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INTRODUCTION

ANTRIM PAPERS

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Antrim Papers (D2977)

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Summary

One of the largest collections of privately owned papers to be deposited in PRONI is D2977, the records of the MacDonnell family, the Earls of Antrim. This collection, which contains approximately 50,000 documents, comprises the administrative records, dating from the early seventeenth century, of a landed estate which at one time included the whole of the four northern baronies of County Antrim, an area of more than 330,000 acres (approximately 520 square miles). The greater part of the archive is given over to nineteenth and twentieth century documents generated by the day to day running of the estate and its related businesses, which included mines, railways, fisheries and harbours, however it also contains important earlier material and documents which throw light on the lives not only of the Earls but their tenants and employees.



The Lords of the Isles

The Antrim MacDonnells are a part of Clan Donald and can trace their descent back to Somerled Lord of Argyle who ended Norse control of the southern Hebrides in the twelfth century. By the fourteenth century his descendants had become the Lords of the Isles and controlled most of the western seaboard of Scotland. The involvement of the MacDonnells with north-east Ulster can be dated to the marriage of John (or Ian) Mór MacDonnell to Margery Bisset, heir to MacEoin Bisset, Lord of the Glynnns of Antrim, in the 1390s. By the end of sixteenth century the Lordship of the Isles had disappeared but the MacDonnells of Clan Ian Mór had established an autonomous Lordship in north-east Ulster, in spite of the hostility of both the English administration in Dublin and the O'Neills of Tyrone, who had traditional claimed hegemony in Ulster.



The First Earl

The earliest records in the PRONI collection date from the time of Randal "Arranach" MacDonnell, the first Earl of Antrim, who in 1603 was granted a charter recognising his ownership of "the Route and the Glynns", an area equivalent to the modern Baronies of Glenarm, Dunluce, Kilconway and Cary (including Rathlin Island) in County Antrim (D2977/5/1/1/1). In spite of the hostility of the English administration in Dublin, who had traditionally opposed Scottish settlement in the north, and in particular Lord Deputy Chichester who had personal ambitions in north Antrim, Randal prospered, mainly because of his friendship with King James VI & I. The titles of Viscount Dunluce and Earl of Antrim were conferred on Randal in the 1620s and the MacDonnell estates, along with the rest of counties Antrim and Down, were excluded from the plantation of Ulster, although Randal voluntarily gave up 2,000 acres around the town of Coleraine to the London Companies (D2977/5/1/1/4) and encouraged the settlement of Scottish Protestants on his own estates. The fact that the MacDonnells were Catholic and Gaelic makes their success all the more remarkable. After the flight of the Earls in 1607 Randal MacDonnell became the most important Catholic landowner in the north of Ireland and the Earls of Antrim remained Catholics until the 1730s.



Second and Third Earls

The 2nd Earl, created Marquis of Antrim in 1644 (D2977/5/1/2/15), has been the subject of a recent biographical study by Dr Jane Ohlmeyer (Civil war and restoration in the three Stuart Kingdoms: the career of Randal MacDonnell Marquis of Antrim, 1609-1683, Cambridge, 1993) which draws on the records in PRONI. He played a significant role in the civil wars of the mid seventeenth century in Ireland, Scotland and England, during which he showed a considerable talent for political survival. His interventions in western Scotland against the Covenanting armies, while ostensibly in support of Charles I, continued a struggle between the MacDonnells and the Campbells for control of the Western Isles (D2977/5/1/2/11). After the defeat of the royalist cause Antrim succeeded in ingratiating himself with the Cromwellian regime in Ireland and on the restoration of Charles II he found himself accused both of involvement in the Irish Catholic rebellion of 1641 and of collaboration with Cromwell (D2977/5/1/2/45). True to form however he survived all allegations and after a prolonged legal battle was restored to all his estates (D2977/5/1/2/58). When Randal died childless in 1683 the Marquissate died with him. He was succeeded by his brother Alexander, the 3rd Earl, who is doomed to be remembered mainly as the man who instigated the siege of Derry in 1689. It was the arrival outside the City of his regiment of north Antrim "redshanks" that led to the closing of the gates. In spite of being on the losing side in the Glorious Revolution the family held on to its estates, the Earl being in arms at the end of the war, came under the terms of the Treaty of Limerick (D2977/5/1/3/14).



