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INTRODUCTION

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Abercorn Papers (D623)

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Summary



Abercorn Coat of Arms



The Abercorn Papers consist of c.29,300 individually numbered documents, 759 volumes, 88 bundles and 40 PRONI boxes 1219-1963. In default of individual numbering of the contents of these bundles and boxes, the best way of conveying an impression of the size of the archive is to say that it runs to 168 boxes, 9 yards of volumes too large to be accommodated in a box, and 6 map drawers of other outsize material.

Family history

The Abercorn family are the senior surviving branch of the Scottish House of Hamilton in the male line, the dukedom of Hamilton having passed through a female in the mid-seventeenth century. The direct male ancestor of the Abercorns was Lord Claud Hamilton, fourth son of James, 2nd Earl of Arran, Regent of Scotland during the minority of Queen Mary. He was created Duke of Chatelherault in the kingdom of France. Lord Claud was distinguished for his attachment to Mary Queen of Scots, and at an early age was appointed commendator of the abbey of Paisley. The extensive lands of this abbey were after the Reformation erected into a temporal lordship, and he was elevated to the peerage under the title of Lord Paisley. He had four sons, of whom James, the eldest, was created Baron of Abercorn, 1603, and in 1606 advanced to the dignity of Earl of Abercorn, Baron of Paisley, Hamilton, Mountcastle and Kilpatrick. The estate of Abercorn, from which this title is derived, is in Linlithgowshire.



*James Hamilton,
Earl of Arran, Duke of
Chatelherault*



James, Earl of Abercorn

The 1st Earl of Abercorn was one of the promoters of the Plantation of Ulster, and had a very great estate granted out of the escheated lands in Co. Tyrone. He died in 1618, and was succeeded by his son, James, who during his father's lifetime had been created a peer of Ireland in 1616, by the title of Baron of Strabane. James, the 2nd Earl, was a loyal supporter of Charles I. He was succeeded by his son George, 3rd Earl, at whose death, without issue, the title devolved upon Claud, grandson of Claud, 2nd Lord Strabane. Claud, 4th Earl, was outlawed for supporting James II, but his brother, on succeeding as 5th Earl, had the outlawry reversed. His kinsman, the 6th Earl, prior to succeeding to the earldom in 1701, was a colonel of regiment to James, but assisted in raising the siege of Londonderry for William.

The 7th Earl, who succeeded in 1734, was a fellow of the Royal Society, and wrote treatises on harmony and loadstones; his younger brother, the Hon. Charles Hamilton, was a noted horticulturist. The 8th Earl was a patron of the arts, a builder, and the consolidator of the family's property and influence. In 1745 he bought the Duddingston estate, outside Edinburgh, where Sir William Chambers built a mansion for him in the 1760s. At Paisley in Renfrewshire, the family's former property, which he re-acquired in 1764, he built the Place of Paisley and laid out a new town in the 1770s. His successor, the 9th Earl, created 1st Marquess in 1790, was another great patron of architects, a leader of fashion, a friend of Pitt the Younger (Prime Minister, 1783-1801 and 1804-1806), and the first considerable political figure in the family. His grandson, the 2nd

Marquess, created 1st Duke in 1868, was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland twice, 1866-1868 and 1874-1876. The 2nd Duke was a friend of Edward VII's and held various Household appointments, 1866-1901. The 3rd Duke was the first Governor of Northern Ireland, 1922-1945. The dukedom of Abercorn is Ulster's only dukedom, Ireland's second and Britain's second-last.



Title deeds and leases

The title deeds naturally reflect the complicated processes by which the family acquired, lost or sold, and sometimes re-acquired, their estates in various parts of the British Isles.

The Tyrone estate derived from Plantation grants, some of which survive in the archive, of four manors in the parishes of Ardstraw, Donaghedy, Leckpatrick, Camus and Urney, and in what came to be defined as the barony of Strabane Lower. The four manors were, from north to south: Donelong, Cloghogle, Strabane and Derrygoon/Derrywoon/Dirrywoon (where Baronscourt is situated). By the end of the seventeenth century, as a result of partitions effected in 1621 and 1633, only the manor of Strabane belonged to the then (5th) Earl of Abercorn; the others belonged to the cadet Hamiltons of Donelong, who had participated with their cousin, the 1st Earl, in the original Plantation, and one of whom, James Hamilton, succeeded as 6th Earl of Abercorn in 1701. As a supplement to their fee simple estate in Tyrone, the Abercorns held, during the eighteenth and the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, leasehold property under the see of Derry. This was part, later all, of the c.4,000 (Irish) acre churchland estate of Ardstraw, which lay between the manors of Strabane and Derrygoon and was geographically situated and shaped to round them off. In the period 1840-1880, the 1st Duke of Abercorn acquired all of it, first by lease, and subsequently by purchase from the Church Temporalities Commissioners.

The Donegal estate, across the River Foyle from the manor of Donelong, came in by a combination of marriage and purchase in the second half of the seventeenth century. It, too, belonged to the Hamiltons of Donelong. In 1660, Colonel James Hamilton married Elizabeth, daughter of the 1st Lord Colepeper. Although technically not an heiress, Elizabeth Hamilton's fortune was sufficiently large to enable her trustees to purchase, in 1677, the manors of Magavlin and Lismoghry, round St Johnstown, mainly in the parish of Taughboyne, and in the future barony of Raphoe North. In 1684, half of this estate was settled on her son by James Hamilton, another James, the future 6th Earl; and in 1709 the whole of it merged with the Abercorn estate on the death of Elizabeth Hamilton.

Among the Irish title deeds are c.30 dating from before 1660, c.50 from 1660 to 1700, and c.115 for the period 1700-1760. There are about 1,150 leases covering the period 1820-1934, of which some 550 relate to the Ardstraw churchlands, 1841-1867. Two isolated items, dated c.1668 and 1675, relate to Sir George Hamilton's claim to lands in the barony of Duhallow, Co. Cork, formerly belonging to Dermot McOwen Carthy. The best documented Abercorn property outside Tyrone and Donegal is the Dublin town house on the corner of York Street and Stephen's Green which was held by lease from the Dean and Chapter of St Patrick's, and was brought into the family through the 6th Earl's marriage in 1684. The seventeenth-century Irish title deeds also include 1670s-1680s references to silvermining in Tipperary, the Alnage of Ireland, and the Alnage of the city and county of York.

The earliest Scottish deeds are 14 charters and grants relating to the abbey of Paisley. These include: four papal bulls, 1219-1265, including a bull of Honorius III permitting the monks to elect an abbot. There is also a later transcript of a 1265 bull of Clement IV granting lands and privileges to the monastery, a charter of Robert III of 1404, and a photocopy of a 1553 bull of Julius III conferring the abbey 'in commendam' on Lord Claud Hamilton, later 1st Lord Paisley, the father of the 1st Earl of Abercorn. Although these texts are known and published from a 16th century cartulary in the National Library of Scotland (NLS Adv. 34.4.14), original documents relating to Scotland at this period are of great rarity. Further title deeds, 1557 and 1586-1655, document the changing ownership of the abbey, lands and mill of Paisley, down to their acquisition by the Cochrane family, Earls of Dundonald, in 1653. The remaining title deeds, of the period 1671-1766, mainly relate to the 8th Earl of Abercorn's re-acquisition of most of the estate by purchase from the 8th Earl of Dundonald in 1764. A bundle of case papers, correspondence and deeds, 1875-1876, documents a dispute over the right of presentation to the parish and parish church of Paisley.



Lord Paisley

In addition, there are 'tacks' or leases of premises in Paisley, thinly spread over the period 1611-1822, and leases concentrated on the period 1835-1950. A bundle of c.60 inventories, 1824-1833, of title deeds to premises in Paisley, gives particulars of the leases granted over time in respect of each particular holding, and constitutes a kind of unbound lease book for the estate.

