screens passage and from the top end of the former common hall, which then became the room which is the present dining room. What had been the screens passage was widened to the left, and became a well-proportioned entrance hall; the 18th-century stone flagging (which probably dates from 1784-1785 [see D1567/E/1/1]) is still there today, and occupies the left-hand third of the now staircase hall. On the first floor, corridors and passages were inserted to provide privacy and a number of bedrooms with dressing-rooms beside them. One of the corridors was literally rounded-off with a graceful arch. On the top floor, the garrets and putative dormers were replaced by coved ceilings and low-set windows. The rhythm and proportions of the sash windows, which were probably quite different

from the mullioned windows with casements which surely existed in the Ashe house, were permanently fixed at this time.

The Rt Hon. John Staples was both a Privy Councillor and, almost uninterruptedly from 1765 until 1802, an MP (part of the time a county MP). It is likely that a man of his prominence would have devoted continuing attention to his seat; and some accounts and receipts for building work, including cornices and plasterwork, in the mid-1780s survive in the archive [D1567/E/1/1]. In family tradition, he is credited with converting what had been a 17th-century forge, to the rear and left of the entrance front, into a 'great kitchen' in 1773. The result of the 18th-century alterations, which may have been much more piecemeal than described above, is the house depicted in the already-mentioned water-colour of c.1799-1803. It is a charming, if unsophisticated, gentleman's residence, set off by handsome trees at the front and to the right.



Regency Lissan

At some point between 1820, when his father, the Rt Hon. John Staples died, and 1833 (the date of the OS), Thomas Staples, later Sir Thomas, 9th Bt, performed a Regency face-lift on the Georgian house. As a successful Dublin barrister, he enjoyed an extra-landed income, and so was able to indulge himself in making Lissan a more fashionable house than it had ever been before. His most obvious contribution was to add a single-storey music room or ballroom to the right-hand side of the entrance front. (Its plasterwork, particularly in the ceiling, has a more-modern-than-Regency 'feel'; but this is because it had to be re-made to the original design some fifteen years ago, when structural problems were experienced.) In the main block of the house, he created Regency interiors in what is now the dining room and (probably) the library, although only that in the dining room survives. Externally, he built out a porch (with two front columns answered by two pilasters either side of the Tuscan columns in the door-case, and a triglyph frieze), and altered the roof-line with the effect that the roof was disguised behind a parapet. This latter change gave loft to the house, and meant that the top windows were no longer overshadowed by the roof. A painting and a drawing, both dated 1876 and both preserved at Lissan, show a house which to all outward appearances was built during the Regency.



Victorian to present-day Lissan

Sir Thomas died in 1865 and was succeeded by his nephew, Sir Nathaniel, 10th Bt, under whom many changes took place, mostly not for the better. The first was not his fault: Sir Thomas's widow, Catherine Lady Staples, went back to live full-time in their grand house, No. 11 Merrion Square, Dublin, and according to family tradition removed with her a number of handsome, mahogany doors, together with numerous more moveable contents. (A further dispersal of contents by auction took place after Sir Nathaniel's death in 1899 [see D1567/B/28- D1567/B/43].) This would explain the poor quality of some of the doors at Lissan, and also the presence in the Kildare Street and University Club, Dublin, of a fine portrait of Sir Thomas by Martin Cregan.

The changes made by Sir Nathaniel himself in part derived from the fact that he had spent much of his life in India or on the Continent, and cannot have found the Co. Tyrone climate congenial. A water-colour of the entrance front (which also gives a most interesting view of the out-buildings), dated post-1876, shows the Regency porch glazed-in, plate glass in all the windows bar those before the staircase, and casements in place of sashes on the top two floors. Not content with glazing-in the porch, Sir Nathaniel subsumed it into a vast porte-cochere, originally crowned by two turrets (of which the stumps remain), and completely dominating the entrance front. The effect of these changes is to give the house a sternly late-Victorian aspect and utterly to disguise its Regency, Georgian and 17th-century lineage.