Eighteenth-Century Earls

The Earls of Antrim of the eighteenth century were some what less distinguished than their predecessors. The 4th Earl married Rachel daughter of Viscount Massereene and their children were raised as Protestants. When the 5th Earl, reached his majority in 1733 he conformed to the established church and took his seat in the House of Lords however neither he nor his successor made much of an impact on contemporary politics, although the 6th Earl did manage to revive the Marquissette before it again died with him. In spite of marriage to a great heiress the 2nd Earl had run up enormous debts (D2977/5/1/2/82) which continued to burden the estate throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The body of the 5th Earl was reported to have been seized by creditors and a report prepared for his successor in the 1770s shows debts of over £50,000 and while the income from the estate amounted to £8,550 a year, this still fell short of expenditure. (D2977/5/1/6/1)



Division of the Estate



*Anne Catherine Macdonnell,
Countess of Antrim*

The problems of the estate were compounded by the failure of the 6th Earl to produce a male heir. Although he was granted a new patent for the earldom, which allowed his daughters to inherit and transmit the title to their children (D2977/5/1/6/10), the inheritance of the estate itself proved much more problematical. The Earl bequeathed his estates in his will to his three daughters and the resulting litigation lasted more than 20 years (D2977/2/5). The eldest daughter Anne Catherine married first Sir Henry Vane-Tempest, a county Durham land owner by whom she had one daughter and after his death scandalised society by marrying a younger man of obscure origins called Edmund Phelps. When Anne died without a male heir the title passed to her sister Charlotte who had married

Lord Mark Kerr a younger son of the Marquis of Lothian. Their son Hugh Seymour succeeded to the title in due course.

The estate itself was eventually divided. Anne Catherine's daughter Francis Anne, who married the 3rd Marquis of Londonderry received one sixth, the remainder passed to Charlotte and her descendants. The Marchioness of Londonderry bequeathed her portion of the estate to her younger grandchildren and in 1921 it passed to Winston Churchill, who held the remains of the property, mostly in the village of Carnlough, until after the second world war. The main portion of the estate remained in the hands of the Earls of Antrim.



*Frances Anne,
Marchioness of Londonderry*



Decline of the Estate

The sheer size of the Antrim estate meant that from the beginning of the seventeenth century large areas were let as "Fee Farm" grants, effectively permanent leases at a fixed rent. Along with the political misfortunes of the Earls and their propensity for incurring huge debts this resulted in the alienation of considerable areas of the estate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A survey made in 1734 shows approximately 152,000 acres in the possession of the 5th Earl (D2977/35/1-4). The dissolution of the estate was accelerated by the legal disputes that followed the death of the 6th Earl in 1791. By 1871 the Earl of Antrim's estate contained 34,292 acres in County Antrim along with 112 acres around Portstewart in County Londonderry, while the Vane-Tempest portion amounted to 13,781 acres, all in County Antrim. Along with the other landed estates of Ireland the Antrim and Vane-Tempest estates were sold off to the tenants in the early years of the 20th century, apart from the demesne lands and urban property, although the estate continued however to have an interest in various mines and quarries in north Antrim.



The Antrim Papers and PRONI

The deposit of the Antrim Estate papers in PRONI took place over a considerable period of time. When the Belfast PRO opened in 1924 it was in the shadow of the destruction of the PROI in Dublin in 1922 which destroyed nearly all the records generated by the courts and other organs of central government in Ireland dating back to the middle ages. In an attempt to replace these records Dr Chart, the first Deputy Keeper of PRONI, wrote to all the major landowning families in the province asking them to deposit their family and estate records. The then Earl of Antrim agreed to deposit part of his estate office records and to allow copies to be made of family documents. As a result in 1928 PRONI received approximately 300 documents, mainly leases for the baronies of Dunluce and Kilconway (formerly D265) and around the same time Dr Chart made transcripts of some of the more important documents then held by Hambro's Bank in London (T473). It is probably fair to say that at this time the importance of the archive was not recognised, material dating from after 1801 was not even considered for deposit and the archive lacked the large quantities of political papers which made other estate collections so attractive. However over the subsequent years the importance of even very routine estate papers was increasingly recognised by both historians and genealogists and in the 1960s PRONI made a more detailed survey of the records at Glenarm. With the agreement of the Earl of Antrim the bulk of the remaining estate and family papers were deposited between 1973 and 1979. The collection has now been reorganised and the older material integrated with the later accessions.