The Duddingston title deeds and leases begin chronologically in 1655. There are: deeds and papers relating to minor interests in Duddingston acquired by the 8th Earl of Abercorn between 1756 and 1787; original and copy title deeds, etc, 1683-1926, relating to the future Abercorn estate in the parish of South Leith (Waterpans, Slackendrought, etc) adjoining Duddingston; deeds, copy deeds, correspondence, etc, 1696-1854, relating to the boundary between Brunstane and the area within the jurisdiction of the magistrates and town council of Musselburgh; and a considerable quantity of title deeds, leases, bonds, case papers, etc, 1696-1772, also relating to Brunstane, which the 8th Earl of Abercorn purchased in 1769 through a series of transactions recorded in this part of the archive. One previous owner of Brunstane was the Home family of Manderston, Berwickshire, Baronets; so the papers also relate to the general financial affairs and lawsuits of the Homes, and to their estates elsewhere, including Coldingham, Eyemonth, Lumsden, Westreston, etc, in Berwickshire. The main concentration of the Duddingston title deeds is however on the major purchases of the lands of Easter and Wester Duddingston made by the 8th Earl of Abercorn in 1747 and 1767 from the Lord Justice Clerk, Andrew Fletcher, Lord Milton, and from Archibald, 3rd Duke of Argyll. These constitute c.80 documents, dating from 1699.

The Duddingston leases mainly consist of: 'Political leases' of Easter and Wester Duddingston, 1765-1792, including annuities to members of the Abercorn family and to the Irish agent, James Hamilton of Strabane; leases, 1802-1936, of Piershill, with related papers; feu charters or leases, 1802-1818, of premises in Easter and Wester Duddingston, the Townparks, Portobello, Rabbithall, Abercorn Place, Hamilton Street, John Street, Melville Street, Pitt Street, etc; leases, 1803-1830, of premises in the East Links of Joppa; leases, 1805-1907, of Dickson's Park, alias Northfield, with related papers; leases, etc, of Meadowfield, 1811, 1822-1823, 1942 and 1954; and leases, etc, 1873-1960, of various parts of the Duddingston estate, mainly urban property in Edinburgh suburbs (Willowbrae Avenue, etc).

General deeds of settlement, trust, etc, mainly affecting both the Paisley and Duddingston estates, comprise: deeds and other papers, 1787-1792 and 1819-1823, relating respectively to the succession of the 1st Marquess of Abercorn in 1789 and of the 2nd Marquess (as a minor) in 1818; legal searches, 1827-1850, for encumbrances affecting the Scottish estates; and deeds of settlement, disentailing deeds, articles of association of the Abercorn Estates Company, etc, 1841-1971.

Brief mention has already been made of the history of the Abercorn estates in England. In 1720, the 7th Earl of Abercorn, who had married the daughter of a Hertfordshire landowner, bought the Witham Place estate in neighbouring Essex. The 8th Earl sold the house at Witham in the mid-1780s, and the 1st Marquess the rest of the Witham estate in the 1790s. The latter concentrated his resources on extending his own English property, The Priory, Stanmore, Middlesex. In 1852-1854, this was sold (for over £90,000) by his grandson, the 2nd Marquess, subsequently the 1st Duke, in order to pay off his debts and, it was said, after some deliberation over whether Baronscourt should be sold instead. Most of the title deed material relating to the Middlesex estate passed to the purchaser, Sir John Kelk, and is now Accession 502 in the Middlesex Records Branch of the Greater London Record Office. Of the English title deeds still present in the archive, the majority (some 40) relate to Hampden House, Green Street, London, 1729-1890; Hampden House became the town house of the Abercorn family in 1869. One deed of 1720 bears on the title to the Essex estate.



Irish estate papers

Some of the surveys, rentals and correspondence in the Abercorn Papers, when used in conjunction, provide the following picture of the extent and value of the Irish estates in Tyrone and Donegal, 1777-1832:

Manor	Irish acreage	Rental (1777-81)	Rental (1790 (1818)	Rental (1832)
Donelong	5,139	£3,588	£6,030	£4,417
Cloghogle	6,469	£3,464	£6,923	£4,726
Strabane	9,260	£4,340	£7,791	£5,823
Derrygoon	5,865	£2,506	£4,224	£3,190
Magavlin [and Lismoghry]	9,803	£5,811	£12,522	£8,760
TOTALS	36,536	£19,709	£37,490	£26,916

By 1868, at the time the dukedom of Abercorn was created, the rental had been restored to its 1818 level, standing at nearly £40,000 a year.

This was not simply a matter of restoration, because the estate as well as the rental fluctuated in the middle years of the nineteenth century, and a great deal of money was also spent on improving it. By the mid-1850s, the 1st Duke had spent nearly £30,000 buying churchlands and other property in the vicinity of Baronscourt, and at least £20,000 more on improving and planting them. During the financial crisis which beset him at that time, and which obliged him to sell The Priory, outlying townlands in his inherited fee simple estate in Tyrone and Donegal with a rental of over £2,000 a year were sold for £51,000. Both the composition and character of the estate changed greatly during this period: a point which needs to be borne in mind by users of the archive.

The most obvious feature of the extant estate papers is the presence of long and sometimes virtually unbroken runs of accounts of various kinds. These include: rentals for the two-century period 1777-1963; estate, demesne and home farm accounts, 1787-1966; household accounts, 1779-1963 (with many intermissions); and maps, surveys, plans and architectural drawings, c.1710-1959. Perhaps the most interesting component of the household accounts are building accounts for the 8th Earl's Baronscourt, 1779-1784; for the 1st Marquess's Baronscourt (which cost at least £14,500, enjoyed short-lived glory as one of Ireland's most important neo-classical houses, and lost all its most distinctive features in a fire of 1796), 1791-1800; and for the Baronscourt which Sir Albert Richardson reconstructed for the 3rd Duke in the decade 1940-1950, after yet

another fire. The plans and architectural drawings relate to out-buildings (notably the stable-block of 1889), demesne cottages and gardens, rather than to Baronscourt itself. The garden plans include a beautifully drawn overall scheme, with lettering characteristic of the Richard and W.V. Morrison office, c.1839. The gardens were made still more ornate in 1876, when the 1st Duke commissioned the Dublin landscape-gardener, Ninian Niven, to extend the layout on the south front. The estate maps contain the usual element of adapted Ordnance Survey and Valuation material. But earlier, MS. and special-purpose Abercorn maps include: 25 of the Donegal estate, by Archibald Stewart, 1718; a set of 5 coloured maps of 25 townlands in the manor of Cloghogle, Co. Tyrone, c.1720-1750; a set of 8 coloured maps for part of the manor of Derrygoon, Co. Tyrone, c.1720-1750; a volume of 95 maps of the manors of Cloghogle and Donelong, Co. Tyrone, 1756; a volume of 91 maps of the entire Abercorn estate, Co. Tyrone, 1777, and Co. Donegal, 1781; and a volume of 34 maps of the manor of Strabane, Co. Tyrone, 1806. There are also: a coloured map, by Thomas Newell, of the town of Ballymagorry, Co. Tyrone, c.1710; certified copies of Petty's Down Survey maps for the parishes of Leckpatrick and Donaghedy, Co. Tyrone, c.1720; valuation surveys of the manors of Strabane and Derrygoon, Co. Tyrone, 1756; a map, by Matthew Hood, of Baronscourt Park in 1800 showing the progress of tree planting in the period before and after 1798; and a map by Hood showing the various parts of the Tyrone and Donegal estates, 1804.

The Famine marked a watershed in estate policy for the Abercorn estate. As leases fell in many townlands, especially in the churchlands and in Derrygoon, were planted with timber, and there is a report on the condition of the plantations in 1886. Sales of timber processed in the estate saw mill are recorded from 1900 to 1964. The development of the home farm pre-dated the Famine, but the surviving herd-books and registers of pedigree stock date only from the 1890s, with detailed reports and valuations of crops and stock for the early 1920s. Other post-Famine developments, notably the Land Acts of 1870-1903, are reflected in sets of land purchase account books, 1887; judicial rent books (which distinguish between rents arranged in court and those arranged out of court), 1898; and volumes recording renewals of leases from 1775 to 1925, and tenant right sales, c.1880.