Internally, Sir Nathaniel encountered structural problems. An undated description, preserved at Lissan, states: '... The original, wooden staircase of timber from the estate was altered when two rooms over the hall were demolished to make a large space opening right to the roof rafters. Fortunately, the old timber and the original design was [sic] used, with the result that the staircase and hallway are an exceptionally fine feature of the house.' What this probably means is that the floors of some bedrooms, almost certainly on the top floor, gave way or became unsound. Sir Nathaniel's solution to this problem, which he carried into effect 'about 1888', was completely to re-arrange the (late?) 17th-century staircase, with the result that it now rises from the site of the former closet and climbs through a vast and many-windowed well the full height of the house. At this time he was living on his own, apart from a mistress, so he could well afford to lose bedroom accommodation (and probably lost a bedroom on the first floor as well as two or three on the top floor). He was not in easy financial circumstances, and as he had a plentiful supply of oak on the estate, and a sawmill, it was a cheaper alternative to him to construct the present staircase than to re-make the collapsing rooms.

The c.1888 staircase re-uses some of the original oak balustrades (some were also built into the bizarre chimneypiece in the staircase hall), distinguishable from the rest by their darker colour. The triplets motif in the balustrading also seems to have been taken (to judge from R.P. Staples's sketch) from the 17th-century staircase. But as the new staircase, which not only goes right up to the roof but branches off in all directions (many of them dead ends), must have required well over double the timber of the original, new oak was required and the undersides of the stairs were made of pitch pine (which was also used in a new ceiling inserted in the library, probably at

this time). The effect is astonishing; it is of a vast adventure playground, with a distinct nautical 'feel'. It is an amazing creation for an elderly and somewhat isolated backwoods baronet, and it is tempting to suggest that his artist son, R.P. Staples, had something to do with the design. However, the latter's already-mentioned drawing of the original staircase is firmly captioned by him '... altered by my father about 1888', which he would hardly have said if he had had a hand in it himself. Unfortunately, there appears to be no mention of the staircase in Sir Nathaniel's letters of this period to R.P. Staples in D1567/F/10- D1567/F/11.

It was probably at the same time that the pitch of the roof was again altered, possibly because of drainage problems created by Sir Thomas's Regency parapet. The parapet was removed, and the roof was brought – with over-hanging eaves – much more conspicuously forward of the top floor windows than had been the case with the Georgian house. Earlier, in c.1878, Sir Nathaniel had erected, to the left and rear of the entrance front, an aggressively Victorian clock tower which almost contests the dominance of the porte-cochere and was even more dominant at the time of its erection. (The clock itself was made in 1820 by Joshua Adams for the market house recently erected by the Salters' Company in The Diamond at Magherafelt. Sir Nathaniel bought it in 1878, to the considerable annoyance of the locals.)

Following his death in 1899, or possibly preceding it, further alterations were made to the disadvantage of the external appearance of the house. There had always been a tendency for kitchens and offices to 'develop' to the rear of the left-hand side of the entrance front (and into the base of the clock tower). It was probably in the very early 20th century that an additional bay was added to the entrance front itself, to link it up with 17th-century out-buildings – Ashe's 'tenement which has three or four pretty rooms in it' – coming forwards at a right-angle, and with other out-buildings to the rear. It seems that this was done to facilitate wheelchair access for the member of the family then living at Lissan, James Head Staples, who was an invalid and who, with his wife, had set up a creamery and a lace-making enterprise in the out-buildings to the rear. Thanks to the enterprising spirit of J.H. Staples, Lissan was one of the earliest (1902) houses in Ireland to boast a water turbine for the generation of its own electricity. It is still in efficient operation today.

Having been built of rubble stone, Lissan would always have been rendered. Otherwise, its present-day appearance is completely at variance with its antiquity as a structure and with the architectural charm, if not distinction, which it possessed in former building periods. From the historical point of view, however, the house is of the utmost importance and represents continuity, not change. There are very few Ulster houses which have been in the continuous occupation of the one family from before 1641 to the present day. Killyleagh, Co. Down, is a case in point. Are there any others West of the Bann?

Following this digression into building history, the rest of this Introduction will be devoted, first, to family history, and then to a brief description of the content of the archive.



Family history

Family history in the period 1682-1774 is extremely complicated and is both bedevilled and documented by a series of lawsuits. These are summarised at D1567/A/6 of the list which follows and there is therefore no need to describe them here (particularly since the period 1682-1774 is largely a blank in the archive).

