



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

STEWART OF KILLYMOON PAPERS

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Stewart (of Killymoon) Papers (D3167 and D2966/92/B)

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Summary

The Stewart of Killymoon papers comprise c.850 letters and papers, 1761-1845, of the Stewart family of Killymoon Castle, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, principally of James Stewart of Killymoon (1741-1821), MP for Co. Tyrone, 1768-1812, and his wife, the Hon. Mrs Elizabeth Stewart, *née* Molesworth.



Background



James Stewart

James Stewart was the eldest son of William Stewart of Killymoon and Eleanor King of Rockingham, Co. Roscommon. Shortly before embarking on his long parliamentary career, the young James Stewart did the Grand Tour in Europe. A splendid portrait of him (now in the Ulster Museum) was painted in Italy some time in 1767 by Pompeo Batoni, the highly fashionable painter of foreign visitors to Italy and then at the height of his considerable powers. Early the following year Stewart was reported to have left Turin on his way home. The future 2nd Duke of Leinster (eldest brother of Lord Edward FitzGerald) wrote to his mother in March 1768 describing him as 'a gentlemanlike young man, and also very amiable. I know no gentleman better liked than he has been in every town he has passed through ...'.

Stewart succeeded his father as one of the MPs for Co. Tyrone in 1768, retaining the seat continuously and without a contest for the next thirty-two years in Dublin and a further twelve after 1800 at Westminster. It was said of him that 'without place or pension, one shilling of public money has never found its way into his pocket ... during a period of 44 years'. Most county seats in the Irish Parliament, like most of the boroughs, were dominated by great landowning families. Tyrone was unusual at this period in having a large number of independently minded Presbyterian voters, and its great landowners happened to be at loggerheads. Only when faced by a combination in 1812 was Stewart obliged to retire.

Though he himself was a member of the Protestant Ascendancy, as it came to be called, his father was (and remained) a Presbyterian. This was ironic, in view of the fact that Killymoon and over half the Stewart estate was church land, held on 21-year leases under the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh. Stewart became one of the leading spokesmen in the Irish Parliament for the northern Presbyterians and was instrumental in promoting legislation to mitigate or remove the penal laws which affected them. In particular, he supported the Act (19 & 20 Geo. III, c.6) that repealed the Test Act for Protestant Dissenters, proposed the Act (21 & 22 Geo. III, c.25) declaring marriages by Presbyterian ministers valid, and helped to secure an increase in the *regium donum*, the annual grant to approved Presbyterian clergy. The Presbyterians' regard for him was shown not only by electoral support but also, in the usual fashion of the time, by numerous presentations of silver plate.

Stewart was prominent in the Volunteer movement, from its foundation in the late 1770s to its suppression in 1793. He was the close ally of the Volunteer commander-in-chief, James Caulfeild, 1st Earl of Charlemont, was active at Volunteer meetings and parades, and in September 1783 took the chair at the second great convention of northern Volunteer companies in Dungannon, in preparation for the national meeting in Dublin. After Lord Charlemont's celebrated but still mysterious breach with Grattan in 1783, Stewart became Charlemont's principal spokesman in the



James Caulfeild

House of Commons (thanks to the general inarticulacy of those whom Charlemont returned, after Grattan, for the family borough of Charlemont, Co. Armagh). Like Charlemont, and unlike Grattan, Stewart opposed all political concessions to the Roman Catholics; not until the Union had transferred the Irish representation to Westminster did he come round to support of Catholic Emancipation.

By a curious confusion, Charlemont's letters to Stewart almost all passed into the possession of Stewart's younger brother, Henry Stewart of Tyrallen, Co. Donegal, and passed down that branch of the family (see PRONI, D3319); the rest of Stewart's papers passed down the female line through Stewart's daughter, Louisa, who in 1811 married into the Clements family of Ashfield, Co. Cavan, later of Lough Rynn, Co. Leitrim. The papers which passed down the collateral male line have been reunited with those which passed down the direct female line to constitute D3167/1.

In 1772 Stewart married Elizabeth Molesworth, daughter of the 3rd Viscount Molesworth. She was one of the survivors of a tragic fire in London in 1763, where she was living with her widowed mother. Lady Molesworth, two of her daughters and six of the servants were killed. Two other daughters were badly injured when they jumped from upper windows - one had to have a leg cut off after landing on the railings below - and a third was severely burned. Elizabeth Stewart became in 1794 a co-heiress of her late brother, the 4th Viscount Molesworth, and inherited a share of the Molesworth estates in Dublin City, near Swords, Co. Dublin, and in and around Philipstown, King's County. Another sister, Louisa, was married to William Brabazon Ponsonby, 1st Baron Ponsonby, the leader of the celebrated political 'cousinhood' of that name - a connection which strengthened Stewart's links with the Whig opposition, both before and after the Union.

After the Union, Stewart also formed a friendship with the Prince of Wales which has been much exaggerated in family mythology (although the Prince did at least trouble to condole with Stewart's son and successor, William, on Stewart's death in 1821). Stewart is also popularly reputed to have lost Killymoon to the Prince in an unsuccessful bet. This almost certainly apocryphal incident is *not* documented in the papers, which do however contain some documentation, 1803-1804, about the early 19th century re-building of Killymoon by John Nash, and about the furnishing of it by Thomas Tatham of London, 1809-1810; there are also earlier letters of architectural interest from Frederick Trench (1795) and Robert Woodgate (1801).