As landlordism receded, the emphasis of estate management shifted to direct farming. This shift is documented in the already-mentioned demesne and home farm accounts, which become more profuse in quantity and diverse in character from the second half of the 1880s; between 1886 and 1964, for example, there are nearly 200 volumes and bundles of accounts relating to sales of timber, flowers, livestock, poultry, eggs and milk. The 'personnel' side of direct farming is documented in the reports on the demesne cottages and their tenants, 1863-1948; in the wages books, c.1903-c.1955, with their references to health and unemployment insurance; and also in the day books, 1877-1882 and 1902-1912, and estate diaries, 1949-1963. Further illustrations of the march of progress are provided by papers on the Baronscourt-Newtownstewart telephone line, 1890-1911, and many more on the installation of an electricity generator in 1908. One unusual feature is the run of weather records, 1892-1898 and 1920-1957 (a resumption of the meteorological reports made for the 1st Marquess in the 1790s). However, the

Abercorn Irish estate papers as a whole are unusual in that they record, not only the process of land purchase (which almost all similar archives do), but also the much more rarely documented transition from the Great Estate to the Estates Company.



Irish estate and related correspondence

The first phase of the Irish estate correspondence, covering much of the eighteenth century and a little beyond, takes the form of correspondence between the agents in Tyrone, Donegal and Dublin, and successive Lords Abercorn, 1736-1818. There are a few Irish agents' letters to the 1st Duke, 1841-1879. For the period from the mid-1890s to the 1960s, the correspondence is much fuller, but it is from and to the agents, and seldom involves the Dukes of Abercorn themselves. Up to 1790, the agents' letters to the Abercorns include letters about politics and patronage from a variety of landowners, neighbours and protégés who were not Abercorn agents. From 1790, the letters from the agents are separately filed. Between 1745 and 1817 there is, in addition, a fine run of copy outward letters from the Abercorns. As with the inward letters, pre-1790 outward letters to agents (in Great Britain as well as Ireland) are mixed with letters to other 'locals' and non-locals; but in the case of the outward letters, this mixed arrangement continues beyond 1790, and to the end of the series. In total, the Irish estate correspondence amounts to some 12,500 letters, inward and outward.

Its first and most important phase principally involves two members and generations of the family: James, 8th Earl of Abercorn (1712-1789), and his nephew and successor, John James, 9th Earl and 1st Marquess (1756-1818). Because both these Lords Abercorn were mainly absentee, living in or near London and visiting Baronscourt only at intervals, the correspondence constitutes a detailed record of estate management over a period of some eighty years. Both Lords Abercorn, though absentees, were knowledgeable landlords, whose correspondence reveals a sympathetic, practical and flexible approach to the problems of estate administration. The Irish estate correspondence of the 8th Earl and 1st Marquess - more strikingly, perhaps, than any other source - demonstrates the importance of the contribution of the landlord to eighteenth-century Irish life. The letters also tell us much about society in north-west Ulster and how it was evolving in the second half of the eighteenth and the early-nineteenth centuries, when population increase began to press harder on the already well-exploited resources of the linen industry and farming.

In an age when proprietorship of land and political influence were virtually inseparable, it is inevitable that politics, too, should feature in the agents' letters. In the period between the 1730s and the 1760s, the main political concern is the two parliamentary boroughs on the estate, St Johnstown, Co. Donegal, and Strabane, Co. Tyrone. The few letters to the 7th Earl of Abercorn, written in his father's lifetime when the 7th Earl was styled by courtesy Lord Paisley, relate to his candidature for a vacant burgess-ship, or seat on the corporation, of St Johnstown, August-November 1735. The Abercorn family had hitherto been the patrons of St Johnstown and enjoyed virtual control over the return of its two members to the Irish parliament; in this period their control was broken, never, as it turned out, to be recovered. Some letters of this period to Lord Paisley's son, the Hon. James Hamilton, afterwards 8th Earl of Abercorn, relate to a similar theme: disputes over the composition of the Strabane corporation, and Hamilton's attempt to be elected to parliament for that borough, 1732-1733. At about this time, the Abercorn family's

control of Strabane, which had been shaky for many years, was also overthrown, but this time only temporarily, thanks to the determined efforts made by the 8th Earl over the next thirty years to regain it. In 1764, after using every legal means in his power and also resorting to the power of the purse, he was at last successful. Thereafter, Strabane ceases to loom so large in the agents' letters, although members of parliament have still to be returned and vacancies in the corporation have still to be filled. Later in the century, the borough of Augher, Co. Tyrone, which the 1st Marquess of Abercorn purchased in 1790 and was anxious to sell by 1797, features fairly prominently in the agents' letters, as does the compensation money which Abercorn was paid, for both Augher and Strabane, when they were disfranchised under the terms of the Act of Union in 1800.

The constituency politics of Cos Tyrone and Donegal are also well documented. Between 1761 and the death of the 8th Earl in 1789, there are a few canvassing letters at the time of each general election or by-election, with a certain amount of comment on the registering of freeholders in-between times, although there is no great volume of electioneering correspondence, except for the Co. Tyrone general election of 1768. This pattern changes with the succession of the 1st Marquess of Abercorn, who was as obsessed with politics as his uncle had been indifferent to them. From 1789 onwards, therefore, registering of freeholders, canvassing, contests and polls became almost the staple of the agents' letters, and this continues into the early nineteenth century, by which time it was clear that the 1st Marquess's attempts to capture a seat for Donegal had fallen fairly flat, and that even in Co. Tyrone, where his main strength lay and where he ought to have been irresistible, the achievement was by no means commensurate with the effort involved. Perhaps the most striking election material in the agents' letters of this period are the blow-by-blow accounts of the Co. Donegal general election of 1807, and the by-election which followed soon afterwards in 1808.

General politics, as well as constituency politics and estate management, are also documented. This is particularly so among the agents' letters of the 8th Earl's time, which include: letters from his members for Strabane discussing current political issues; one letter from the British Prime Minister, the 3rd Duke of Grafton, in 1769, requesting the 8th Earl's support for the 'Augmentation' (of the proportion of the British army paid for out of the Irish Revenue); and an original bundle of letters from the 8th Earl's fellow-absentees, the Duke of Devonshire, Lords Rockingham, Bessborough, etc, over the proposed Irish Absentee Tax of 1773, which was defeated by this powerful English pressure group. (This last correspondence is by no means unique, as all the absentee proprietors were circularised with the same letters.)

One of the 8th Earl's most regular correspondents, agents apart, is his kinsman, Arthur Pomeroy, afterwards 1st Viscount Harberton, the father of Henry Pomeroy, one of the MPs for Strabane; the subject-matter of Arthur Pomeroy's letters varies from accounts of lobbying the Lords Justices on the 8th Earl's behalf in the late 1750s to accounts of the proceedings of the National Convention of the Volunteers in 1783. Another similar correspondent is William Brownlow of Lurgan, MP for Co. Armagh, a kinsman of the 8th

Earl, for whom the latter provided a seat in 1768 in case Brownlow should fail to be re-elected for Co. Armagh.

Other, non-political, correspondents include: the celebrated Frederick Hervey, Bishop of Derry and later 4th Earl of Bristol, who endeavours to interest the 8th Earl in schemes for bridges across the Foyle at Derry, 1768; Davis Ducart/Dukart, the Sardinian engineer and architect, who comment scathingly on the over-remuneration of James Brindley for his work on the Bridgewater Canal, 1768; and George Steuart of Upper Harley Street, London, the Scottish architect whom the 8th Earl employed to build him a new Baronscourt and whose letters on that subject begin in 1779. In the Irish estate correspondence of the 1st Marquess's time, the equivalents of Dukart and Steuart are John Whally, the engineer employed in the 1790s on the Strabane Canal (about which there are many letters and papers), and the 1st Marquess's favourite architect, John Soane.

