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INTRODUCTION

WILMOT PAPERS

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Wilmot Papers (T3019)

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Summary

The Sir Robert Wilmot papers comprise c.6500 photocopies of the papers, 1730-1772, of Sir Robert Wilmot, 1st Bt (c.1708-1782), of Osmaston Hall, Derby, mainly as 'Resident Secretary' (residence in this connection being in London) to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from June 1740 to June 1772. The originals are in the Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock.



Derbyshire and family background

Wilmot was a protégé of the great Derbyshire magnates, the Dukes of Devonshire, two of whom were Lords Lieutenant during this period. He was appointed deputy Resident Secretary in 1737 by the 3rd Duke of Devonshire, Lord Lieutenant, 1737-1745, and promoted by him to the full secretaryship in 1740. The 4th Duke, who was Lord Lieutenant, 1755-1757, and First Lord of the British Treasury and Prime Minister, 1756-1757, subsequently became Lord Chamberlain of the Household, and in 1758 appointed Wilmot Deputy-Secretary to the Lord Chamberlainship. In the early days of George III's reign, he was promoted Secretary to the Lord Chamberlain, a post which he retained along with the Resident Secretaryship until 1772.

The papers thus contain material relating to the Lord Chamberlainship, and also to Derbyshire affairs. The Chatsworth papers - the papers of the Dukes of Devonshire – reveal that Wilmot played a not-insignificant role in British high politics – as a spokesman and intermediary for the Dukes of Devonshire, particularly apparent at the time of the complicated negotiations of late 1756 which brought the 4th Duke, briefly, to the premiership. Wilmot's own papers, however, by and large do not reflect this role: the intimate political correspondence which they contain relates almost exclusively to Irish affairs, as do the papers of a more routine kind.

From *DNB* entries and from Wilmot's entry in *The Baronetage*, we know that the Wilmots were a well-established Derbyshire family by the early Hanoverian period. Wilmot's father, also Robert, had developed the estate at Osmaston. Before him came another Robert, who was MP for Derby from 1690 to 1695; his father, Sir Nicholas, was a Serjeant-at-Law and was knighted by Charles II in 1674. Wilmot was the eldest son in his generation and the heir to Osmaston; which explains his coming to the notice of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire, his first patron, to whom he became private secretary, c.1734. His grandfather had been elected MP for Derby with the support of the Devonshire interest and was a strongly loyal MP in the early 1690s. All of that suggests a long-standing relationship between the Wilmots and the leading political interest in Derbyshire.

The Wilmots remained a family of more than local prominence in the 18th century: Wilmot's brother, Sir John Eardley Wilmot, was Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, 1766-1771, and a cousin, Henry Wilmot, was Governor of Nova Scotia in the 1760s. Wilmot's brother's life helps explain some of his other political connections. Sir John Eardley Wilmot's *DNB* entry records his friendship from Westminster School onwards with Henry Bilson Legge. The latter was briefly Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1739-1741, and his refusal to accompany the 3rd Duke of Devonshire thither in the winter of 1739 seems to have hastened the promotion of Wilmot from deputy to full Resident Secretary. Wilmot's predecessor in that office, John Potter, was in Ireland from 1737 (thus in effect ceasing to be Resident Secretary at all) and replaced Thomas Tickell as Secretary to the Lords Justices in 1740. Wilmot's experience as deputy since 1737, added to the recommendations that would have come from Legge and Devonshire, made him the obvious candidate. (Legge more or less disappears from Wilmot's correspondence after 1741 as he concentrated on his political career in England.)



Lord George Sackville

confidential relationship with the Dukes of Devonshire, and his personal social position.

