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INTRODUCTION

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FitzGerald Papers (T3075)

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Summary



*Maurice Fitzgerald, Knight
of Kerry, Coat of Arms*

The FitzGerald Papers copied by PRONI comprise 1,793 documents – principally correspondence – deriving from Robert and Maurice FitzGerald, respectively 17th and 18th Knights of Kerry, and covering roughly the 100-year period between 1750 and 1850. They are bound in 18 late-19th century volumes, of which the first 17 are in family possession, and the last is in the National Library of Ireland. PRONI has made a detailed calendar of the contents of all 18 volumes, and holds microfilm copies of vols 1-17 at MIC639 and photocopies of vol. 18 at T3075.



Family history

The following account of the Knights of Kerry is taken, mutatis mutandis, from J. Anthony Gaughan, *Listowel and its Vicinity* (Cork, 1973), pp. 284-297:

'The Knights of Kerry belong to an early branch of the mighty Geraldines. There is uncertainty as to exactly how or when they received their title or, more accurately, their distinction. Traditional accounts attribute the creation of this distinction and that of the White Knight and the Knight of Glin to John FitzThomas, who was killed at Callan on 23 July 1261. The story goes that he had four (possibly five) illegitimate sons by four different mothers and that he conferred the knighthood on three of these sons by virtue of his royal seignory as a count palatine. [Professor K.W. Nicholls strongly rebuts this interpretation. He suggests that the three titles arose by prescription because during the 14th century, the critical period of Gaelicisation, the heads of the three houses always happened to be knights.] ... In any case, whenever the titles originated, the descendants of all these knights have been styled such by acts of parliament, patents under the great seal and in all legal proceedings up to the present time. ...

The long association between this family and Listowel is recalled in the name of the scenic stretch of land along the southern bank of the Feale, near the town, which is known as the "Knight of Kerry's" or Ballinruddery, the Town of the Knight. The names are appropriate since, in earlier times, the Knights of Kerry intermittently occupied the partially ruined castle situated here and, later, until c.1870, lived in a beautiful, thatched, seventeenth-century mansion which stood nearby and ... which ... was re-named Woodford ... by the 18th century. ... Between 1600 and 1742 Ballinruddery Castle and the adjoining lands changed hands on a number of occasions. Presumably they were forfeited by the FitzGerald in 1600. [All three knights had jointed successive Earls of Desmond (the heads of their branch of the Geraldines) in rebellion.] ... By at least 1742 the FitzGerald were in firm possession again because in that year Daniel FitzGerald, younger son of John, 13th Knight of Kerry, had a lease forever of the Ballinruddery estates. ...



Dwindling estates

It would seem that the property of the Knight[s] of Kerry remained considerable until at least the second half of the 17th century. Thus we know that John FitzGerald, 12th Knight of Kerry, successfully petitioned the House of Commons in 1665 for the return of property which he had held near Dingle and in the baronies of Clanmaurice, Iraghticonnor, Trughanacmy and Magunihy and which had been vested in the crown under the Act of Settlement. The family seems to have lost much of its Kerry property between this time and the middle of the 18th century.



Religious and political conformity

In the Williamite war Maurice, 14th Knight of Kerry, took the Catholic side and was in James's army at the battle of the Boyne. However, he managed to survive the Williamite settlement without losing any of his territory After this the Knight of Kerry conformed politically. By 1703 he had conformed religiously. In that year (on July 30th) he became the first of his line to marry a Protestant wife. Thereafter, as the Geraldine blood of the FitzGerald became diluted through marriages with planter stock, they became more and more alienated from the Irish Catholic population about them. And because they belonged to a narrowly-defined establishment they played an even larger role than heretofore in both national and local affairs.