From the death of the 1st Marquess in 1818, the character of the Irish estate correspondence is much less varied and the quantity much reduced. There is virtually none during the period of the 1st Duke's minority. Some fascinating letters survive on the subject of the remodelling of Baronscourt by Sir Richard and William Vitruvius Morrison in the decade 1829-1839; but this is the result of a subsequent accident, the bankruptcy of one James Pettigrew, the Dublin contractor who had carried out the work, and who wrote hard-luck-story letters to the 1st Duke years later, in the 1870s. For the most part, the 1st Duke's surviving estate and business correspondence concerns overall family finance rather than detailed estate management; with total debts of over £340,500 by 1850, on an annual income from all his estates of only £41,500, his finances were obviously a matter of paramount concern. Thus, evidence of the quality of Major Humphrey's conduct of the day-to-day running of the estate must be sought in the rentals and accounts, for no more than c.100 letters from him to the 1st Duke survive.

In 1894, eight years after the 1st Duke's death, estate correspondence similar to, but more detailed than, that of the period 1736-1818, reappears, and continues up to the 1960s. This, however, is the correspondence of the agent and the Estate Office/Company, rather than that of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Dukes. For the period 1894-1934, in particular, a run of five 'Office letter-books' is extant. From c.1930, the 4th (and late) Duke, then Marquess of Hamilton, assumed most of the overall responsibility for the running of the estate, because the 3rd Duke was necessarily resident at Government House, Hillsborough, for much of the time. Nearly all of the 4th Duke's papers are still at Baronscourt.



Scottish papers (other than title deeds)

The Abercorn family are associated with Scotland by ancestry, peerage and property. The ancestral aspect has already been touched upon. The 8th Earl was the only nobleman, not of the blood royal, who held titles in the three peerages of England, Scotland and Ireland. The Abercorn property in Scotland consisted of the estates of Duddington, in the old Edinburghshire/modern Midlothian, and Paisley, Refrewshire, acquired by the 8th Earl in 1747 and 1764 respectively. Paisley cost c.£38,000. Duddington, which cost over £20,000, was the more considerable estate of the two, partly because its salt and coal deposits and proximity to Edinburgh inflated its value; and in 1767 the 8th Earl added to it (at a further cost of c.£14,000) the adjoining barony of Brunstane. In 1789 the Duddington (and Brunstane) rental was over £3,000 a year, and this rose rapidly to £7,300 in 1809. In 1834, the Duddington and Paisley rentals were £7,800 and £3,000 respectively; and these relativities obtained until part of Duddington was sold in the early 1870s. It was valued at this time at £225,000, as compared to the c.£90,000 for which The Priory had sold in the 1850s. The Abercorn family were at all stages in their history greater Scottish than English landowners; and the arrangement of the Abercorn Papers has taken account of this fact by placing Scottish material next after Irish.

The family's associations with Scotland also embrace two distinguished Scots, Sir William Chambers and Sir Walter Scott. Chambers built Duddington House for the 8th Earl in the years 1763-1768 at a cost of over £30,000 (and also worked on his London house in Grosvenor Square in 1763), and 16 letters from him to the 8th Earl survive to document the Scottish commission. (There are also subsequent inventories of Duddington, 1803, and photographs of it, 1912) Sir Walter Scott was the son and namesake of the 8th Earl's Scottish 'factor', or agent; and Sir Walter's elder brother, Thomas, succeeded their father in the 1st Marquess's agency until superseded for incompetence and worse in 1807. Sir Walter conducted a courtly-love relationship with Lady Abercorn, the 1st Marquess's third wife, and dedicated both his edition of Swift and *The Lady of the Lake* to the 1st Marquess himself. Unfortunately, the 53 surviving letters from Sir Walter to the 1st Marquess reflect his business, not his romantic and literary, connection with the family, and relate solely to the misdeeds of Thomas Scott, 1805-1808. There is, however, among the Abercorn Papers a volume of near-contemporary copies of 89 letters from Scott to Lady Abercorn, two of which do not exist in the original elsewhere.

The Chambers and Scott letters form a tiny part of a whole run of business letters to the 8th Earl and 1st Marquess from Scottish agents and employees, 1745-1817. There is also an original bundle of Duddington estate letters, 1777 and 1790-1795, mainly about Brunstane mill, bridge, deerpark and plantings of timber, and about Liberton school and schoolmaster. From 1818 to 1832, this series continues with letters to the 4th Earl of Aberdeen, step-father and guardian of the 2nd Marquess, later 1st Duke, of Abercorn during the latter's minority. There is a short and interrupted run of replies from the 1st Marquess to the Scottish agents, 1799-1809, the rest of the 8th Earl's and

1st Marquess's Scottish out-letters being in the general out-letter series. The papers of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Dukes include Scottish agents' letters, 1850-1939.

The other Scottish estate material, in addition to the title deed material already mentioned, includes: a folio volume containing a c.1820 copy of the 'Rentals of the property belonging to the monastery of Paisley', 1460-1550, printed in J. Cameron Lees, *The Abbey of Paisley* (Paisley 1878), appendix L, but from the original in the National Library of Scotland (Advocates MS 15.1.17), and not from the 19th century copy: Paisley rentals, 1754 and 1764-1765; accounts, etc, relating to the estate, feu duties and stipend of Paisley, 1771-1916 and 1957; a broken run of Paisley and Duddingston rentals and rent accounts, 1777-1893; an original bundle of rentals, accounts, vouchers, etc, relating to the stipend of Duddingston, 1792-1797; a series of outsize Duddingston ledgers, 1918-1955; c.50 inventories and schedules of deeds, c.1670-1950, mostly arranged according to estate or denomination, and including descriptions of many deeds no longer present in the archive; an 'Inventory of furniture in Duddingston House, 25 June 1790'; valuation and survey reports, 1752-1884; a map of the toll bar junction on the Duddingston-Leith-Haddington road, c.1770; a plan of the 8th Earl's New Town of Paisley, 1789; 5 plans for a church, three of them coloured elevations signed by R.N. [?Irwin], November 1802; a plan of 'Seams of coal on the march between Duddingston and Niddrie', 1812; 2 plans for alterations to Duddingston flour mills, 1836; and c.150 maps, plans, surveys and valuations, c.1850-1950, many of them printed portions of OS maps with coloured MS markings, and many of them small and flimsy tracings of particular denominations in Duddingston and Paisley. Included among the maps, plans, etc of c.1850-1950 are a couple of legal case papers giving valuation particulars, a plan of the whole Duddingston estate as it stood in 1860, and an outsize folder containing a map of 'Paisley farms', taken from the appropriate OS sheet for Renfrewshire. Other more miscellaneous items are: memorandum books of the 1st Marquess concerning Duddingston, 1802, and the misdeeds of Thomas Scott, 1805; and a game-book and other papers about the 1st Duke's shoot at Ardverikie, Inverness, 1835-1873.

The 8th Earl was a figure of some significance in Scottish political and administrative history, and his papers to some extent reflect that fact. He wielded a limited amount of electoral influence in Midlothian and Renfrewshire, sat as a Scottish representative peer, 1761-1787, and during the 1780s belonged to the small but coherent group which managed Scottish business in the Upper House. His advancement to the British viscountcy of Hamilton in 1786, with remainder to his nephew and heir, owed a good deal to his own services and standing in Scottish public life, as well as to the future 1st Marquess's association with Pitt. Having succeeded to an hereditary seat in the House of Lords, the 1st Marquess was never more than a voter in representative peerage elections. He also seems to have been jealous of and hostile to Pitt's manager of Scottish affairs, Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville. They only became reconciled at the end of Dundas's reign as 'Henry IX', in 1805, when Dundas's ward, the 4th Earl of Aberdeen, married one of the 1st Marquess's daughters.

Prominent among the Scottish political and administrative material is a notebook [kept by the 8th Earl?] containing reports of cases in the House of Lords, 1762. There are also two original bundles of letters to the 8th Earl, the first concerning local Scottish affairs (enclosures, presentments and the Renfrewshire election of 1773, including a letter about the last from Henry Dundas), 1763-1764 and 1772-1773. The second original bundle consists of letters to the 8th Earl from Lords Dumfries, Breadalbane, Marchmont, Cassillis, Stormont and Tweeddale about the Scottish representative peerage election, March-May 1784. The 8th Earl's and 1st Marquess's out-letters also contain frequent references to this and other representative peerage elections, particularly that of 1806, when the 1st Marquess seconded Dundas's successful attempt to have Lord Aberdeen returned in opposition to the wishes of the then government. Interestingly, the few papers of the 4th Duke present in the Abercorn Papers in PRONI include documentation of the last Scottish representative peerage election of all, that of 1959; the representative peerage system was soon afterwards abolished by the Peerage Act of 1963.