Family and Derbyshire connections also explain some other Irish contacts of Wilmot's, especially those with John Bowes (who became Lord Chancellor of Ireland in 1756 and was a protégé of Chatsworth) and Archbishop John Ryder of Tuam, whose brother, Dudley, was the English Attorney-General of the Pelham years and a friend of John Eardley Wilmot. They also explain why Wilmot was effectively on level-pegging and on fairly close personal terms with the Chief Secretaries of the period, notably Edward Weston, 1746-1750, Lord George Sackville, 1750-1755, and Richard Rigby, 1757-1761. Although technically of under-secretary rank, Wilmot was written to almost as an equal by these men because of his expertise and experience, his



A career civil servant

However, a Namierite family analysis of Wilmot's career and connections should not obscure the role he played in his own fortunes. He graduated from Oxford with a B.A. in 1729 and studied law at the Inner Temple, before rising as already outlined in the service of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire and the state. By 1750, he was seen by several correspondents as the channel in London through which all Irish business, especially that concerning patronage, must flow. He retained the Secretaryship to the Lord Chamberlain, the 4th Duke of Devonshire, in 1762, continuing under successive Lords Chamberlain such as the Dukes of Portland and Grafton. Some of his official correspondence in this capacity, dealing with accommodation in the royal palaces and requests for tickets and other passes on royal occasions, survives scattered through his Irish papers, especially for the later 1760s.

Another office with which Wilmot was rewarded, in 1754, was the Solicitorship in England to the Irish Revenue Service. There was disagreement among the Irish Revenue Commissioners over the filling of this post. Wilmot asked the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Dorset, to support his pretensions and the Duke agreed to do so, as did John Ponsonby, the First Commissioner of the Revenue, and Devonshire. One of the English-born Commissioners, William Bristow, raised objections, arguing that Wilmot's position as Resident Secretary would lead to conflicts of interest (though it appears he had someone else in mind for the job). A much bigger obstacle to Wilmot's appointment came in August in the shape of the first Lord of the Treasury, the Duke of Newcastle, who



*Thomas Pelham Holles,
1st Duke of Newcastle*

asserted Treasury control over the appointment and had in mind for it Robert West, the brother of the Treasury Secretary, James West. In the event Newcastle was able to find an alternative job for West, without having formally to renounce his claim to appoint to the Solicitorship. That office, though worth £200 a year, appears to have been largely a sinecure and a reward for service, with only the rare appearance of business.

Wilmot's involvement in politics never seemed to have gone beyond advice and comment. He does not seem to have had any political ambitions, though he was consulted on political as well as administrative matters by his patrons and their sometime allies like Henry Fox and the Duke of Newcastle. Wilmot's own politics are never disclosed, beyond a loyalty to the 'Old Corps'. After the death of the 4th Duke of Devonshire in 1764, he seems to have settled into a deeply sceptical attitude towards both British ministers and oppositions. By this time he was in his mid-fifties, suffering from ill-health and convinced that resistance to the changes brought about by the new reign was dangerous. As he remarked in February 1767: 'severity and obstinacy are very old weapons and won't do in these days'. Survival and the rewards for long service should not be threatened by flirtations with an opposition for which he had little respect - his letters from the 1760s reveal a growing cynicism with any rhetorical outbursts from politicians in Britain or Ireland. ▲

The Waite-Wilmot correspondence

In this essentially a-political attitude, Wilmot was at one with his opposite number in Ireland, Thomas Waite, Under-Secretary to the Chief Secretary, 1747-1777, and Secretary to the Lords Justices of Ireland during the long absences from Ireland of the Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary in the period up to 1767. In their respective positions of permanency on opposite sides of the Irish Sea, Wilmot and Waite provided much of the continuity in the government of Ireland; and their correspondence reflects this fact, and reflects the less discreet and less reticent Waite's sense of their superiority over their peripatetic and fleeting political superiors. What is revealing of the characters of the two correspondents is that Waite instructed Wilmot to burn the most private of Waite's letters, which Wilmot did not do, while the cannier Wilmot instructed Waite to *return* his letters of the same nature, which Waite did (hence the presence of both sets of letters in the Wilmot papers). The Waite-Wilmot correspondence is the most important, single component of the Wilmot papers.