'Petticoat government'

Maurice FitzGerald, 14th Knight of Kerry, was succeeded by his eldest son, John, who in turn was succeeded by yet another Maurice. This latter on 10 June 1764 married Lady Anne Fitzmaurice, a representative of the other great Anglo-Norman family of the district. He was known as the "Dingle Knight" and was somewhat eccentric. Because of a dispute between his wife, Lady Anne Fitzgerald (née Fitzmaurice), and his uncle, Robert, ... over control of the parliamentary borough of Dingle, he left his Dingle property to his sister, Mrs Townsend, and thereby Rahinane Castle and the bulk of their remaining ancestral lands were lost to the FitzGerald. Richard Boyle Townsend, M.P. for the borough of Dingle in 1781 and a nephew of Maurice, 16th Knight of Kerry, eventually by will became heir to these estates ..., [part of which, the Ennismore estate, was sold to Richard Hare, later 1st Lord Ennismore, in 1796]. For a fascinating account of the background to these extraordinary events, entitled "Petticoat government", see ... [T3075/4/84]. It is very probable that the author of this broadside, which is a devastating indictment of the role of Lady Anne Fitzgerald in the disinheritance of Robert FitzGerald, 17th Knight of Kerry, was the latter's nephew, Judge Robert Day. ... [Maurice FitzGerald, 16th Knight of Kerry] died without a family in 1780 and was succeeded by his uncle, Robert FitzGerald. ...



*Maurice Fitzgerald,
16th Knight of Kerry*



A title unsupported by estates

[The property which Robert FitzGerald's branch of the family owned or leased in its own right was comparatively minor, and seemed at first to be dwindling. On December 1767, Robert FitzGerald had] ... sold his interest in a farm in Ahanagolden, Co. Limerick, to Thomas Rice. ... On 5 January 1806 Maurice FitzGerald [his son and successor] conceded interests in land in Co. Limerick to Stephen E. Rice who forwarded money to help Maurice to buy out the Valentia estate [Co. Kerry] Not all the Limerick estate, however, had been sold before Peter George [Maurice's son and successor] became 19th Knight of Kerry. He still retained some 2,000 acres of it in 1851 together with an estate in Co. Carlow which he had inherited from a La Touche uncle.

[The surviving Kerry estates] ... were divided between Valentia island and the vicinity of Listowel. The acreage he owned in the vicinity of Listowel was quite insignificant and, with the exception of the 230 acre demesne at Ballinruddery ..., was divided into numerous small farms The family began to reside on the Valentia estate in 1780 when Robert, 17th Knight of Kerry, rented it from Lord Orkney. However, the estate came into the possession of the FitzGeralds only in 1807 when it was finally bought out by Maurice, 18th Knight of Kerry Robert built a residence at Farranreagh. Maurice, however, disposed of this about 1820 and built ... Glanleam



Robert FitzGerald, 17th Knight of Kerry (1717-1781)



*Robert Fitzgerald,
17th Knight of Kerry*

Robert FitzGerald ... was described ... as "an outstanding character of his time". He was a barrister, an M.P. and a Judge of the Admiralty Court. He was witty and convivial, mixed freely among the Viceregal set and enjoyed the friendship of almost all the most distinguished and cultured men of his time. He was widely travelled and had close friends not only in Dublin and London but also in Paris, such as Marshal Thomond (Lord Clare) of the Irish Brigade and a distinguished Irish priest named Père Mahoney. A series of letters ... in which he plagued Lord Towns[h]end, the Lord Lieutenant [1767-1772], with requests for advancement in his profession, gives on the impression that he was rather naive. In one letter he points out that of all the circle of close friends around that dignitary he was the only one to be rewarded with high office. On the back of another one of these querulous letters, in the hand of Lord Towns[h]end or his secretary, is an ample list of what can only be described as sinecures which FitzGerald had received for himself and members of his family down through the years. ...



Maurice FitzGerald, 18th Knight of Kerry (1772-1849)

With the death of Robert FitzGerald in the winter of 1781, his young son, Maurice ... became the 18th Knight of Kerry. He was the ward of the well-known Justice Day of Kerry. On the judge's advice he joined the Kerry Militia under Colonel John Crosbie, ... [2nd Earl of] Glandore [a very frequent, and usually complaining, correspondent], in 1793 and saw active service in 1798. Already he had entered public life. In 1794 the sudden death of Sir Barry Denny, Bt, left a vacancy in the representation of Kerry. In the ensuing election contest he won easily against Sir Edward Leslie, Bt, and was thereby elected M.P. for Kerry towards the end of 1794. However, he was unable to take his seat for some months until he came of age early in the following year.