English estate papers (other than title deeds)

The Abercorn family were never extensive English landowners. The Priory estate, for example, which was probably the largest English property they ever owned, produced a mere £2,750 a year in 1840; and in 1797 the 1st Marquess had described The Priory as 'a large house, [run] at great expense, without what deserves the name of property around it'. Yet, from at least the late seventeenth century, when the 5th Earl was in possession of a property in Oxfordshire, the Abercorns were never without an English base. Indeed, during the period 1868-1918 three of the 1st Duke's sons sat in parliament for English constituencies.

The 7th and 8th Earls maintained town houses, first in Cavendish Square and then (by 1763) in Grosvenor Square, as well as Witham Place, to which the 8th Earl added a wing in the 1740s. The 1st Marquess sold Witham, but retained his uncle's town house, and greatly extended his own house and estate at Stanmore. Ironically, the proximate reason for the 1st Duke's having to sell The Priory in 1852-1854, was an over-ambitious attempt to extend his English base by spending nearly £100,000 (which he did not possess) on buying the estate of Dale Park, near Arundel, Sussex. Both before and after the sale of The Priory, the 1st Duke kept up a succession of London town houses: Dudley House (Park Lane), Chesterfield House (Audley Street) and, from 1869, the house which the Abercorn family were to retain until the First World War and which they were to make famous, Hampden House (Green Street).

Among the English estate and business papers, accounts of various kinds predominate, starting in the 1780s. The most important of these are accounts and estimates, together with related letters, from John Soane for his work on The Priory and the house in Grosvenor Square (and also Baronscourt), 1786-1802. These show, among other things, that between 1788 and 1794 the 1st Marquess spent nearly £20,500 on alterations and extensions to The Priory alone; subsequent accounts, not with Soane, reveal a further expenditure of £13,000 in 1812-1813, among other things on the construction of a library (and this leaves out of the reckoning the cost of the theatre, and of two wings added by William Wilkins in 1809). Soane's accounts for 1786-1802 also refer to other English properties of which mention should be made, Lansdowne House, Bath, and further London houses in Park Street and Beaumont Street. Lansdowne House, Bath, had belonged to the Hon. Charles Hamilton, a younger brother of the 7th Earl, and was left by him to the 8th Earl in 1786; Park Street was the 1st Marquess's town house prior to 1789 and his succession to the Abercorn honours and estates; and Beaumont Street was the house in which, in the late 1790s, he ensconced his longest-lasting mistress, Frances Hawkins/Maguire, of whom Lawrence painted an infamous portrait for him in 1805. (The financial provision made by the 1st Marquess for Mrs Hawkins and her two sons by him is the subject of a small sub-section of the Irish title-deed material.)

Other English accounts include: London and Priory tradesmen's accounts, 1801-1866, including accounts for the town house of Viscount Hamilton, the 1st Marquess's short-lived elder son and the father of the 1st Duke, 1813-1814; household and stable accounts for The Priory, Grosvenor Square, Dudley House, Chesterfield House and Hampden House, 1789-1878; London bank accounts, mainly with Coutts, with some accompanying letters, 1795-1906; estate rentals and accounts for The Priory, with accompanying letters from the 1st Marquess's steward, John Laing, 1813-1860; sale particulars for The Priory and Dale Park, 1849-1860; and Hampden House inventories, 1869-1915.

Correspondence about English estate and business affairs is varied and scrappy. The 8th Earl's correspondence of this nature is largely composed of letters from his younger brothers, Capt. John and Rev. George Hamilton, and other (mostly poor) relations about jobs and money, 1745-1788. There are a few references in his and the 1st Marquess's 'English letters' to the sale of Witham, but the latter naturally relate mainly to The Priory. They include correspondence about purchases and swaps of land to augment that estate, 1790s; a letter of 1792 from Uvedale Price mentioning landscape gardening and Humphry Repton (the rest of Price's letters were removed by 'Lord Aberdeen' and are now among the Aberdeen Papers in the British Library – PRONI, T3472/1); and correspondence about the 1st Marquess's Harrow Yeomanry Corps, 1797-1805. There is also material in both the 1st Marquess's and the 1st Duke's papers about nearby Harrow School, of which both were old boys and governors, c.1770-1834. The 1st Duke's correspondence includes sections about Priory estate affairs, 1841-1858, the sale of The Priory and the purchase and sale of Dale Park, 1849-1860, the renovation of Chesterfield House (including one letter from the architect, William Burn), 1850-1852, and the acquisition of Hampden House, 1869.

The more miscellaneous English estate and business letters include correspondence of the early 1790s concerning the estate and advowson of Sprotborough, Yorkshire, which belonged to the Copley family of Sprotborough – the family of the 1st Marquess's first wife; early nineteenth-century correspondence about the financial affairs of the family of his half-brother, Edward Eliot of Port Eliot, Cornwall, and about the renting of a house at Stokelake, Devon; occasionally hilarious correspondence about the 1st Marquess's boxes at Covent Garden and other London theatres, 1790s; letters of 1791 about the purchase in Rome, by the 1st Marquess's well-known kinsman, Sir William Hamilton, of 'the Abercorn Parmigiano' (which the 1st Marquess sold in 1809); references in 1805 and 1813 to Lawrence's portraits of Mrs Hawkins and the 1st Marquess; and correspondence of the 1st Duke about the purchase of works of art for him on the Continent in 1835-1840. The correspondence of the 2nd and 3rd Dukes also contains references to the contents, or erstwhile contents, of Hampden House, 1886-1906 and 1919-1934. At least one Abercorn painting is now in the Frick Collection in New York.



Miscellaneous, mainly seventeenth-century, family papers

The seventeenth-century history of the Abercorn family has been briefly outlined. The surviving seventeenth-century family papers include: a King's letter from Charles I to Lord Deputy Falkland, concerning a quarrel between the 2nd Earl of Abercorn and Lord Antrim, 1628; two letters to the 2nd Earl of Abercorn (apparently in hiding from his creditors) from his sister, Lady Lucy Hamilton, 1650 and 1657; a commission signed by Charles II making James Hamilton of Donelong a colonel (just before Hamilton's death), 1673; two King's letters from Charles II, one concerning the estate of the 3rd Earl of Abercorn's grandfather, Charles Fagan, 1687; two statements by Colonel George Hamilton [a younger brother of the 6th Earl of Abercorn] concerning regimental and recruiting problems, 1694 and N.D.; and receipts from Katherine, Dowager Countess of Abercorn [widow of the 5th Earl], 1704 and 1722.



Correspondence and papers of the 6th Earl of Abercorn

Sir James Hamilton, grandson of Sir George Hamilton of Donelong, became, as already stated, 6th Earl of Abercorn, as last male heir of Claud, 1st Lord Strabane. He was an eccentric figure, both personally and politically. He was, among other noteworthy things, a prominent Tory supporter of the administration of Queen Anne's last Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Duke of Shrewsbury, 1713-1714, one of the projectors of the scheme for a national bank, or Bank of Ireland, which came to naught in the early 1720s, and one of the financiers and founders of the colony of Georgia in 1733.

The few items of his correspondence which survive include a report, addressed to him in 1700, just before his succession to the title, by his agent at Strabane, on a recent textile exhibition held in a large apartment in the town hall there. Of the same period are a letter from Elizabeth Hamilton, the 6th Earl's mother, 1701, a letter from [General] Gustavus Hamilton, [later 1st Viscount Boyne], about the lack of recognition of his military services, 1701[2?], and a Co. Tyrone presentment list, 1702. Another small group of the 6th Earl's papers relates to the terms and consequences of the settlement made on the marriage of his son, Lord Paisley, afterwards 7th Earl, to Ann Plumer of Blakesware, Hertfordshire, 1711, and to the 6th Earl's ensuing quarrel with Lord Paisley and proceedings against him, 1713-1717. The 6th Earl's papers now, though not originally, contain a small volume (formerly a Phillips MS., and acquired by the 4th Duke of Abercorn) containing the originals of letters from the 6th Earl to Edward Southwell, Secretary of State in Ireland, 1713-1714; these concern the famous disputed election for Dublin City, the opposition of the Brodrick family to the Duke of Shrewsbury, etc, with some references to elections in Cos Tyrone and Donegal, and Strabane borough.