An official archive

However, to highlight the private correspondence which the papers include is perhaps to miss the point of the Wilmot archive. The point is that it is the archive of an office rather than of an individual - and its official flavour derives not solely from Wilmot's discreetness. Significantly, the archive starts in 1730, almost seven years prior to Wilmot's appointment to the Irish office in London, and for much of that decade the papers are not Wilmot's at all. Then, and thereafter, it contains the originals of many King's Letters and other formal documents which, if they were ever present in the Chief Secretary's office in Dublin Castle, must have been so in copy form. It also contains letters, not just to Wilmot, but to various Lords Lieutenant and Chief Secretaries during their residence in England while the Irish parliament was in its long recess of approximately a year and a half out of every two years.



The period 1747-1756

Dr Declan O'Donovan, who has made a particular study of the papers for the period 1747-1757, has kindly provided the following note on them:

'Wilmot was a discreet politico-administrator with an unusually wide range of confidants. He was on excellent terms with the Chief Secretaries of his period, including the most touchy of these, Lord George Sackville, and had other important Irish correspondents too. It was in fact Wilmot's discretion, knowledge of Irish business, and of course his wide contacts, which encouraged his correspondents to write regularly and freely.

His principal function in London was to assist relations between the Dublin and Whitehall administrations, and in particular to expedite the passage of legislation through the British Privy Council. He seems to have been an effective lobbyist with the Clerks of the Council. This activity must have brought him into contact with the Attorney- and Solicitor-General, who reported to the Irish Committee of the Council and who in practice determined the fate of Irish legislation. To judge from the papers covering the years 1747-1756, Wilmot only made representations to the Law Officers on rare occasions. He did not allow himself to be an ambassador when the Lord Lieutenant was in Ireland, nor does this seem to have been expected. This aspect is indeed difficult to assess because the material in the collection at PRONI contains very few out-letters, except those to Waite, and with that important exception very little indication of Wilmot's own views. The other examples we have are written in the style of a sensitive civil servant rather than a political agent.

Wilmot's principal area of expertise was a financial business (which brought him into friendly contact with the powerful Nathaniel Clement, Teller of the Irish Exchequer). Wilmot loyally assisted the policies of the different Lords Lieutenant he served. His own attitude to Ireland was certainly dominated by a concern for English interests, but he was not hostile to Ireland and when the 4th Duke of Devonshire, then Lord Hartington, was Viceroy he associated himself with the anxiety of Chief Secretary Conway and Hartington's father, the 3rd Duke, to make a bargain with the "Patriot" opposition which had brought down the Dorset administration.



A surrogate for the Chief Secretary's archive

Although used in some recent work, the Wilmot papers have not yet received exhaustive examination, and they may prove to offset the loss of the Chief Secretary's papers in 1922, so far as the mid-18th century is concerned. The political correspondence of Dublin Castle with Wilmot is a very significant addition to the primary source material. For the 1740s and 1750s the papers rank with the Newcastle, Chatsworth and Stopford-Sackville papers in political interest. Moreover, no other collection provides as much information about the officials of the Irish administration and their methods of business. It is in this respect particularly that the papers may compensate for the loss of the Chief Secretary's records.'

Indeed, it may be added that their quality, nature and sheer bulk raise the question, how much can there ever have been in the Chief Secretary's records? If the Chief Secretary's records had survived in their entirety, the Wilmot papers would still have the advantage over them that, for roughly two-thirds of the period between 1740 and 1767, Wilmot and the Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary were on the same side of the Irish Sea, and yet not in the same place, because he was usually in London and they were usually in the country; his office thus became an essential clearing-house for letters and papers passing to and from Chatsworth, Knole, Woburn and so on.