For the next thirty-seven years he represented the county. Up to the time of the Union he sat in the Irish parliament and voted in favour of that measure. He outlived all his former colleagues and in him expired "the last commoner of the last Irish parliament". Throughout his parliamentary career he was an indefatigable champion of Catholic Emancipation So sincere was he on the issue that according to his grand-daughter, Emily FitzGerald, he refused to take office with any government which did not make Catholic Emancipation an integral part of its policy. And thus he sacrificed many years of official life and salary There is ample corroboration for Emily FitzGerald's statement. In a letter, dated 9 May 1820, from James O'Connell to Daniel O'Connell, one reads: "Our friend the Knight of Kerry is yet at Ballinruddery. Report says that he is coming into office with Mr Plunket. I hope so as the poor fellow has a large family and a very small fortune much encumbered, and he has been a Patriot long enough, God knows" ...'.

... In spite of his advocacy of ... [Emancipation] he held the following public appointments. From 1799 to 1802 he acted as a Commissioner of Customs and Excise in Ireland. Soon after he was returned (in 1801), to the Imperial Parliament for Kerry, he was called to a seat in the Privy Council and also to the board of the Irish Treasury which he left in 1806 [sic - 1807]. In 1830 he was Vice-Treasurer of Ireland but shortly afterwards his active political career came to an end for, although he once more held office as a Lord of the Admiralty in Sir Robert Peel's short-lived administration of December 1834, he lost his seat in the Kerry [by-]election of 1831 and was again unsuccessful in 1835. Subsequently he declined a number of invitations to run for an English constituency.

A man of great charm and talent, he ... was on familiar terms with and highly esteemed by many of the great men of his day, including the Prince Regent, and was particularly friendly with Lord Castlereagh. However, it seems that his interest in national affairs and his mixing freely with notable contemporaries did not distract him from being a justice of the peace. Thus on 18 May 1820 he was responsible for having Stephen Sullivan, the accomplice of John Scanlon in the murder of the "Colleen Bawn", committed to Tralee jail. There is also evidence that he was an excellent landlord. Although he spent periods in Ballinruddery - in particular from 1812 until 1821 - he resided for most of his life at Glanleam, Valentia, where he died on 7 March 1849.



Sir Peter George FitzGerald, 1st Bt, 19th Knight of Kerry (1808-1880)

Maurice was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Peter George, 19th Knight of Kerry. A remarkable man also, he began life in the banking house of his maternal grandfather David Latouche in Dublin. Later, having entered the public service, he was appointed Vice-Treasurer of Ireland in the last ministry of Sir Robert Peel. From the time he succeeded his father in 1849 he resided almost constantly on the island of Valentia, devoting himself to his duties as a landlord. His landholdings in Co. Kerry, which in 1876 consisted of 4,769 acres, were not very extensive, comparatively speaking. They were also somewhat fragmented; and ...Valentia [as has been seen] ... was the family's most recent acquisition. He was popular with his tenants because of his genuine concern for them and especially because he built substantial homesteads for them in place of the wretched cabins in which they were living. He showed a keen interest in everything which had a practical bearing on the progress or prosperity of Ireland and, predictably, he was most co-operative in the establishment of the trans-Atlantic cable station at Valentia. ...' He was created a baronet in 1880 and died shortly afterwards.



Sir Peter George FitzGerald's memoir of his father

In a memoir of his father, Maurice, 18th Knight of Kerry, taken from a typescript copy of a 'Family record' compiled by Sir Peter in 1868, the following comments are made:

'... My father, the Rt Hon. Maurice FitzGerald, Knight of Kerry, was a man of considerable talent, and of social qualities quite remarkable. Had he been driven to "make his own way" in the world, he probably would have risen to greater eminence than he did. It could scarcely be said that he was a very steady or systematic man of business, but he had immense energy: for example, the way in which he pushed the slate flag business in London (when in the years 1834-1836 he began to work for Valentia quarries for the production of flags in lieu of roofing slate) was most remarkable. He also, in 1824-1826, worked the question of packet stations with immense energy, and succeeded in forming a company for running steamers between Valentia and Halifax, which had made considerable advance towards that object.