Correspondence and papers of the Hon. Charles Hamilton

The Hon. Charles Hamilton, a younger brother of the 7th Earl of Abercorn, owned the already-mentioned Lansdowne House, Bath (for which a complete inventory of 1786 survives). His chief claim to fame, however, is another house – Painshill, Cobham, Surrey – whose grounds he began to re-model with celebrated effect from 1738 onwards. In the first half of the 1760s, he dotted them with a widely diversified series of follies, some erected as ruins but many erected as fine buildings, the beauty of which was to be admired as much as their setting. Among these were a mediaeval castle, a Gothic pavilion, a Turkish tent, a Hermitage and a Temple of Bacchus, the last almost certainly the work of Robert Adam. A surviving account book for the period 1760-1773, apparently relating to Painshill, may throw more light on these operations. Charles Hamilton was a noted horticulturist, and his papers include correspondence with the Abbé Nolin on this subject, 1755. They also include papers on the less agreeable subject of his accounts while Receiver General of the Revenues of Minorca, 1743-1757.



Papers and correspondence of Capt. the Hon. John Hamilton, R.N., his widow and their son, John James, the future 1st Marquess of Abercorn



The Hon. John Hamilton

Capt. John Hamilton is perhaps best known as a protégé of Lord Anson, the celebrated circumnavigator, and as the subject of an early Reynolds portrait, painted in 1746, which can reasonably be regarded as having put that painter on the map. Hamilton was born in 1715 and was 'bred to the sea service'. Between 1737 and 1740, he served in Guinea and the West Indies. He was promoted captain and received his first command in 1741, and was constantly employed, mainly in convoy duties, in home waters and the Mediterranean throughout the War of the Austrian Succession. During this period, in 1745, he carried out pioneering investigations into the condition of the French and Spanish prisoners of war held in Plymouth and Kinsale. In 1749, he married Harriet Craggs/Eliot, natural daughter of the Rt Hon. James Craggs (d.1721) and widow of Richard Eliot of Port Eliot, Cornwall, Auditor and Receiver General to the Prince of Wales (d.1748). Between 1751 and 1755 Hamilton was on half pay, living for the most part in Essex. On the outbreak of the Seven Years War, he was put in command of 'The Lancaster' which, having been prevented by bad weather from joining Admiral Byng's abortive expedition to Minorca, sank off Spithead in November 1755, with the loss of the lives of Hamilton and the greater part of his crew. His widow survived him by more than thirteen years, dying in 1769.

Hamilton's few surviving papers include copies of correspondence between the Admiralty and him about their alleged hard usage of him, 1738; and correspondence concerning his death and will, 1755-1756. His wife's papers include letters to her from members of the Eliot family, as well as from Hamilton himself, pre-1749-1755. Also present in this section are numerous poems written by the Hamiltons and others, 1730s-1750s; letters from the 8th Earl of Abercorn to the widowed Mrs Hamilton about money and family matters, 1756-1758; and one letter dated 1767 from the 8th Earl to his nephew and successor, John James Hamilton, at Harrow.



Political correspondence of the 1st Marquess of Abercorn

Most of the 1st Marquess's correspondence can broadly speaking be termed 'political', because he was a very politically minded man, in whose life and letters politics played a major part. However, the political correspondence covered by this section of the papers excludes all the local election material which crops up among the letters to him from his Irish agents, one of whom, James Galbraith, was not only an agent but one of the 1st Marquess's MPs in the Irish parliament.

The 1st Marquess was born in 1756, and died in 1818. He succeeded as 9th Earl of Abercorn in 1789, and was advanced to the British marquessate of Abercorn in the following year. He owed his swift promotion to his personal and political friendship with Pitt, of whom he had been a contemporary at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and with whom he was connected, by marriage, through his half-brother, Edward Eliot of Port Eliot. Before his succession to the earldom, he had sat in the British House of Commons, where he had been prominent in support of Pitt in the early and shaky days of his first ministry; his debut as a back-bencher at Westminster, which he made in December 1783, exactly coincided with Pitt's as Prime Minister. Even at this stage in his career, the 1st Marquess had enough money at his command to purchase The Priory, which (as has been seen) was near his old school, Harrow. This he made his principal residence throughout his life. However, notwithstanding the partial destruction of Baronscourt in 1796, he usually spent part of the year there – at least up to the last decade of his life. He was married three times, his second and third marriages (to Lady Cecil Hamilton and Lady Anne Hatton respectively) provoking even more tittle-tattle than his extra-marital amours with Mrs Hawkins and her predecessors. This 'Court and personal' aspect of his career is covered, in unnecessary detail, in an unpublished 'life' written by his descendant, Mary Baillie-Hamilton in c.1904; one typescript of this work is at Baronscourt, and another (the author's own copy) in PRONI (D2152/2). Shorter, but similar, treatment is meted out to the 1st Marquess by his great-grandson, Lord Ernest Hamilton, in *Old Days and New* (London, c.1920), pp. 23-42.

The 1st Marquess's principal 'political' correspondents do not include Pitt or British politicians in general, except those who held office in Dublin Castle: the Lords Lieutenant, Westmorland, Camden, Cornwallis, Hardwicke, Richmond and Whitworth, and the Chief Secretaries, Hobart and Castlereagh. More prominent than any of these, however, are three Irishmen, the Hon. Thomas and the Hon. George Knox, sons of the 1st Viscount Northland, and John Stewart of Athenree, Co. Tyrone. Lord Northland's estate, like most of the Abercorn, lay in Co. Tyrone. His seat was Northland Park, Dungannon, and he was the patron of the parliamentary borough of Dungannon, which George Knox represented in the Irish parliament. Thomas Knox, the eldest brother, MP for Co. Tyrone, 1790-1797 and 1806-1812, was in effect the political manager of the 1st Marquess's following in the Irish parliament, until they quarrelled irreparably in 1794. George Knox's, and indeed Lord Northland's, relations with the 1st Marquess were not affected by this quarrel. But it was ultimately not George Knox but John Stewart who succeeded to the unofficial role of the Abercorn political manager. Stewart sat for

various boroughs in the Irish parliament, and represented Co. Tyrone at Westminster, 1802-1806 and 1812-1825. He was Irish Solicitor-General, 1798-1799, and Attorney-General, 1799-1803, and was created a baronet on his retirement from office in the latter year.

The correspondence covers the period 1789-1818, but is densest during the period 1789-1807. The earliest letters relate to the 1st Marquess's anxiety to exploit the political potential of the estates in Cos Tyrone and Donegal which he had recently inherited, and to build up a following in the Irish parliament, for example by means of the purchase of the parliamentary borough of Augher, Co. Tyrone, which took place in 1790. Up to 1793, at least, he was constantly on the look-out for boroughs for sale, or for unconnected members of parliament who might be prevailed upon to enlist under his standard. Another constituency which he eyed jealously was Dublin University, of which he hoped to be elected Chancellor, and for which George Knox was elected MP in 1797.

It is symptomatic of the 1st Marquess's roving political eye and far-flung ambitions that in 1791 he got Thomas Knox to produce for him a list, with comments, of the members of the Irish House of Commons and a sketch of the leading political 'interests' in Ireland (published by E.M. Johnston in the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. 59. Sec. C. No. 1. 1957). This document was intended to form a basis for discussions with Pitt at The Priory. Although there are some forty so-called 'lists' of the Irish parliament for the period 1769-1800, this is the only surviving one which was compiled for an Irish political magnate, and one of the few that was not compiled for Dublin Castle.

