



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

BUNBURY PAPERS

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Bunbury Papers (MIC238, T3795 and T3048B)

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Summary

There are three versions/variants of the mainly Irish papers of the Bunbury family of Barton, West Suffolk, in PRONI:



Lord Edward Fitzgerald

- a microfilm copy of a set of mid-19th century, family-compiled extracts from Bunbury correspondence, 1759-1821;
- photocopies of modern typescript copies of some, and more, of these letters, c.1760-1860; and
- photocopies of the originals of some 45 letters relating to the '98 Rebellion and to participants in it, particularly Lord and Lady Edward Fitzgerald, 1783-1839.



Mid-19th century family-compiled copies

The microfilm copy (MIC238) is of 36 volumes containing mid-19th century copies of letters, 1759-1821, written to Lady Sarah Bunbury/Napier, née Lennox (1745-1826), daughter of the 2nd Duke of Richmond. Her principal correspondent is her sister, Lady Louisa Conolly, of Castletown, Co. Kildare, about Lady Sarah's numerous admirers in her youth, her fall from social grace in 1769 when she ran away from her first husband, Sir Charles Bunbury, 6th Bt, of Barton (whom she married in 1762 and who divorced her in 1776); the similar fall of their sister, Emily, Dowager Duchess of Leinster, who in 1774 married her children's tutor, William Ogilvie; and, generally, about social life and social events in exalted circles in both Great Britain and Ireland, with important incidental comment on the political events of the period, particularly on the constitutional settlement of 1782-1783. The correspondence tails off, in both quantity and interest, from c.1808, when Lady Sarah went almost completely blind.



Emily, Dowager Duchess of Leinster



Lady Louisa Conolly

There are three 'thematic' runs of correspondence, one about the efforts of Thomas Conolly, Lady Louisa's husband, to effect a reconciliation between the Earl-Bishop of Derry and his son, Frederick Hervey, later 5th Earl, and 1st Marquess, of Bristol, in the mid 1790s; the second concerning the efforts of members of the Leinster family to obtain a reprieve for Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1798; and the third concerning Thomas Conolly's death in 1803 and the settlement of his affairs. Another group of letters of particular Northern Ireland interest are those of 1782 from Lady Louisa Conolly about the re-letting of the Limavady estate, Co. Londonderry, which her husband, Thomas Conolly, had inherited in the previous year.

The early 19th century correspondence relates mainly to Lady Sarah Bunbury's children by her second husband, Colonel the Hon. George Napier (whom she married in 1781 and who died in 1804), Comptroller of Army Accounts in Ireland, 1799-1804. One of their children, Emily Napier, married in 1830, as his second wife, General Sir Henry Bunbury, 7th Bt, nephew and successor of her mother's first husband, Sir Charles Bunbury, 6th Bt. This explains why these papers, in spite of Lady Sarah's divorce from Sir Charles in 1776, come to be in the Bunbury family archive. The copies were made in the 1860s by William Henry Bunbury (although they are in fact written in several hands).



Colonel George Napier



The c.1970 modern typescript copies



Lady Sarah Napier

T3795 comprises modern typescript copies, made by Ms Eleanor Burgess, of letters, mainly to Lady Sarah Bunbury/Napier, and of other Conolly, Napier and Bunbury correspondence, particularly of Lady Sarah's daughter, Emily (1784-1863), [1760]-1826, 1832, 1839, 1852 and 1860. Lady Sarah's and Emily Napier's principal correspondent is Lady Sarah's sister, Lady Louisa Conolly. The letters cover all manner of family, estate, business, political, military, etc, concerns – excluding, however, correspondence about the '98 Rebellion (for which see T3048/B). They cover some of the same ground as the late 19th-century, family-compiled MS copy extracts in MIC238, but the latter concentrate on family and personal matters and are seriously incomplete.

The typescripts are arranged as follows: 179 letters to Lady Sarah Lennox from her sister and, for much of this correspondence, Co. Kildare neighbour, Lady Louisa Conolly, [1760], N.D., 1773-1785, 1790, 1792, 1794-1795, 1799-1804, 1809 and 1814. The first of the letters, [of 1760], alludes plainly to the young King George III's famous infatuation for Lady Sarah. Then follow: 22 miscellaneous letters and papers, [1785], 1793-1796, 1801-1802, 1809 and 1818-1821, of Thomas and Lady Louisa Conolly, including 2 memos. by him [1785] and 1794?] about Irish politics, but otherwise consisting of family and personal correspondence, including letters about the battle of Coruna, 1809, where one of Lady Sarah Napier's sons, Major Charles Napier, was killed; 10 miscellaneous family and personal correspondence, 1794, 1803-1804, 1809 and 1812, of Lady Sarah Napier, some of it about the death of her husband in 1804 and the death of her son in 1809; 11 letters, 1803-1804 and 1806, to the 3rd Duke of Richmond from his sister, Lady Louisa Conolly, about the death of her husband, Thomas, in 1803, the confused state of his financial affairs, her discovery by 1806 that he had had a mistress, etc, etc; a series of letters, 1806, marked 15-20, to 'My dearest Anne' from Miss Emily Napier (daughter of Lady Sarah Napier and niece and adopted daughter of Lady Louisa Conolly), who writes from Holland House, London, from Bognor and other from places in England about social and personal affairs; 37 letters, 1807-1808, 1810 and 1819, to Emily Napier from Lady Louisa Conolly, including 1 letter to Lady Louisa from Emily; and 25 items of correspondence, spiritual reflections and other papers, [1801], 1806, 1821-1822, 1825-1826, 1832, 1839, 1852 and 1860, of Emily Napier, many of them about the death of Lady Louisa Conolly, Lady Louisa's saintly character, last hours, generosity to the poor, etc, and about the affairs of a charitable foundation for the local poor of Celbridge, Co. Kildare.



The '98 Rebellion and Lord Edward Fitzgerald material

T3048/B comprises photocopies of original letters, mainly to Lady Sarah Napier, many of them from Lady Louisa Conolly, 1797-1798, about the security situation in the greater Dublin area, the '98 Rebellion, Lord and Lady Edward Fitzgerald, etc, etc. The originals were sold by the Bunbury family and purchased by the late B.Y. McPeake, a distinguished collector of United Irish and '98 Rebellion material, by whose kind permission they were copied by PRONI.

Long before that, in c.1970, Mr McPeake donated all the other Irish correspondence of the Bunbury family acquired by him to the Irish Georgian Society, since it was not relevant to his collecting specialism. This part of the correspondence seems to be entirely or largely covered by the Eleanor Burgess typescripts (T3795). The originals may be fuller and, obviously, are more authentic than the different versions hitherto described, and arrangements are being made by IGS, via the Castletown Foundation, to make them more accessible.

Although many letters of the four sisters, Emily, Duchess of Leinster, Caroline Lady Holland, Lady Louisa Conolly and Lady Sarah Bunbury, have appeared in print, few if any of the letters in this collection have done so.