The routine of business

Only once did Wilmot, or Waite, provide the kind of description of an Under-Secretary's work that their more famous English equivalent, Charles Jenkinson, did in 1761 when he described the routines of preparing correspondence both to give to his superior, Lord Bute, and to send out of the Secretary of State's office.

In October-November 1761 Wilmot seems to have expressed a wish to retire on a pension due to ill-health, and discussed the nature of the work with Waite, who was briefly interested in becoming the next Resident Secretary. Wilmot was full of advice on the post and its duties, pointing out that one clerk was enough to do the office work. 'As to the writing work, it's nothing. The clerk does all the disagreeable part. Now and then there will be a little hurry, but by a small degree of forecast you will be sufficiently prepared for it, and will seem to have done wonders when you really will have done little or nothing.' Waite was told to rent a house in London, perhaps in St. James' Place, for £70 per annum, plus £5 taxes and more on furniture. This would mean he could work at home and put off any tedious business until he had an appetite for it. 'You have not only hours but days at your command; and if it was necessary for your health or agreeable, you might go out of town in the summer on a Friday evening ... and return on a Tuesday morning early.' Wilmot's picture of the easy routine of his office was, he believed, a mirror of Waite's in Dublin.

Wilmot's letter-books give a strong impression that the secretariat's routines were dominated by the arrival of mail packets, the copying of their contents by clerks and the processing of the business that arose out of them. The seemingly arcane subject of fees collected on patents, pensions and military commissions was certainly very important to the likes of Wilmot and Waite, as these sums usually amounted to perhaps four or five times their salaries. In early 1758 Irish MPs, led by Edmond Sexton Pery, proposed an abolition of military fees paid to the Secretary's Office. The compensation scheme agreed between Rigby, Waite and Pery resulted in £2500 per annum for the Chief Secretary, £1000 for Waite and £500 for the First Clerk, revealing the kinds of sums that could be expected from this area of government business. It is not, therefore, surprising that internal battles between officials over who should receive particular fees were common, with the leading clerk, William Lingen, and the Teller of the Exchequer, Nathaniel Clements, clashing in 1742 over fees payable on pensions. The next year Lingen quarrelled on the same subject with a colleague, James Belcher. The semi-secret world of fees collection rarely emerges into the daylight during Wilmot's period in office, with the exception of the compromising position in which Lord George Sackville found himself in March 1755. After controversy began to rage and Sackville was attacked in the Dublin press, he repaid £708 in military fees which were probably his due, but which he decided he could not prudently take.



The non-residence of the Lord Lieutenant

Beyond mundane matters of daily routines and incomes, the papers are most informative on the relationships between Wilmot and his changing political masters, namely the Lords Lieutenant and Chief Secretaries. The practice, before 1767, for Viceroy's to reside in Ireland only during the parliamentary winters meant that there were two distinct periods in the lives of administrators like Wilmot.



*Philip Dormer Stanhope,
4th Earl of Chesterfield*

The periods of residence were for Wilmot and the secretariat much the busier. Work began before the Viceroy's arrival in Ireland with preparations for his household. Wilmot described the nature of this household to Sir John Blacquiere, the Chief Secretary, in 1772, with six aides-de-camp, at least two chaplains, a comptroller and steward of the household. On top of that came the riding master, the gentleman usher, two gentlemen to the bedchamber, at least eight gentlemen 'at large' and two pages. The numbers of footmen, porters and other domestic staff were left up to individual Viceroy's. In the normal course of events the secretariat or any aides-de-camp already in Ireland were ordered to make ready the Castle and the stables. This was an expensive affair, although the Viceroy received £3000 per annum for equipage costs. In the financial year from April 1745 to April 1746, Lord Chesterfield's equipage costs as Lord Lieutenant amounted to £2746.13. A great deal more money would be spent on making the Castle the centre of entertainment during the parliamentary winter, with the quality of the Castle's cellars and the regularity of dinners and balls being a factor in a Viceroy's popularity. A list of the wines consumed in the Castle in the period September 1757 to April 1758 shows that fifteen to twenty bottles were drunk every night in the Green Room, mostly of port, but also champagne, madeira and burgundy. This was during the Bedford viceroyalty, one criticised for its parsimony.