The company had intrinsic strength enough for several companies of these degenerate days. The D. of York was patron, the D. of Wellington some honorary position - no end of admirals as the directors. Sir H. Blackwood, Sir [names left blank], Sir George Beaufort, etc. They also had good City names, Mr J. Wells, the banker, and others. They had actually purchased two steamers, "The [Calpee?]" and "The United Kingdom", and would have been very soon in operation, but for the great money panic of 1826, and some jobbing or worse on the part of one of the directors ... and the secretary My father lost (for him) heavily by the affair, but the money loss was a very small consideration compared to the disappointment of his sanguine hopes of seeing Valentia growing into a place of importance. ... It was some time before his natural elasticity of character rebounded.

One of his great allies in the packet station project was [Alexander] Nimmo, a very remarkable man; a self-taught engineer, who had he lived anything like an ordinary term of years, would have taken rank with the Stephensons, Telfords, etc. ... I think it was from intercourse with Nimmo that many of the matters on which my father wrote and worked, originated: for instance, packet station, improvement of lands, Board of Works, defence of the seaboard of the country, etc. Of the Board of Works my father was very much the projector ...'



Rapidly changing times

The correspondence of Robert and Maurice FitzGerald, 17th and 18th Knights of Kerry, reflects all these interests and activities and features all the dramatis personae from Lord Townshend to Alexander Nimmo. It also complements the Kenmare Papers in PRONI (D4151), which is almost entirely devoid of correspondence for the period 1795-1835, when the 1st and 2nd Earls of Kenmare, and the 2nd Earl's wife, were writing fairly copiously to Maurice FitzGerald. As Catholics, moderate supporters of Catholic Emancipation and the leading electoral interest in Co. Kerry, the Kenmares were vital to his return for Co. Kerry.

Though primarily concerned with politics and personalities in that county, the FitzGerald correspondence is of far more wide-ranging significance than this might suggest. For one thing, many of the letters have a literary quality - sometimes, as with those from one of the principal correspondents, Judge Robert Day, which run from c.1783 to 1818 - too self-consciously so. For another, they are of a quality which is appropriate to their recipients, who were in their different ways men of a personal ability and amiability which gave them influence out of all proportion to their fairly slender landed and financial resources.

Above all, they convey with quite unusual vividness an impression of the rapidly changing times in which the two men lived. Though Robert and Maurice FitzGerald were father and son, they seem as if they were generations apart (and this is only partially to be explained but the fact that Robert was in his mid-fifties when Maurice was born). The world of intrigue at the Viceregal court of Lord Townshend over sinecures and emoluments feels as if it ought to be far further removed from the world of the Valentia packet service than the sixty years which actually separated them; and it is the more remarkable that this should be so, granted that Kerry is one of the more remote parts of a country which is supposed not to have experienced an industrial revolution.



Arrangement of the archive

The volumes are arranged in rough chronological order, as follows:

1/1-104 (pp 1-196)	1658: 1679 [1739?]-1765	Letters and papers of Robert FitzGerald, who later, in 1780, succeeded his nephew as 17th Knight of Kerry, including some miscellaneous papers prior to his birth or coming-of-age and much correspondence with his 'Wild Geese' friends and acquaintances on the Continent.
2/1-95 (pp 1-198)	1766-2 Dec. 1768	Letters and papers of Robert FitzGerald, many of them from his political cronies and drinking mates, Francis Andrews, M.P. for Londonderry City and Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, Richard Rigby, absentee Master of the Rolls in Ireland, Lord Townshend, etc.
3/1-104 (pp 1-206)	28 Dec. 1768- 10 May 1774	Letters and papers of Robert FitzGerald, with similar content.
4/1-84 (pp 1-180)	14 June 1774- 1782	Letters and papers of Robert FitzGerald, many of them relating to the power struggle over the borough of Dingle, Co. Kerry.
5/1-98	1783-1796	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, 18th Knight of Kerry, who succeeded his father, Robert, in 1781, when still a minor; including much Co. Kerry election material, and copies of 23 letters from Robert Day to the 2nd Earl of Glandore, made by Elizabeth FitzGerald, c.1880.
6/1-87 (pp 1-174)	July 1796- Jan. 1799	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, many of them about the Kerry Militia, the '98 Rebellion and the Union.
7/1-109 (pp 1-194)	Jan. 1799- Dec. 1801	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, many them about the Union and Catholic Emancipation.
8/1-82 (pp 1-176)	1802- Oct.&NBSP;1803	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald.
9/1-87 (pp 1-180)	Nov. 1803- Oct. 1806	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald.
10/1-101 (pp 1-190)	Oct. 1806- July 1816	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald.
11/1-98 (pp 1-194)	Sep. 1816- Sep. 1825	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald.
12/1-110 (pp 1-214)	Nov. 1825- Oct. 1828	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald.