A visit to Killymoon

In 1824, when Stewart's widow and the Stewarts' unmarried son, Colonel William Stewart, were living in Killymoon, they invited their Tyrone neighbour, John Ynyr Burges, '... to pass a few days at this romantic and most beautiful place [as Burges recorded in his diary (PRONI, T1282/1, pp. 10-13)]. It may be well termed so, for I suppose its equal is not to be found in any country for the most perfect combination of wood, water, mountain and undulation of ground.

My brother and I rode there. ... We arrived at the bridge which spans the widest part of the river, famed for its enormous sycamores. At one side is a long glade, richly wooded at its furthest end. On the other you see the castle, at that time nearly shut out by elms of picturesque forms. We passed the bridge and through fine specimens of the old Irish pines, fir, now no more. We gained the park, and soon found ourselves in the apartments allotted for us. ...

[When the dinner gong sounded, they descended] '... the grand staircase, for grand it is Colonel Stewart took the head of the table, and his venerable mother the foot, a lady of the old school, so clever, so agreeable, such a one is not to be seen now, so kind, so anxious to please, so dignified, with the greatest good nature. William Stewart was the Sir Charles Grandison of the day, what some would call fine, but fineness was natural to him and it did not sit unseemly on him. He had the softest voice and the gentlest manner, and with all the courage and prowess of a hero. His gallantries as a man of fashion are well known, the only portion of his character I wish to veil over. ...

The following morning we lionised this magnificent place. Every walk and drive brought us into new features. The extensive gardens, celebrated for an enormous pear tree, caught our attention. The length of said tree is something immense. Also, I must not forget the huge Portugal laurel and the larch The silver firs are equal to the most luxuriant [?piceas] in the pinetums of the present day. It would be difficult to find such specimens now. The dark green of the foliage and the thickness of the stems seem as if they belonged to some distant hemisphere. The spruce firs, too, are very fine. The grandeur of the timber, particularly the oaks and sycamore, quite give you the idea of a scene of Claude Lorraine's, and that dark, clear river always running rapidly along [?creates] a scene that perhaps might border, without its cheerful and its darling sound, upon the gloomy.'

Killymoon Castle and the estate were sold on Colonel Stewart's death in 1850.



The papers

These include letters and drawings relating to James Stewart's new Killymoon Castle, including a letter (1795) from the amateur architect, Frederick Trench, that actually mentions imitating Claude Lorraine, and another from Robert Woodgate, 1801. The castle was, in the end, designed for Stewart by John Nash. There are other letters about the design and the building from Mrs Stewart and Nash himself, 1803-05, a number of drawings by Nash of the same period, and letters about the furnishing of Killymoon by Thomas Tatham of London, 1809-1810.

As might be expected, James Stewart's papers are at their best in documenting Co. Tyrone elections and politics during the period 1768-1812, his role in the local Volunteer movement from the late 1770s to the bitter end in 1793, his position as spokesman for the Presbyterians (particularly letters to him from the Rev. William Campbell of Armagh and the Rev. William Crawford of Strabane, Co. Tyrone, urging him to oppose a bill of 1785 to prevent clandestine marriages, which the Presbyterians felt was particularly aimed at marriages celebrated by their ministers), etc, etc.

Mrs Stewart's letters and papers, 1798-1831, which include a copy of her will (1821), principally consist of a run of 337 letters to her, spread over this whole period, from Rebecca Leslie, wife of Colonel, later General, David Leslie, the third son of the 6th Earl of Leven. The Leslies had come to Ireland in 1796 with the Tay Fencibles, a Scottish regiment of which David Leslie was colonel and which had been stationed at Cookstown, where the Leslies met and befriended the Stewarts. The letters begin towards the end of 1797 and become frequent and regular when the Leslies moved with the Tay Fencibles to Carrickfergus in 1798. They mostly contain news of family and social events, but the '98 and '99 letters make many references to the rebellion and its aftermath. A letter of 27 January 1807, for example, comments amusingly on the Marquess and Marchioness of Donegall, '... who have come to Scotland to retrench and to starve, as her Ladyship says, upon £17,000 per annum, "which is all their cruel creditors will allow them", ... are so dashing they quite astonish our sober Scottishies, but our gentlemen have found out that the poor Marquess is very weak and does not understand literary conversation, which is what they feed themselves upon; so they hold him rather cheap and look a little glum at the gold bragg parties which Ly D. has introduced. ...' During the next thirty years the Leslies served or lived in various places in Ireland and Scotland, and the correspondence between Mrs Leslie and Mrs Stewart continues throughout these years.

The Stewart papers peter out uninspiringly with Stewart's descendants huddling in Boulogne to escape their creditors. The Stewart finances, always parlous, finally collapsed in the 1840s, so that there was nothing left for Stewart's daughter, Louisa, who had married Henry John Clements of Ashfield in 1811, to inherit when her brother, Colonel William Stewart, died childless in 1850. Some 150 letters to Colonel Stewart's Dublin agents, Messrs Stewart & Kincaid, 1841-1848, documenting the financial difficulties of these last years, will be found at D2966/92/B.

The above description is mainly based on the content of the archive. However, it also draws on W.A. Maguire (ed.), *Up in Arms: the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland: a Bicentenary [Ulster Museum] Exhibition* (Belfast, 1998), which in turn draws on Professor E.M. Johnston-Liik's 'History of the Irish Parliament, 1690-1800' database.