The papers also show the crucial role of Wilmot and the others of Under-Secretary rank in the political preparations before a Viceroy's arrival in Ireland. In 1747 Nathaniel Clements was writing to Wilmot with the latest political intelligence for the use of the Earl of Harrington. When Harrington and his Chief Secretary, Edward Weston, arrived in Dublin in late September they were pleased with this groundwork, but Weston chided Wilmot for not writing to Harrington about politics in London. He complained: 'We know no more ... than if we were viceroy of Iceland instead of Ireland'. A fortnight later Weston urged Wilmot to strike up a regular correspondence with the new Castle Under-Secretary, Waite, to maintain a flow of information. Within a month this flow was established, thus creating the major part of the Wilmot papers for the next twenty-five years.



Rapid turnover and wide ability-range

This provision of political information, alongside office skills, was the more important given the regular changes in the person of the Chief Secretary, never mind the Viceroy. Between 1755 to 1765 there were six different Chief Secretaries who ranged from the politicians, Richard Rigby and W.G. Hamilton, to the ghost of a Chief Secretary, Sir Charles Bunbury, who leaves little trace of ever having held the post. Rigby, Conway and Hamilton were not always interested in Irish affairs but they did seek to influence them during their periods in office and involved Wilmot in this. In contrast, Bunbury's predecessor, Lord Drogheda, was ineffective and had been appointed mainly to get rid of the unwanted W.G. Hamilton. Lord Beauchamp was more interested in Ireland, but when he became Chief Secretary he was only twenty-two and three years out of Oxford and was no doubt the 'young master' to whom Waite referred disparagingly in 1768. With this kind of unevenness, in terms of ability, in the Chief Secretaries, Wilmot and Waite became even more indispensable and cherished by their masters.



Richard Rigby



Communications problems

There is no doubt that the physical distance between Dublin and London, or more often the country seat of the Viceroys, led to delays in Irish business. Communication between the Viceroy and his Lords Justices was dependent on the postal systems on both sides of the Channel and the post-boats that ran from Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead or Parkgate. The average length of time between a letter being sent from Ireland and the reply returning was ten days to a fortnight, though expresses and messengers were sent with letters needing greater expedition. Over time this performance, which was not disastrous, improved. Within Ireland from the 1740s there was an expansion in the numbers of turnpikes and a network of roads spread northwards and westwards from Dublin. The improvements in the transport infrastructure meant that Coleraine, Roscommon and Cork were within three days' travel of Dublin by 1750. In Britain the roads were also improving from the 1730s as the turnpike trusts began their expansion, which turned into a road-building craze by the 1750s and 1760s.

Yet, the need for transport across the Channel meant a reliance on the weather that could often delay passages for up to a week. On one occasion in late 1748, decision-making on an army augmentation scheme suggested by the Earl of Harrington was held up for almost two months by delays in the post. In the meantime the Lords Justices moved from a position of evading a decision on whether or not to support the scheme, to one of outright opposition, as rumours swept Dublin that a Land Tax would be introduced to pay for the extra 6000 men.



Irish business before the British Privy Council

These obstacles did not disappear when the Viceroy was resident in Ireland, as some decisions still had to be agreed in London. The major ones were those concerning Irish bills which had to be agreed to by the Privy Council in England under the Poyning's Law procedure. With the bills, as with other matters that had to be passed through the various departments in London, the lobbying skill of a Resident Secretary became all-important. Wilmot's skills included his ability to act as an agent for the Irish administration, moving business successfully and quickly through the different departments in London.