13/1-115 (pp 1-192)	Oct. 1828- Dec. 1830	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, some of them about O'Connell's victory at the Co. Clare by-election of 1828.
14/1-101 (pp 1-178)	Oct. 1830- Dec. 1834	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, many of them about his defeat at the Co. Kerry by-election of 1831.
15/1-90 (pp 1-184)	Jan.- Oct.&NBSP;1835	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, giving a blow-by-blow account of the Co. Kerry election and its aftermath.
16/1-137 (pp 1-190)	1836-1847	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, many of them about Valentia and the packet company.
17/1-46 (pp 1-54)	1847-1849	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald.
18/1-145	1796-1849	Letters and papers of Maurice FitzGerald, abstracted from the general series because of the celebrity of the correspondents.

Volume 18 requires special comment. It comprises 120 letters covering the period 1796 to 1884, mostly relating to political affairs (particularly Ireland and the Catholic Question prior to Emancipation), together with a number of memoranda either submitted with the letters or recording important interviews. In this category may also be included a kind of diary kept by Maurice FitzGerald from time to time over several years (1830 et seq.) which comprises 15 separate entries making 36 pages. Many of the letters to and from Maurice FitzGerald are long and several exceed 10 pages each. A few of the later letters refer to Indian affairs. The principal correspondents represented are the Duke of Wellington (42 letters), Lord Castlereagh, later 2nd Marquess of Londonderry (12), Sir Robert Peel (2), Lord Brougham (30), the 2nd Earl of Donoughmore (9), the 2nd Earl of Moira (3), William Wilberforce (1) and Tom Moore (1). The letters to subsequent FitzGerald include some from various members of the royal family, among them Queen Victoria and her sons, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (Edward VII), and Arthur, Duke of Connaught (to whom Maurice FitzGerald, 2nd Bt and 20th Knight of Kerry, was equerry). The book also contains 14 photographs of mid-Victorian personalities.



*Sir Maurice Fitzgerald,
2nd Bt*




Parts of the archive elsewhere

In addition to the volumes described above, the following volumes (not copied by PRONI) have been located and described by Mr Adrian FitzGerald, son of Sir George FitzGerald, 5th Bt, 23rd Knight of Kerry, in other institutions or in family possession:


NLI, MS 5948

144 items, c.1845-1868, bound in one volume. These are almost entirely letters; the earlier ones relate mainly to family matters, the later ones to the destruction by fire of the Kildare Street Club, the Royal visit of 1861 and preparations for the laying of the Trans-Atlantic Cable.




NLI, MS 5949

524 items, c.1863-1871, bound in one volume. These are mainly letters regarding both local, Co. Kerry affairs and national issues, including church and land, with some portrait photographs of correspondents and some related newscuttings.




NLI, MS 5950

331 items, c.1871-1873, bound in one volume. These are mainly letters regarding Co. Kerry and national issues, especially church and land, with some portrait photographs of correspondence and some related newscuttings.




NLI, MS 5959

345 items, c.1874-1878, bound in one volume. These are mainly letters, the earlier ones concerning an attempted murder in Cannes during Peter FitzGerald's stay there, the remaining ones and the majority reverting to issues of church and land. Included are some portrait and topographical photographs and some newscuttings.