In 1758, Sir Robert Staples, 7th Bt (1740-1816), inherited from his connection-by-marriage and guardian, Edward Maurice, Bishop of Ossory, a long lease of the house, demesne and estate of Dunmore, near Durrow, Co. Leix. This Sir Robert Staples and his son, Sir Robert Staples, 8th Bt (1772-1832) lived at Dunmore or in Dublin, not at Lissan. Lissan during this period was inhabited by the younger brother of Sir Alexander Staples, 6th Bt, the Rev. Thomas Staples, Rector of Derryloran (1702-1762), and by his more important son, the Rt Hon. John Staples (1736-1820), M.P. for Co. Antrim and brother-in-law of the politically influential Thomas Conolly of Castletown, Co. Kildare, MP for Co. Londonderry. Although the house was lived in by this junior, Northern branch of the family, the Lissan estate, which formed part of the see lands of Armagh, was leased jointly from the Archbishop by the Rt Hon. John Staples and his Southern cousins, the 7th and 8th baronets.

In 1832, when Sir Robert Staples, 8th Bt, died without legitimate issue, the baronetcy passed to the Northern branch of the family, in the person of Sir Thomas Staples, 9th Bt, eldest son of the Rt Hon. John Staples. Sir Robert, however, had left an illegitimate son, Edmond Staples of Dunmore, to whom he left that estate and an undivided moiety of the Lissan estate. This he was free to do presumably because, being leasehold, they had not been protected by entail and therefore formed part of his personal estate. The Lissan estate continued to be held jointly, under the Archbishops of Armagh, until 1837, when it was partitioned between Sir Thomas Staples and his illegitimate cousin, Edmond; part of it was then sold in the Encumbered Estates Court in 1854. Sir Thomas Staples, 9th Bt, who had risen in his profession to be Queen's Advocate for Ireland and had then retired to live full-time at Lissan, died in 1865. He had no children, and was succeeded in title and estates by Sir Nathaniel Alexander Staples, 10th Bt, eldest son of Sir Thomas's younger brother, the Rev. John Molesworth Staples.



Sir Nathaniel Staples, 10th Bt

Much information about the career of Sir Nathaniel Staples, 10th Bt, has been assembled by Mrs Ann Mitchell in a University of Ulster undergraduate dissertation entitled 'An Indian Journal: the Letters of Nathaniel Alexander Staples, 1834-1840' (1985). '... Nathaniel Alexander Staples, born on 1 May 1817, was a second son of the Rev. [John] Molesworth Staples Nathaniel had three brothers: the eldest, John, ... born in 1816, was captain in the 7th Bengal Light Cavalry Next came Nathaniel, then Thomas ..., born in 1824, who became a major-general in the Bengal Staff Corps. The youngest brother, Francis Ponsonby, born in 1831, was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. ... Nathaniel had five sisters: Harriet, sometimes referred to as "Harry" in the letters; Anne Louisa, referred to as "Any"; Mary Jane; Grace Catherine; and Charlotte Melosina Nathaniel succeeded his uncle, Sir Thomas Staples, as 10th baronet in 1865. ... [He] joined the army as a young cadet in 1832 and was posted out to the Bengal Artillery in India in 1834, where he eventually achieved the rank of captain in 1850. During this period he married Elizabeth Lindsay, only daughter of Capt. James Head. They had issue ... three sons, John Molesworth (11th Bt), James Head, and Robert Ponsonby (12th Bt), and two daughters, Cecilia and Anne Elizabeth. ...

There were ... two armies in India: the army of the Crown and the army of the East India Company ..., [the officers] of the Crown army being educated at either Sandhurst or Woolwich, and those of the Company army being educated at Addiscombe in Surrey. It was ... at Addiscombe that Nathaniel spent the first two years of his army career as a young cadet, from 1832 until 1834, when he was posted out to India. ... Although only seventeen when he first went out to India, Nathaniel's letters project him as a lively, humorous, observant and quite mature young man. His voyage out to India, ... [which he wrote up] in the form of a journal to his mother, ... took approximately five months, as the vessel had to travel the whole way down the coast of Africa, round the Cape, then along the other side of Africa and bear eastwards towards India.