Dr Michael Kammen has described the way that agents for the American colonial assemblies managed their business through the corridors of power. Wilmot's work on bills was similar to that of the American agents and carried the same rewards, with the Irish parliament at the end of each session agreeing to pay him £200, with the same amount to William Sharpe, the secretary to the Privy Council, and £800 to be spread among under-secretaries, clerks and doorkeepers. This work included lobbying for certain bills favoured by the administration and, at other times, trying to complete business as quickly as possible, so that the Viceroy could return to England. Wilmot's efficiency was such that, when the decision was taken to have a resident Viceroy in Ireland, it was taken on political rather than administrative grounds.



Two cynical old-stagers

Where there was inefficiency in the business of government, Waite and Wilmot were sure, as good 'men of business', that the fault did not lie with them. Waite did not see residence as a cure for inefficiency in his masters. In fact he was as critical of the first resident Lord Lieutenant, Lord Townshend, as he had been of Lord Hertford two years previously. In one of the last letters in the Wilmot letter books Waite expressed his pleasure that the new administration of Lord Harcourt and Sir John Blaquiére seemed to be in command of the office business. He wrote: 'We are coming back very fast to the old regular methods of doing business and I am perfectly well satisfied with my new masters.'

Both Waite and Wilmot applauded the political consequences of greater control by Dublin Castle in the area of parliamentary management but neither of them equated that, in the way historians have, with greater administrative efficiency. The ability to do business was always going to be dependent on the character of the office-holder, and Waite's criticism of the irregular practices of Lord Townshend, particularly his habit of doing business in the early hours of the morning and his 'enthusiasms', are trenchant. When describing the resident Viceroy's character, Waite often combined amazement at Townshend's energy with despair at his fitful interest in doing business and at his lack of regularity.

Waite's criticisms of the irregularity found at the top levels of the administration in Dublin Castle certainly increase in the 1760s, the period of fast-changing Viceroys, particularly during the viceroalties of Northumberland (1763-1765) and Hertford (1765-1766). Waite objected to having to train young masters, and he was even more critical, as was Wilmot, of the growing waywardness of the Viceroys. In the early years of George III, the papers suggest that factional and political interests were beginning to interfere with the passage of routine business. Irregular applications for patronage, by-passing the Secretary's Office or the Lords Justices, were commonly noted in this period. At the same time, with the political temperature rising, Waite was twice (in 1761 and again in 1766) berated for his alleged prejudice against a Viceroy or Chief Secretary. Wilmot was no more sympathetic to the various ministries of this period, but learned quicker than Waite to hold his tongue.

Wilmot (and Waite) had the advantages and disadvantages of having served for a long period of time. Their views exhibit a mixture of assumed infallibility, long perspective, nostalgia, inconsistency and the melancholia of ageing. The two veterans have no clear 'system' to propose (beyond 'firmness' and 'resolution') and are not even particularly far-sighted. For example, during the Dr Charles Lucas agitation of the late 1740s, Wilmot and Waite saw the problem in terms of the weakness of the Viceroy, Lord Harrington, expected that politics would settle back into the normal channel, and were shocked by the crisis that engulfed the next Viceroy, the Duke of Dorset. What comes clearly out of the letters in this connection is that no-one believed the crisis would explode in the way it did in December 1753, and that Wilmot and his correspondents felt that pragmatism had proved successful during the Hartington viceroalty of 1755-1756 and that the opposition was thoroughly defeated. There is some evidence that Dudley Ryder and his judicial

colleague, Charles Yorke, discussed changes in the government of Ireland at this point, but none that this was influenced by Wilmot. In spite of this, both Wilmot and Waite in later years were wont to bemoan - with convenient forgetfulness – the lack of 'firmness' shown in 1756 when the deal was struck with Henry Boyle and the Patriot opposition.