Charles Lynegar

This is primarily an estate collection rather than a family archive although it does preserve some of the personal papers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Earls (D2977/5/1). Many of the papers relating to the earlier earls were used by George Hill in his *An historical account of the MacDonnells of Antrim* published in 1873. It is likely that those documents relating to Antrim's activities in 1641 and during the civil wars were brought together in 1665 when he was fighting to be restored to his estates. For the most part however there is little in the way of personal or political correspondence. One document from the early eighteenth century should be mentioned. It is a genealogy, in Irish and English of the 4th Earl of Antrim prepared in 1704 by Charles Lynegar, otherwise Cathal Ó Luinín, of Trinity College Dublin. The Lynegars were hereditary ollaves or historians to the Maguires of Fermanagh however Charles became lecturer in Irish to the divinity students at Trinity College Dublin and consequently the target of some vitriolic satires from the other Gaelic scholars of the period. This particular genealogy traces the MacDonnells back to Colla Uaish monarch of Ireland in the fourth century and illustrates the pride they took in their Gaelic heritage. (D2977/5/1/4/3)



The Marchioness of Londonderry's Estate

The administrative papers of the Vane-Tempest portion of the estate are present with the main collection, probably due to both estates having the same agent from the later part of the nineteenth century. Francis Anne Marchioness of Londonderry showed a considerable interest in the day to day administration of her estate, demanding detailed reports from her agents (D2977/6). She was a relentlessly improving land owner, encouraging agricultural improvement and endowing schools, clothing societies, etc. (D2977/57, D2977/58, D2977/59). There is a considerable amount of correspondence between Lady Londonderry and her agent along with petitions from tenants, usually endorsed with notes by the agent all of which throw an interesting light on conditions in the north Antrim area during the famine years and after (D2977/5/1/8). The papers also deal with the building of Garron Tower, Lady Londonderry's summer residence on the Antrim coast (D2977/54).



The range of the archive

The greater part of the archive is taken up with documents relating to the day to day running of the estate: rentals (D2977/7B), rent books (D2977/8), accounts (D2977/18), receipts (D2977/13) and routine correspondence (D2977/5/2). Maps and surveys were important tools in estate management and there is a large collection in the Antrim papers including a considerable number which date from before the first Ordnance Survey of Ireland in the 1840s, the earliest a survey of the entire estate made in 1734 by Archibald Stewart to mark the coming of age of the 5th Earl (D2977/35). There are other bound surveys of parts of the estate from later in the eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth century as well as a large number of individual maps of various holdings (D2977/36).

As "Lords of the Soil" for the four baronies the Earls of Antrim had an interest in the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the north of Antrim, including areas where they had lost possession of the land. One of the earliest documents in the collection is a lease, dating from 1639, of the coal mines and salt pans of Bonamargy, just to the east of Ballycastle, and it is clear from the wording of this document that mining was already well established in the area by this time (D2977/3A/2/36/1). Another document shows that Ballycastle coal was sold in Dublin in the early eighteenth century (D2977/5/1/4/11). Iron ore, bauxite and limestone were also mined and the Earls were involved in the development of harbours, roads and railways to facilitate the exportation of the minerals. Amongst the industrial concerns whose records are included in the collection are: the Ballycastle collieries (D2977/28), Glenariff Iron Ore and Harbour Co. (D2977/30), the Antrim Iron Ore Co. (D2977/41), Glenarm Whiting Mill (D2977/34), Glenarm harbour (D2977/31) and the Carnlough harbour and railway (D2977/29). Another resource that the Earls exploited was fishing, particularly salmon fishing along the north Antrim coast. The earliest lease which mentions the salmon fisheries dates from 1625 (D2977/3A/1/1/1) and the records continue down to the 20th century (D2977/33).