Between 1791 and 1795, although local politics and electioneering continue to be prominent themes of the 1st Marquess's political correspondence, the emphasis shifts to Catholic Relief and Catholic Emancipation, which the Knoxes and he supported but not without reservation and an eye to the main chance. There is much unfavourable comment about the alleged clique of Ultra-Protestants who dominated Dublin Castle at this time, and whose efforts were powerless to frustrate the substantial concessions to the Irish Catholics contained in the Catholic Relief Act of 1793. At the close of 1792, an interesting negotiation is opened between the 1st Marquess and the delegates from the Irish Catholic Committee sent to London to present the Catholics' petition to the King. After the passing of the Militia Act of 1793, the Co. Tyrone Militia becomes a major topic of correspondence – and of 'political' correspondence, because the 1st Marquess's association with the regiment was not as apolitical as he liked to claim. He was its figurehead commander, until he resigned in 1800, and Thomas Knox was its Lt-Colonel, or effective commander, until the quarrel of 1794, when he was succeeded by Nathaniel Montgomery Moore of Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone. Inevitably, Co. Tyrone politics become intertwined with the discussion of the organisation and establishment of the Co. Tyrone Militia.

From 1795 to 1800, the correspondence is dominated, though not to the exclusion of militia and electioneering matters, by the saga of the 1st Marquess's complex relations with the Fitzwilliam, Camden and Cornwallis administrations. Sometimes the pivot on which these relations turned were matters of patronage, the deanery of Raphoe in 1795

and the bishopric of Clogher in that year and again in 1797, but sometimes it was the major political issues of the day - Catholic Emancipation in 1795, the Abercromby crisis in 1798, and the Union in 1798-1800. A subsidiary topic at the time of the Union is the compensation money payable for the disfranchised boroughs of Augher and Strabane.

As a result of these disfranchisements, Cos Donegal and Tyrone are the principal constituencies with which the post-Union local political correspondence is concerned; but the correspondence ranges widely within this fairly narrow sphere, from Abercorn's proceedings against Judge Fox who had slandered him at the Co. Donegal assizes of 1803, to his resistance to the policy of parish and townland fines for illicit distillation, notably in 1809. By this stage the correspondence has begun to dwindle in volume and in interest, although it includes letters from a new ally in the politics of both counties, the 2nd Viscount Mountjoy, later Earl of Blessington, who was elected an Irish representative peer in 1809 largely on the strength of the 1st Marquess's influence. Fortunately, not all the letters from Lord Mountjoy are 'political': they afford some rare glimpses of 'Mrs Browne', his mistress and first wife, and make some references to a little-known episode in the Blessington saga, Lord Mountjoy's residence with her at Oxburgh in Norfolk.

Of the non-Irish political correspondents (many of whom are represented by copies of letters from the 1st Marquess to them, rather than by a two-way epistolary traffic), the best known, in addition to Pitt himself, are: the already-mentioned Henry Dundas, later 1st Viscount Melville; William Wilberforce; the 3rd Duke of Portland; Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth; Sir Arthur Wellesley, later 1st Duke of Wellington; Spencer Perceval; the 2nd Earl of Liverpool; the 3rd Earl Bathurst; Richard Payne Knight; and William Carr Beresford, Marshal and Viscount Beresford. Lord Castlereagh, who can perhaps be regarded as 'non-Irish' after 1800, also figures prominently, and there are copies of his celebrated correspondence at the time of his duel with Canning in 1809. Also included in this section of the papers are drafts of the 1st Marquess's (largely unreported) speeches in the House of Lords, mainly 1790-1806. Though he was inept in the subtler, backroom arts of politics, his ability to make an effective speech was universally acknowledged.

The 1st Marquess's later years were passed in what, by his standards, was obscurity, and were saddened by the fact that no less than five of his grown-up children predeceased him. He himself died in 1818, aged 64. He was succeeded as 2nd Marquess by his grandson, a minor, who did not come of age until 1832. Half a century later, the 2nd Marquess achieved one of the 1st's many unfulfilled ambitions by being created a duke.



Political and personal correspondence of the 1st Duke of Abercorn

The earliest papers of this kind deriving from the period of the 2nd Marquess and 1st Duke of Abercorn, actually relate to his wife, and to a time considerably prior to their marriage in 1832. These are a couple of letters to the future Duchess, then Lady Louisa Jane Russell, from her father, the 6th Duke of Bedford, c.1818 and 1827.

Marriage to a daughter of the great English Whig House of Russell did not influence the 1st Duke's (Tory) politics. It may, however, have influenced his decision to spend nearly £20,000 on remodelling and enlarging Baronscourt (in emulation, it has been suggested, of the splendours of Woburn), and it may have contributed to his fatal enthusiasm for acquiring English landed property and to his general extravagance. On the credit side, it also contributed greatly to the position he came to hold at Court. From 1846 to 1859, he was Groom of the Stole to Prince Albert, whose particular protégé he was. Only a dozen letters from the Prince Consort, and those of a fairly formal kind, survive among the Abercorn Papers. But a run of 72 letters from Queen Victoria survives, covering the period 1851-1898, and most of them to the 1st Duke's wife, with whom she was on 'Dearest Duchess' terms; there are also some 82 letters from the Prince and Princess of Wales (later Edward VII and Queen Alexandra), the Empress Frederick and other members of the royal family, 1858-1904. This association with the Queen and Prince Consort helps to explain the 1st Duke's elevation to the dukedom, although by 1868 the Prince himself was dead.

The immediate services for which the dukedom was a reward were as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the 1st Duke having held that office since July 1866. He resigned as Lord Lieutenant shortly after his promotion, on Gladstone's winning the 1868 general election. But he was appointed for the second time by the next Conservative government, in March 1874, resigning in December 1876, partly because of the Duchess's ill-health. A contributory reason may have been that their daughter, Lady Blandford, had involved her in-laws, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, in a furore at Court which made it convenient for the Duke of Marlborough to be exiled to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant. The 1st Duke of Abercorn failed to achieve the main policy-aim of his vicerealties, to overcome the Queen's objections to the creation of a permanent royal residence in Ireland. But in other respects his two terms of office were a considerable success, and he was indeed lavish and unsparing in fulfilling the social responsibilities of the vicerealty, at considerable personal cost. The voluminous accounts which survive for his two terms of office include one abstract which reveals an expenditure of over £33,000 for the year 1874-1875, at a time when the salary of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland was only £20,000.

The rest of the viceregal papers amount to c.650 letters, memoranda, illuminated addresses, and albums. The topics covered include: measures to deal with the Fenian rising of 1867; the imbroglio over the Party Processions Act and with William Johnston of Ballykilbeg; the Prince of Wales's visit to Ireland in 1867; education policy in Ireland,

including vitriolic comments from the Duchess's brother, Lord John Russell, on the celebrated O'Keefe affair; Poor Law administration, especially reorganisation of the rating system; law and enforcement; official statistics on agriculture, emigration, etc; elections, especially of Lord George Hamilton and others of the Duke's family; parliamentary business; the land question; management of the viceregal household; and patronage.