To men like Wilmot, Waite and John Bowes, who had lived through the previous fifteen years of 'u-turns', the Townshend viceroyalty, now seen as a turning-point, was the subject of much scepticism and humour. Wilmot's correspondence becomes less frequent between 1767 and 1772, possibly because he was preparing himself for retirement. The surviving letters show Waite's despair at his new boss, Lord Townshend, and an idea common to both Wilmot and him that what was happening over Wilkes and North America showed continuing timidity at the heart of government. By the time of Wilmot's death in 1772, there is still no sense that either Wilmot or Waite believed that the change in government of Ireland was permanent or successful. The introduction of residency was not seen by either of them as crucial, while they thought the changes in the revenue system were ill-conceived by Townshend, forced on a reluctant ministry and unlikely to last.



Retirement honours

Final recognition of Wilmot's services came in October 1772 when he was created a baronet, thirty-three years after he had been knighted. He was able to ensure that this title passed to his illegitimate son, also Robert, who had been born to his mistress, Elizabeth Foote, in c.1752. Wilmot's first wife died in early October 1769 and he married Mrs Foote two months later. He did not long enjoy either this second marriage or his baronetcy, as he died on 14 November 1772 at his villa at Little Ealing, Middlesex.



The format of the Wilmot archive

Something now needs to be said about the relationship between the originals in the Derbyshire Record Office and the photocopies in PRONI.

To cut down on the cost of photocopying, a certain amount of material wholly irrelevant to Ireland was omitted. This applies particularly to Osmaston estate material - a readily identifiable and an already isolated category. Basically, weeding was done where this was simple, both for the weeder and the photocopier, and where Irish material constituted less than 80% of the whole. Once the stage had been reached that it was proving more costly in time to weed than it would in money to photocopy, weeding was abandoned. The basis of selection is not, therefore, very scientific; and in retrospect it can be argued that selection was undesirable in principle, because it has tended to obscure the fact that Wilmot had other things on his mind and on his hands besides Ireland. However, enough unweeded material remains to act as a reminder that Wilmot served the Dukes of Devonshire in Derbyshire and Derby borough local affairs as well as in the Irish administration, and that he was Deputy-Secretary and later Secretary to the Lord Chamberlain.



An addendum from Chatsworth

In one respect, the non-Irish element in the archive has been augmented, instead of weeded. Subsequent to the photocopying of the Wilmot papers, a volume of bound in-letters to Wilmot was acquired for Chatsworth. This was not one of the 'missing' Wilmot volumes (to be discussed shortly), as it covers, thinly, the long period, 1680-1770. Apart from one item of Irish relevance (probably bound by mistake), it relates wholly to Derbyshire and Derby borough. But it was photocopied all the same, because it shows in a very clear light Wilmot's relations with the Dukes of Devonshire in this sphere. The photocopies are interspersed with the Wilmot photocopies proper, but they are easily distinguishable by the suffix 'X' which in their case has been added to the overall PRONI reference number, T3019.



The Wilmot papers proper

The Wilmot papers proper in T3019 amount to some 6450 photocopies. The originals from which the photocopies were made are in the following format:

1. 48 volumes of bound in-letters, of which two volumes are missing: those covering the periods, 9 October 1762 to 8 March 1763 and 12 April 1764 to 9 January 1765. The overall covering dates of the volumes are 25 January 1739/40 to 25 December 1770; there is thus nothing for the last year and a half of Wilmot's Resident Secretaryship. Each volume contains roughly 80 letters, making a grand total of some 3900. The volumes are tightly bound, creating considerable problems for the photocopier. The photocopying has been well done, so there is no actual loss of the text of the letters; but fairly often Wilmot's endorsements have been unavoidably obscured, and where these give the only clue (besides the position of the letter in the letter-book) to the letter's date, recourse will have to be had to the originals. The letters were bound in a chronological sequence which is fairly reliable, and although they are foliated, chronology is a better guide than foliation, as a great many of the foliated letters have been subsequently - but probably a long time ago - torn out. The foliation, for what it is worth, is visible on the photocopies, and the number of the volume from which each letter comes has been written by PRONI on the back of each photocopy. The contents of the 46 volumes (excluding, obviously, the contents of the two which are missing) have been photocopied in their entirety, as they relate entirely to Ireland.
2. 16 small boxes of loose letters, amounting to 2800 items or more. These have all been placed in envelopes by the Derbyshire Record Office, and over half of them have been indexed by it under correspondents' names. PRONI has a copy of this index. Such weeding as was done applies to this section of the collection only. The contents of the envelopes are not arranged in the same fairly reliable chronological division among the envelopes themselves, and they are not numbered. For these reasons, a record has not been kept of the envelope from which each letter came. The photocopies of these loose, or 'individual' letters have been endorsed by PRONI, 'I.L.'
3. Five volumes of a near-contemporary calendar of 815 selected letters from the 48 volumes (including some from the two missing volumes). The calendar is amply though discursively foot-noted, in the same handwriting, and the internal evidence from these foot-notes suggests a date of compilation of c.1837. The compiler was George Lee, secretary to Sir Robert-John Wilmot Horton, 3rd Bt (Wilmot's grandson), and the (unfulfilled) purpose of the exercise appears to have been publication.



The near-contemporary calendar of c.1837

On these volumes, Dr O'Donovan comments:

'Items are numbered consecutively through the five books, but each book has a contents list giving details of the writer and the date, as well as the gist of the letter. The letters are presented in chronological order. The calendar is easily legible manuscript. Interestingly, the foot-noter has obvious Whig prejudices which would not have been shared by Sir Robert, and he is critical in particular of the Castle establishment in the Dorset viceroyalty. The calendar appears to be very reliable for the period 1747-1756. Spot checks for the earlier and later periods revealed no serious misreadings. Generally, a full version is given of each item, but portions are in some cases omitted for no good reason. Few letters of substance seem to have escaped George Lee's attention. Therefore, while the calendar cannot be relied on as a complete guide to the in-letters or as offering an exact rendering of each item, it is of sufficient quality to stand on its own. The period covered more or less coincides with Sir Robert Wilmot's tenure as Resident Secretary from June 1740 to June 1772, although the calendar starts only in September 1741, and stops short in May 1770.'

Three other points are worth noting. The calendar does record, by means of asterisks, where a cut has been made; also, the cuts are recorded in pencil on the originals of the letters calendared. The calendar does not cover any of the loose letters - only the bound ones. Finally, from the early to mid-1760s proportionately fewer letters are included in the calendar. This is possibly because the most important and frequent correspondent in this period was Waite, whom George Lee may have considered insufficiently important in his own right to shed lustre on Sir Robert. The basis of selection is sounder for the letters of the 1740s and 1750s.



The PRONI arrangement

The five volumes of calendar are obviously a complete and separate entity; what was not so obvious was whether PRONI should observe, in its photocopies, the distinction obtaining in the originals between bound and individual letters. Broadly speaking, the bound letters are more important in content than the individual letters, and the latter category contains all the formal documents in the collection (and all the documents prior to Wilmot's appointment as deputy Resident Secretary/Resident Secretary). However, the individual letters also contain all the out-letters from Wilmot that survive - both copies and the originals faithfully returned by Waite. Moreover, they include a fair proportion of the letters from Waite, and many other letters which might equally well have been bound. In the case of the originals, the distinction is unavoidable, for physical reasons: in the case of the photocopies it is not unavoidable, and should not be maintained unless it is meaningful, which clearly it is not. Strict chronological order is usually the simplest and best solution, and would seem to be particularly appropriate to an official archive of this kind, the users of which are likely to know what they are looking for and at what dates they are likely to find it.

The photocopies have, accordingly, been placed in strict chronological order and individually numbered. The only remaining area of imprecision is the already-mentioned matter of the undated documents with dates endorsed on them which have not come out on the photocopies.



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