... Nathaniel was stationed at the artillery post at Dum Dum, in the Presidency of Bengal, but commuted regularly between there and Calcutta during his first two years Being an officer, Nathaniel would ... automatically have been in command of native troops, despite the fact that he was so young. ... His favourite hobby ... appears to have been botany ..., [and he struck] up a friendship with the curator of the botanical gardens in Calcutta, Dr Wallick. ... Although Nathaniel did not resign his commission until 1851, he was never actually involved in active service, despite the fact that there had been two Sikh wars, in 1846 and 1848, during the time he was in India. His own service record included that of postmaster at Dacca from May 1838 to September 1839; duty with the Assam Light Infantry until April 1840, during which time he was acting interpreter and quartermaster with the 6th Battalion Foot Artillery; permanent duty from March 1841 until January 1843; and lieutenant with the 9th Battalion from 1845 until 1851. During this period, however, Nathaniel was twice sent home on sick leave, firstly from January 1843 until October 1845, and then again from March 1851 until his resignation in September 1853. ...

After leaving the army, Nathaniel spent a number of years in Holland and elsewhere on the Continent, and ... his children received most of their education there, chiefly in Belgium. Unfortunately, Nathaniel's eldest son, John Molesworth Staples, spent more than twenty years in a state asylum in Belgium, but his other two sons managed to carve out successful careers. ... Nathaniel did not ... take up residence in the ancestral home at Lissan until his uncle's widow had passed away. According to the obituary written at the time of his death in 'The Belfast Telegraph', "he was a well known figure in London society. He was a man of commanding presence and of considerable gifts. ..." His last few years [actually from 1880 until his death in 1899] were spent in the company of his mistress [Miss Mary Potter, the niece of his agent] rather than his wife. ...' Lady Staples, his wife, went to live with her daughter, Cecilia Greer, and other family members, but moved into the gate-lodge at Lissan when she heard that Sir Nathaniel was dying, in order to prevent Miss Potter from making off with some of the contents of the house when he was dead.



Sir Robert Ponsonby Staples, 12th Bt

The member of the family who features even more conspicuously in the archive than Sir Nathaniel Staples is his third son, Sir Robert Ponsonby Staples, 12th Bt (1853-1943). As a painter, he was something more than a gifted amateur, though – at any rate in his lifetime – something less than a successful professional. In politics, he was a Protestant Home Ruler and a member of the United Irish League. He was anti-Sinn Fein and participated in the recruiting drive in 1914, so his papers include – among numerous letters, diaries and scrapbooks – correspondence with the War Office in 1914 about the possible quartering of troops at Lissan to protect the property and curb Ulster Volunteer Force activities.

Staples played an increasing part in the running of the family estate from c.1905, taking up residence in Lissan itself c.1912, although he did not actually succeed to the property and the baronetcy until 1933, when he was eighty. This was because his eldest brother, Sir John Molesworth Staples, 11th Bt, had been '... non compos since he was twenty years of age', the next brother, James Head Staples, was childless, in failing health and died in 1917, and R.P. Staples's son, Robert George Alexander, was the ultimate heir to the estate and title. R.P. Staples was therefore given an allowance by the Court of Chancery to manage affairs during his eldest brother's lifetime and, as he wrote in a letter of 10 September 1924, concentrated principally on developing the coal-mining potential of the estate, '... which has occupied me for over twenty years and on which Sir Samuel Kelly (the tenant of my brother, Sir John Staples, and Viscount Charlemont, my cousin) has spent over £250,000, and will mean in the near future by royalties an increase of income to Sir John's estate ... which ... [will be] the triumph of my life ...'.



Field Marshal Kitchener

Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin have the following comments to make on Staples in *The Watercolours of Ireland ... c.1600-1914*: '... Another member of the Belfast Ramblers Club who links the world of Belfast ship-building and city worthies to the cosmopolitan scenes of Edwardian society is Robert Ponsonby Staples Staples was educated on the Continent, starting in Louvain and moving to Paris, Dresden and Brussels. The doors of the London art world were opened to him by a cousin, Sir Coutts Lindsay, who owned the Grosvenor Gallery. His chalk sketches of high society, the Prince of Wales, Lily Langtry, the Randolph Churchills, Sarah Bernhardt, Field Marshal Kitchener and other celebrities flashily evoke the glamorous world of England before 1914. Whether sketching, riding on the Row, boating at Henley or attending Ascot, or depicting the life of the music hall and theatre, he echoes the glib influence of [Paul-Cesar] Helleu and constantly reminds one of other artists such as Boudin and Toulouse-Lautrec. Occasionally his watercolours ... have a quiet intimacy, showing the devoted fondness he had for his "chicks", as he called his daughters. Staples returned to Belfast in 1905, many years before he inherited Lissan, where he died, an aged and eccentric figure. He refused

to wear shoes, particularly with rubber soles, as he was concerned that their insulation would cut off the life-giving forces of the earth's magnetic field!

