



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

TALBOT / GREGORY PAPERS

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Talbot/Gregory Papers (D4100)

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Summary

The collection comprises 139 letters, July 1819-July 1835, consisting of correspondence between Sir Charles Chetwynd, second Earl Talbot of Hensol, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, 1817-1821, and William Gregory, long-serving Under-Secretary in Dublin Castle, 1812-1831. A small group of nine letters are to Talbot from family and other friends.



Background

Charles Chetwynd, born on 25 April 1777, was the great-grandson of Charles Talbot, a former Lord-Chancellor, and he succeeded to the peerage on the death of his father on 19 May 1793. Educated at Oxford, in 1803 he took an active part in organising a volunteer force in Staffordshire to oppose the invasion of England contemplated by Napoleon. In August 1812, he was sworn Lord-Lieutenant of the county and continued to hold the office until his death in 1849.

His connection with Ireland began in October 1817 when he was appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, with Sir Robert Peel acting as Irish Secretary until 1818. During his term of office he rendered considerable services to the agriculture of the country, and in 1821 Talbot was made a knight of the order of St Patrick by George IV. He steadily opposed Catholic Emancipation; however Daniel O'Connell gave him much credit for his impartiality on the subject. The discontent in Ireland, however, continued to grow during his administration, and in December 1822, the Marquess of Wellesley somewhat ungraciously superseded him. He died on 10 January 1849, at Ingestre Hall, Staffordshire.

Talbot's correspondent, William Gregory, was born in 1762, the son of Robert Gregory, Chairman of the East India Company and was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was made Sheriff of Co. Galway in March 1799 and was Secretary to the Inland Navigation Board between 1801 and 1811. He was also returned as part of the rearrangement of the Irish House of Commons immediately before the Act of Union and sat in Parliament for Portarlington for only the last six months of its existence. A fluent Irish speaker, he is best remembered, however, as one of the longest-serving Under-Secretaries in Dublin Castle, from 1812 to 1831, and as the trusted adviser of successive Viceroys and Chief Secretaries. Indeed, Gregory was described by Daniel O'Connell, at this time, as the real ruler of Ireland. Gregory's father had been the friend of famous men of a liberal persuasion such as Fox, Rockingham and Burke and there can be little doubt that the younger Gregory inherited these sympathies. He refused a baronetcy in 1827, retired from public life in 1831 and died in 1840.

From the correspondence between these two influential men it is clear that Talbot and Gregory were close friends and that their families were also on intimate terms. Many of the letters cover the period when Talbot was Lord-Lieutenant and relate to: negotiations with the 1st Viscount Sidmouth and the 2nd Earl of Liverpool (Home Secretary and Prime Minister respectively); the Catholic Question; disturbances by 'Ribbonmen' and others; appointments (mostly ecclesiastical); William Saurin's controversial career, including his resignation from his position as Attorney-General in 1822; George IV's post-coronation visit of 1821; and Talbot's unexpected recall from office in December 1822.



The Papers

An interesting cache of letters written in 1821, largely from Talbot to Gregory, discuss the withdrawal of troops from Ireland which the form was opposed to and also 'the lamentable poverty of the Irish Peasants'. Talbot believed the act of outrage perpetrated nightly were not caused by 'any immediate pressure of want, since provisions have not been so cheap for many years as now.' A number of letters dating from the final years of the 1820s concentrate naturally on the important issue of Catholic Emancipation. In February, 1829, Talbot wrote to Gregory, 'The great question of Catholic Emancipation is carried... The word toleration should now be obliterated - We have all a right to everything and are fast verging to the doctrine of Tom Paine of the rights of man.' Although O'Connell credited Talbot on account of his impartiality on the issue, there was no doubting his inner views. In 1833, he wrote to Gregory, 'O'Connell seems to have thrown off the Mask and appears in his native Color.....Peel must regret the false step, irretrievably false step of granting Emancipation to the Catholics.'