The main business of the estate however was the leasing of land for agricultural use. As well as lease books (D2977/3B) and rentals (D2977/7B) there are approximately 4,000 individual leases dating back to the 1620s which form an important resource for both historians and genealogists (D2977/3A). In many cases it is possible to trace the ownership of a particular area across a period of 300 years. Of particular interest are the c.120 leases granted in 1637, when the 2nd Earl re-leased the whole estate, which have been analysed in detail by Dr Ohlmeyer. They show that the Earl was an "improving landlord" giving long leases and encouraging improvements such as tree planting and enclosure. He also encouraged English and Scottish tenants to settle on his estates, names such as Hillman, Shaw, Agnew and Stewart turn up, although there are also many Gaelic surnames, such as O'Cahan, MacHenry and O'Sheyll among the tenants. These early leases also contain place names some of which do not seem to have survived from other sources. As well as farming land the archive also contains leases for several towns and villages including Larne (D2977/3A/4/81), Glenarm (D2977/3A/4/65),

Ballymoney (D2977/3A/3/2/10), Portrush (D2977/3A/3/2/35), Bushmills (D2977/3A/3/2/14), Cloughmills (D2977/3A/5/11) and Carnlough (D2977/3A/4/30). These leases often give details about buildings to be erected. The development of Portrush is particularly well documented, as well as the leases there is an interesting collection of 19th and 20th century building plans submitted to the Estate Office for approval (D2977/37/1)

The patents which the 1st Earl obtained from James I included the right to hold Manorial courts on his lands. These courts dealt with minor civil law matters such as disputes between tenants over boundaries and debt recovery. In later years they took on some of the functions now carried out by local councils such as the regulation of fairs and markets and the provision of water supplies. The surviving records date from the mid eighteenth-century and cover the whole of the estate (D2977/23).

Like many other landowners the Earls of Antrim encouraged the building of schools on their estates in the first half of the nineteenth century. These schools were under the aegis of the Commissioners for National education in Dublin but the day to day control of schools rested with the local manager appointed by the patron of the schools. For the schools on the Antrim estate these duties were carried out by the estate manager. A large collection of the managers correspondence concerning schools in the Glenarm area has been listed in detail (D2977/5/3).



Related material in PRONI

In addition to the main Antrim estate collection material relating to the Earls of Antrim and to the estate can be found in other collections in PRONI. Edmund McGildowny was principle agent for the MacDonnells from 1800 to 1832 and his correspondence for this period along other material concerning the estate can be found in the McGildowny Papers (D1375). The McGildowneys owned a substantial estate near Ballycastle and were also involved with mining in the area during the nineteenth century so the collection is important in its own right. The papers of another 19th agent Charles Stuart (D915) also contains some relevant material. Solicitors papers are a rich source of records concerning landed estates and Antrim estate related papers can be found in the collections of O'Rorke, McDonald and Tweed of Antrim (D1242) and Greer, Hamilton and Gailey of Ballymoney (D1835).



Glenarm Castle, 1901

To complement the material deposited by the MacDonnell family and others PRONI has purchased items relating to the Antrim estate. D3560 contains a presentation set of plans and elevations of Glenarm castle prepared by William Vitruvius Morrison, who supervised the rebuilding of the Castle in 1825. Morrison also contributed to an album of drawings and water-colours purchased at the same time which makes Glenarm Castle probably the best documented project of the

Morrison practise. Recently PRONI purchased an important collection of five letters from Charles I and his wife Queen Henretta Maria addressed to, or written on behalf of, the 2nd Earl of Antrim (D4041).

PRONI has also acquired the papers of two 19th century members of the MacDonnell family, Sir Schomberg MacDonnell and Louisa, Countess of Antrim. Schomberg MacDonnell, a younger son of the 5th Earl Antrim, was private secretary to the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury during the 1890s. His sister-in-law Louisa, Countess of Antrim (née Gray) served as a lady-in waiting to Queen Victoria and Queen Alexandra (D4091 and MIC615).