Further information about 'The Sketches and Political Works of Sir Robert Ponsonby Staples ...' will be found at D1567/F/9/14. Further information about Staples family history will be found in Hazel Dolling, *The Staples Inheritance: 400 Years in the Community* (Cookstown, 2000).



The archive

The Lissan estate papers in the archive include: folder of estate maps ranging in date from 1732 to 1818 and featuring the work of such surveyors as Archibald Stewart, William Short, Mark Reynolds, Andrew Christy, James Ware, John Sloe and William Gibson; volumes of estate maps, c.1830 and 1876; estate lease books and accounts, etc, 1817-1826, with rentals and labourers' accounts for the 1870s and 1880s; Lissan household accounts, 1802-1822, with wine cellar books, 1797-1824; and vouchers for building repair work done at Lissan in the 1780s.

Other estate and business papers include: title deeds, settlements and wills, 1799-1837; c.500 estate and business letters of Richard Staples, 1807-1820, which relate to the Bellaghy estate, Co. Londonderry (for which he was agent, 1819-1820), the Montgomery of Benvarren, Co. Antrim, family and Belfast banking business, the firm of Staples, McNeile & Co., dealing in provisions, hides, tallow, etc, with Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, etc; accounts for the Drumglass colliery in Co. Tyrone, 1787-1790, with details of the erection of the steam engine there, 1783-1788; accounts for repairs to the Rt Hon. John Staples of Lissan's town house in Kildare Street, Dublin, and to the Molesworth family seat of Brackenstown, Co. Dublin, 1795-1797; visitation papers, 1837, deriving



*Richard Ponsonby,
Bishop of Derry and Raphoe*

from the Staples' cousin, Richard Ponsonby, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, and letters and papers, 1803-1804 and 1844-1845, about the Phillipstown estate, King's County, the Molesworth property which was inherited, in whole or in part, by him; title deeds and correspondence relating to the settlement of the affairs of Edmond Staples of Dunmore, Co. Leix, 1840s; and c.500 business and financial letters, 1806-1826, of the Rev. J.M. Staples, Prebendary of Moville, Co. Donegal, and Rector of Lissan (then known as Muff), with some details of building operations on the rectories, churches and schoolhouses at Moville and Lissan, but tantalisingly little about the building of Lissan rectory to the design of John Nash in the period 1807-1811.

Family, personal and political papers include: genealogical particulars relating to the Staples family, c.1662-c.1825; diary and accounts of Nathaniel Staples, later Sir Nathaniel Staples, 10th Bt (1817-1899), serving as a lieutenant and then a captain in the Bengal Artillery in India, with c.1250 letters received by him there and c.50 of his letters home from India, 1836-1852; a few letters of his brother, Capt. John Staples, who was killed in 1857 during the Indian Mutiny; letters from the Rev. Dr James Kennedy Baillie, Ardtrea, Co. Tyrone, and the Rev. William Sewell, Exeter College, Oxford, to Frederick Lindesay, London, 1848, about the purchase of a Kennedy family heirloom; and an extensive archive deriving from Sir Robert Ponsonby Staples, 12th Bt (1853-1943) and reflecting all aspects of his colourful career.

R.P. Staples's papers principally relate to his career, struggles and financial hardships as an artist, though his coal-mining and political ventures are also

documented. The correspondence is particularly full on the subject of his big, group portraits of the 1880s and 1890s – 'Australia -v- England' (subsequently re-named 'An Ideal Cricket Match' and now at Lords), 'The Last Shot for the Queen's Prize at Wimbledon', 'Cardinal Manning's Last Reception' and 'Gladstone Introducing the Home Rule Bill in 1893' – and his triptych depicting the Ulster ship-building and linen industries painted for the new Belfast City Hall in 1905 under contentious and trying conditions which are fully described in the correspondence. However, even his surviving pawn tickets are of interest from the art-historical point of view, because he frequently had to pawn his pictures.

The history of R.P. Staples's career as an artist is incomplete without reference to the material retained or collected by Mrs Dolling at Lissan, and described in Section G of this list. Her ability to answer queries about her grandfather's pictures, down to the finest details of the dates on which sitters sat to him, is remarkable. She has made provision for all this material to come to PRONI at her death, and in the meantime is creating an important research archive and doing much to stimulate interest in R.P. Staples's work.