The better-known correspondents include (in alphabetical order): William Alexander, Bishop of Derry (7 letters); Admiral Lord Charles Beresford (2 letters); the Rt Hon. Abraham Brewster, Lord Chancellor of Ireland (10 letters); Sir J. Bernard Burke, Ulster King at Arms (4 letters); Lord Cairns, Lord Chancellor of England; the 1st Marquess of Clanricarde (4 letters); the 11th Lord Colville of Culross; the Rt Hon. H.T. Lowry Corry, First Lord of the Admiralty (4 letters); Montagu Lowry Corry, later Lord Rowton, Disraeli's private secretary (6 letters); Cardinal Paul Cullen, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin; Disraeli (20 letters); the 1st Earl of Dufferin (2 letters); Sir Arthur Guinness, 2nd Bt; the Rt Hon. Lord Claud Hamilton, brother of the 1st Duke (3 letters); Lords Claud, Ernest, Frederick and George Hamilton, younger sons of the 1st Duke (19 letters); Viscount Hamilton, later 2nd Duke of Abercorn (3 letters); Admiral W.A. Baillie Hamilton, brother-in-law of the 1st Duke, Secretary to the Admiralty (17 letters); W. Neilson Hancock, Superintendent of the Judicial and Criminal Statistics Office, Dublin (5 letters); Sir Michael Hicks Beach, 9th Bt, Chief Secretary during the second viceroyalty (54 letters); Sir Charles Lanyon; Major-General Sir Thomas Larcom, Under-Secretary for Ireland (3 letters); the 3rd Earl of Leitrim (3 letters); the 6th Earl of Mayo, formerly Lord Naas, Chief Secretary during the first viceroyalty (91 letters); the Rt Hon. Michael Morris, Attorney-General for Ireland (2 letters), the Rt Hon. Joseph Napier; Sir Stafford Northcote, later the 1st Earl of Iddesleigh, President of the Board of Trade and Chancellor of the Exchequer (4 letters); the 5th Earl of Rosebery; Lord John Russell (6 letters); Lord Odo Russell; the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury; General the Rt Hon. Lord Strathnairn, Commander of the Forces in Ireland (3 letters); Colonel the Hon. William Le Poer Trench, Chairman of the Poor Law and Lunacy Enquiry Commission (5 letters); the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII; and the Rt Hon. James Whiteside, Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench.



Sir Michael Hicks Beach

It should be noted that the viceregal papers include letters received during the two viceroyalties, but in no way relating to them. (Likewise, Chesterfield House, Hampden House and Baronscourt accounts are intermingled with accounts for the viceregal households at Dublin Castle and Phoenix Park). The letters of an unofficial and unrelated character include those to the 1st Duke from the Duchess of Abercorn during the years 1866-1868 and 1874-1876, which mainly concern the illness and death of their son, Lord Ronald Hamilton. Also included are a few letters which conclude the otherwise separate and self-contained documentation of the 1st Duke's claim to the French dukedom of Chatelherault.

This claim, though never lost sight of by the Abercorn family, had not been formally asserted since 1713. The matter came to a head in the 1st Duke's time because their kinsmen and counter-claimants, the Dukes of Hamilton, had enlisted the support of the Emperor Napoleon III, a connection-by-marriage. The 1st Duke sought to block this manoeuvre in January 1862 by going through the legal process of being 'served heir male of the body of the 1st Duke of Chatelherault by the Sheriff of Chancery in Scotland. In 1864, however, the French Court of Titles awarded the duchy of Chatelherault to the 12th Duke of Hamilton: a decision which the 1st Duke then appeals to have appealed to the French Conseil d'Etat, alleging that, if the title had never lapsed to the crown of France but still appertained to the House of Hamilton, it belonged to him only, as heir male of James, Earl of Arran, to whom it was originally granted, which heir male he became on the failure of male issue to William, 2nd Duke of Hamilton, in 1651.

The Abercorn Papers on this subject, c.375 documents, principally consist of correspondence, legal opinions, etc, of the 1st Duke, 1832-1872, particularly 1853-1865, and during his minority, of Lord Aberdeen, 1818-1826. Successive British ambassadors to Paris feature prominently in the correspondence, the 1st Duke's claim being considerably assisted by the fact that Lord John Russell was Foreign Secretary, 1852-1853 and 1859-1865. There are also some frosty letters of the mid-1860s between the 1st Duke and the Duke of Hamilton. Other related papers consist of mainly eighteenth-century copies of earlier charters, patents, ratifications, etc, of 1445-1790; and contemporary or near-contemporary copies of the ratification by the Scottish Estates of the terms of Mary Queen of Scots's marriage to the Dauphin, 1548, and of a royal proclamation confirming the succession to the crown of Scotland, in the event of Mary's being childless, to the Duke of Chatelherault and his descendants of the House of Hamilton, 1549.

The 1st Duke's later political and personal correspondence consists principally of one letter about his role in the post-Disestablishment Convention, 1870, and a run of letters from the Liberal Lord Lieutenant, the 5th Earl Spencer, about a subsequent visit of the Prince of Wales to Ireland, 1885.



Political and personal correspondence of the 2nd Duke of Abercorn

The 2nd Duke was born in 1838 and died in 1913. As Viscount, and later Marquess of, Hamilton, he was MP for Co. Donegal, 1860-1880. He held various Household appointments under the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, of whom he was a personal friend, 1866-1901. In 1880, he went against the Conservative party line by urging the Disraeli ministry to pass 'a new Land Bill to give us security of tenure and unlimited sale of Tenant Right', arguing that such a measure was necessary to avert electoral losses for the party in Ulster. He was proved right about the electoral losses, but later, as head of the Irish Landowners' Convention, took a different view of the land question. He was also, in later life, Chairman of the British South Africa Company, in succession to Cecil Rhodes.

His surviving papers reflect some of these activities. They consist of 100 letters from or about the Prince and Princess of Wales/Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, 1864-1908, and a bundle of letters and papers concerning the 2nd Duke's mission to the Northern Courts of Europe to announce Edward VII's accession, 1901; some scrappy material on election expenditure, 1866-1877, and on the land question, the Plan of Campaign and the National League, 1886; letters of condolence on the death of the 1st Duke and details of the debts and funeral expenses of the latter, 1885-1886; letters from the Dowager Duchess, 1887-1890; and letters about South Africa and the British South Africa Company, from, among others, Rhodes and Sir Henry Loch, Governor of the Cape (one of whose letters is a 'strictly confidential' paen of praise for the Jameson Raid), 1889-1901. (One further South African item may perhaps be mentioned at this point, a 'Ladysmith log' kept by the 2nd Duke's nephew, Robert Hamilton, 1899-1900). Other correspondents of the 2nd Duke include Disraeli, the Dukes of Cambridge, Clarence and Connaught, Lords Cadogan, Lansdowne, Londonderry, Roberts, Salisbury (33 letters), Waterford and Zetland, and A.H. Balfour (10 letters) and Sir Francis Knollys.



Papers of Lord Ernest Hamilton

Lord Ernest, the sixth son of the 1st Duke of Abercorn, was one of the family's men of letters (along with his brother Lord Frederick, and of course Count Anthony Hamilton). Lord Ernest's surviving papers consist solely of the manuscripts of two books of his, 'King Arthur' and 'The Identity of God', which were not published, the latter apparently because the views it expressed on Christ were deemed by the prospective publisher to be offensive to the Jewish community.

It is worthy of note that these two items are the sole result of an extensive correspondence conducted by PRONI in the late 1960s with the descendants, executors, etc, of all the sons of the 1st Duke of Abercorn, several of whom had careers of sufficient importance in their own right to attract the attention of historians.



Political and personal papers of the 3rd Duke of Abercorn

The 3rd Duke of Abercorn was a prominent Unionist politician in the period up to Partition, and in 1922 became the first Governor of the newly constituted Northern Ireland.

Prior to his succession to the dukedom, he was MP for Derry City, 1900-1913; a phase of his career documented by a scrap-book containing newspaper cuttings and telegrams of congratulations from Lord Salisbury, Balfour, etc, 1900-1910. Other scrap-books and albums of this period relate to the UVF, the signing of the Ulster Unionist Covenant, etc, etc. The 3rd Duke's correspondence includes First World War patronage letters, 1912-1915; two letters about the Irish representative peerage election of 1915; letters, some of them from Sir Edward Carson and Walter Long, about the implementation of Section I of the Registration Act in Co. Tyrone, 1915; and a letter from George V's private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, about the 3rd Duke's refusal of the governorship-general of Canada in 1931.

His papers as Governor of Northern Ireland consist chiefly of over 150 illuminated addresses from sundry Rural and Urban District Councils, Orange and Masonic Lodges, Women's Institutes and Boy Scout troops, churches and chambers of commerce, etc, etc, 1923-1929, 1933-1934 and 1944 – not all of them as pro forma in content as might be supposed. There are also various photograph albums, one showing the building of Parliament Buildings, Stormont, c.1927, and another, Belfast Harbour at the close of the Second World War (which also marked the close of the 3rd Duke's governorship), 1945. One further relic of the governorship is a run of three cellar-books for Government House, Hillsborough, 1924-1940.

