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INTRODUCTION

COOPERSHILL PAPERS

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Coopershill Papers (D4031 and MIC603)

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Summary

The Coopershill archive runs from 1676 to 1974 and occupies 52 PRONI boxes. Almost all of it remains in family possession at Coopershill, Riverstown, near Collooney, Co. Sligo, the exceptions being the material relating to the Cooper family's estates in Cos Fermanagh and Tyrone, some mainly political papers of their cousins, the O'Haras of Annaghmore, Collooney, Co. Sligo, up to c.1830, some odds and ends relating to emigration to North America, and some other material of more than Co. Sligo local interest.

The originals of D4031 have been closed on preservation grounds, but the material is available on microfilm (MIC603). The PRONI list covers the **entire** archive, because the relatively small quantity of material deposited in PRONI cannot be properly understood and evaluated outside the context of the archive as a whole.



A landed family without a pedigree

The Cooper family of Coopershill is unusual among the Irish landed gentry in being largely without a pedigree. This is mainly because they were completely subsumed into the O'Hara family of nearby Annaghmore, in 1860 - almost forty years before the first edition of Burke's *Landed Gentry of Ireland* appeared in 1898. In 1860, Charles William Cooper of Coopershill succeeded his mother's brother, Major Charles King O'Hara, in the Annaghmore estate, assuming when he did so the name of O'Hara only. His two unmarried sisters continued to live at Coopershill, but Charles William O'Hara was its owner, as well as the owner of Annaghmore, until his death in 1897. All his sons assumed the name of O'Hara, and - unusually - the name Cooper was not retained in association with the future ownership of Coopershill except as a second christian name.

This subsuming of the Coopers into the O'Haras must also to some extent be attributed to snobbery: from 1860 to recent times, the Coopers have not been averse to identifying themselves with the ancient Irish O'Haras and distancing themselves from their Co. Sligo neighbours and namesakes, the Cromwellian Coopers of Markree. It seems improbable that two families of the same name, living so close together and so closely involved with each other's affairs in various respects, should not descend from a common Cromwellian ancestor. The only good reason for doubting this supposition is that the arms and mottoes of the two Cooper families are different.



The Cooper family estates

In 1752 the Cooper family of Lisbrislane/Tansyfort/Coopershill, Co. Sligo, acquired through marriage a third share in the Fermanagh and Tyrone estates of the late Guy Carleton of Rossfad, Co. Fermanagh. With this exception, their estates were situated in Cos Sligo and Leitrim, and by and large were held, not in fee or by patent from the crown, but under long or perpetuity leases from other landowners (such as the Coopers of Markree, the Earls of Shelburne/Orkney, the Gore-Booth family, baronets, of Lissadell, Co. Sligo, the Wynnes of Hazlewood, Co. Sligo, etc).



Middling gentry with great expectations

They were middling gentry who, possibly flushed by the Carleton inheritance or carried away by an enthusiasm for house-building, overstretched themselves in the 1770s and were compelled to sell a sizeable proportion of their estates in 1791. For the next half-century or so, they settled back into the highly localised life of the middling gentry class, until it became increasingly apparent that, as a result of the marriage of Arthur Brooke Cooper I and Jane Frances O'Hara, sister of Major Charles King O'Hara of Annaghmore, it was likely that the much larger O'Hara estates, on the strength of which the O'Haras had frequently represented Co. Sligo in parliament, would pass to the Coopers, as indeed they did in 1860.



The O'Hara family and papers

The O'Haras of Nymphsfield, Collooney, Co. Sligo (which was re-named Annaghmore or Annachmore in the first half the 19th century), are much better known than the Coopers. The O'Hara papers from Coopershill deposited in PRONI need to be studied in conjunction with the vastly greater O'Hara archive in the National Library of Ireland. In the early 1970s, when it was still in family possession at Annaghmore, PRONI photocopied and calendared selected late 17th, 18th and early 19th century correspondence (T2812).

The O'Hara papers from Coopershill deposited in the original in PRONI start with a few bits and pieces of the period 1695-1767. There follows a run of letters, 1783-1789, to Charles O'Hara of Nymphsfield, MP for Co. Sligo, 1783-1822, from his younger brother, William (a naval captain), who writes from London, Portsmouth and various Mediterranean stations. He describes a lavish mock battle staged by 'the Archduke' in Milan and the political economy of, and his social life in, the various places where he is stationed between 1784 and 1789 - Nice, Milan, Naples, Leghorn, Marseilles, Florence, Gibraltar, Sardinia, Messina, etc.



The life of a pre- and post-Union Irish MP

There are two (much cut-up and abused) candidate's registry or canvassing books, [1783? and 1790?], which record the names and addresses of Co. Sligo freeholders and the dates of their most recent registration. Next comes a run of letters, c.1790-1803, 1806, 1810-1811 and 1814, to Miss Mary O'Hara from her father, Charles O'Hara, Dublin, Nymphsfield and London, the earliest of them about her education and domestic matters, the others about personal and domestic matters, but with numerous political references, particularly at the time of the Union. These give some insights into the social and political life of an Irish MP in the period immediately following the Union, when most of them - and Charles O'Hara is no exception - were heavily dependent on Irish friends and acquaintances whose contacts in English society and British politics were better than their own.