The Standard and Telegraph & Cable Co., Greenwich

427 items, c.1857-1872, bound in one volume, comprising newscuttings, letters, photographs and ephemera, all relating to the laying of the Atlantic Telegraph, and put together by Peter FitzGerald (damaged by fire at some point with probable loss of some items, but subsequently carefully restored).



The John Rylands Library, Manchester, MS 1189, vol. 1

859 items, c.1805-1868, bound in one volume, comprising a family memoir (incomplete and duplicated elsewhere) dated 1868 by Peter George Fitzgerald, 19th Knight of Kerry, later Sir Peter, 1st Bt, together with supporting letters, poems, etc.

The John Rylands Library, MS 1189, vol. 2

455 items, c.1878-1880, bound in one volume. These are mainly letters regarding local, family and national issues. Included are photographs and newscuttings. (This volume follows in sequence item 4 above.)

▲

The John Rylands Library, MS 1190

50 items, c.1870-1880, mainly comprising Maurice FitzGerald, 20th Knight of Kerry and 2nd Bt's, letters to his family when acting as equerry to the Duke of Connaught.

▲

The Kerry County Library, ref. 270313

426 items, c.1876-1880, comprising Sir Peter FitzGerald's damp-press copy out-letter book containing letters of a more-or-less business nature.

▲

Family possession: Maurice FitzGerald, 20th Knight of Kerry, vol. 1

645 items, c.1880-1909, bound in one volume, comprising letters, newscuttings and ephemera relating to political, social and sporting matters.

▲

Family possession: Maurice FitzGerald, 20th Knight of Kerry, vol. 2

Approximately 370 items, c.1905-1947, bound in one volume, comprising newscuttings, letters and ephemera relating to political, social and sporting matters, and continued after his death by FitzGerald's widow.

▲

Family possession: miscellaneous items

149 items, c.1773-1917, in two folders, on various matters over four generations of the family.

Of these twelve items, Mr Adrian FitzGerald has completed draft calendars of 1-7 and 9-12. A calendar of item 8 already exists.

Further material, which may or may not belong in the series (depending on how provenance and content are defined) is in the private possession of a connection of the FitzGerald family, Lord Monteagle, whose forebear, Francis Spring Rice, later 4th Lord Monteagle, married successively (1882 and 1935) two daughters of Sir Peter FitzGerald, 19th Knight of Kerry and 1st Bt.

This material comprises c.20 loose papers and one 126-page quarto volume, 1815-1926, relating mainly to the FitzGeralds. There are a number of pedigrees and letters about FitzGerald genealogy and family history, including a rough forerunner in Sir Peter FitzGerald's handwriting of his recollections of his father, Maurice, written in 1865 (the more finished versions elsewhere are dated 1868).

The volume is a pot-pourri of manuscript and printed matter, with numerous drawings and engravings, apparently begun by Elizabeth FitzGerald (d.1922), the first wife of the 4th Lord Monteagle, and then continued by him.

It contains, among other things: a MS copy of a letter of 14 June 1815 from Maurice FitzGerald, 18th Knight of Kerry, to his son, Maurice, describing the preliminaries to the Battle of Waterloo (there is no version of this letter elsewhere among the FitzGerald papers); a newspaper report of the impending sale of the FitzGerald estate (which never took place) in the Encumbered Estates Court on 10 June 1853, and giving valuable information about the extent and origin of the property; an undated letter, probably the work of Elizabeth FitzGerald, to an unnamed newspaper about the origins and history of the FitzGerald property in Co. Kerry; a newspaper controversy about Peter FitzGerald's record as a Kerry landlord, 1872; newspaper reports about the Duke of Connaught's visit to Valentia, with letters from the Duke to Elizabeth FitzGerald, 1877; MS copies of published and unpublished letters about the important part played by the late Sir Peter FitzGerald during the reconstitution of the Church of Ireland after its disestablishment, 1880; a printed copy of a letter from Elizabeth FitzGerald on the subject of 'Board of Works loans and Healy's clause', 20 February 1882; and many other documents about the land question, local events on Valentia and in Kerry generally, etc.

The volume concludes with extracts from letters made by Francis Spring Rice, 1878-1903, and with very miscellaneous newspaper cuttings assembled by him, and having no connection with the FitzGerald family.