Miscellaneous papers of Charles O'Hara

Other more miscellaneous letters and papers of Charles O'Hara include a lengthy, printed *Case of Edward Crofton Esq.*, one of the defeated candidates for Co. Roscommon, complaining that on 18 July 1768 the sheriff unduly returned John French of Frenchpark and Sir Richard St George, Bt, and printed copies of election addresses from Charles O'Hara to his Co. Sligo constituents, 1797 and 1818, a printed copy of his retirement address in 1820, and a printed newspaper obituary of him, 1822. Also included is a run of letters to Charles O'Hara from Charles King O'Hara, 1799, 1810-1811 and 1815, one of them commenting on the battlefield of Waterloo.



The Cooper papers

The Cooper, as opposed to O'Hara, papers deposited in PRONI relate mainly to the sometime Carleton estates in Fermanagh and Tyrone, as these – obviously – are of particular Northern Ireland interest. They cover, unevenly, the two centuries between 1726 and 1937, with a particular concentration on the period 1750-1850.



The Cooper estates in Fermanagh and Tyrone

The lands concerned are Drumskinny, Magheragart and Magheralough, Co. Tyrone, held under a lease of pre-1740 from Henry Mervyn of Trillick, Co. Tyrone, which seems to have expired c.1800, and the more extensive Fermanagh lands, consisting of the Rossfad estate, barony of Lurg, and the Boho churchlands, barony of Magheraboy.

The papers include bonds, judgements, accounts, receipts and legal searches, 1749-1772, all relating to debts incurred by Guy Carleton (d.1752), and his representatives, who were Mary, his widow (d.1753), Sarah (his daughter and co-heiress, who married in 1752 Arthur Cooper), Mary (his daughter and co-heiress, who married Philip Perceval of Templehouse, Co. Sligo), and Jane (his daughter and co-heiress, who married in 1766 Colonel Henry Richardson of the Richardson family of Richhill, Co. Armagh, and was later of Rossfad, Co. Fermanagh).

The bulk of the documentation, however, consists of rentals and rent calculations, surveys, leases, correspondence and legal case papers, 1754-1851, relating mainly to the Fermanagh lands, and particular to Boho, because of all sorts of complications over the proposed partition of Boho among the co-owners, the possibility that one of them might want to sell either to the others or to a third party, the need regularly to renew the lease which was held, not directly from the see of Clogher, but from a middleman in the person of the Earl of Belmore, etc, etc. Thereafter, there are a few rentals, accounts and correspondence, 1851-1937, relating to what had obviously become the Cooper family's divided share of the property, consisting of part of Boho and premises in the town of Enniskillen.



Co. Sligo prepares for invasion in 1803

The more miscellaneous Cooper papers deposited in PRONI consist, in date order, firstly of some papers of 1803 deriving from Arthur Brooke Cooper I and relating to measures taken in Co. Sligo to prepare for the threatened French invasion. These include printed 'Proposals for rendering the body of the people instrumental to the general defence, in case of invasion', [1803]; accounts '... of money received by A.B. Cooper towards paying recruits for the Army of Reserve for the barony of Tyrerril [sic] ...' and other similar receipts and accounts, 1803; series of inventories of the live and dead stock of various individuals, including Joshua E. Cooper of 'Mercury', pursuant to an act of parliament requiring that such inventories be taken in all coastal counties, 1803; appointment of Arthur Brooke Cooper I as a Deputy Governor of Co. Sligo, 7 November 1803; letters to him from the Governor of the county, Charles O'Hara of Nymphsfield, about local defence measures, December 1803; and blank lists of people, collected on a parochial basis, willing in the event of invasion to act as pioneers, to provide cars and carts, to carry away live and dead stock, etc, 1803.

These inventories of live and dead stock are of particular interest to the economic historian, and have a fuller counterpart in PRONI among the papers of 1st Marquess of Londonderry, who was Lieutenant of Co. Down at the time of the same invasion scare (D654/A/2).



Brunswick clubs and Orange lodges

Other purely political, not to say propagandist, papers of Arthur Brooke Cooper I are his correspondence about Brunswick, Orange and Protestant political activity in Co. Sligo, 1822 and c.1825-41, including: a petition of the Protestant inhabitants of the union of Tawnagh urging that the Catholic Association be put down, [1825?]; the original of a letter from Arthur Brooke Cooper I to Colonel Alexander Perceval, MP, stating objections to the proposed national school system, 1832; a letter from Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Bt, to Cooper acknowledging an address of thanks from the union of Tawnagh, 1835; MS and printed accounts of a Protestant meeting at Collooney, 1836; and other pieces of Brunswick and Orange propaganda.



'Emigrant' letters

The remaining material of Arthur Brooke Cooper I and his second son and successor, Charles William Cooper, later O'Hara, deposited in PRONI takes the form of 'emigrant letters' or letters about emigration.

These include three emigrant letters to Arthur Brooke Cooper I, 1786, 1804 and 1842, the first two from James McMurray, Frederickstown, USA, 1786 and 1804, the third from George Allen, Kingston, Upper Canada, 1842. There are also letters to Charles William Cooper, 1847-1852, relating to famine relief and assisted emigration to the USA, with particular reference to 'the unfortunate affair of the steamer "Londonderry"' and the drowning of many of its passengers in 1849; emigrant letter to him from Robert Cochran, writing from California in 1856 – '... Times are not so good here as they have been heretofore The average wages in San Francisco is [sic] from 30 to 40 dollars per month ...'.

