



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

KER PAPERS

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Ker Papers (D2651)

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Summary

This major section of the Ker papers (see also D500, D892, D1255/3, D2223/2, D2253, and T2610) comprises c.400 documents and consists of family papers and correspondence of the Ker family of Portavoe, Co. Down, c.1720-c.1850.



Background

The family is descended from David Ker, a merchant of Ballymena, Co. Antrim, who had taken a lease of the first fall on Sir Robert Adair's mill-race at Ballymena, c.1710. He married Jean Boyd of Clontfinnan near Clough, Co. Antrim, and had a family of eleven children of whom three were prominent merchants: William in Ballymena, Hugh in Dublin, and David in London. David Ker settled in London and traded at Cateaton Street, first as Ker & Elmes, then after 1755 as Ker, Elmes & Priest, and later after 1758 as David Ker & Co. In 1765 he purchased the Portavoe estate near Groomsport, in the Ards. He died in 1770 and was succeeded by his son, David, during whose lifetime the firm traded as Ker, Pope & Dyson and later as Ker, Brookland & Priest. In 1785 he purchased the Clough and Magheraknock estates in Co. Down from Arthur Annesley and in 1800 that of Montalto at Ballynahinch, Co. Down, from the 2nd Earl of Moira. His brother, Richard Gervais Ker, High Sheriff of Co. Antrim in 1791, bought the Red Hall estate at Ballycarry, Co. Antrim, in 1780 from Sir Archibald Edmonstone. David Ker died in 1811, and was succeeded by his son David, who married, in 1814, the daughter of the 1st Marquess of Londonderry and in 1834 bought the Southwell estate at Downpatrick, Co. Down, from the representatives of Lord de Clifford.

The Kers are especially important in the late 18th century for their enterprises in the land market in Ulster. Besides purchasing at least four estates between 1785 and 1834, they showed interest in the purchase of several others. In this way the descendants of a Ballymena merchant entered county society and in 1796 the Irish House of Commons (David Ker was returned in that year for Blessington, Co. Wicklow, then controlled by Lord Downshire).



The Papers

The archive falls into three groups, namely the family papers, c.1720-c.1850, the correspondence of David Ker of Portavoe and London, 1779-1811, and the correspondence of Richard Gervais Ker of Red Hall, 1799-1822.

The family papers include: genealogical notes from the 17th century; copy wills of David Ker, merchant, Ballymena, 1720, and his sons, William Ker, merchant, Ballymena, 1774, and Hugh Ker, merchant, Dublin, 1778; copy will and codicil of David Ker, Portavoe, 1810; copy marriage settlement of Frances Catherine Ker, Montalto, with the Rev. James Mahon, Dean of Dromore, Co. Down, 1812; and will of David Stewart Ker, Montalto, 1851. Among the correspondence of David Ker of Portavoe and London are c.40 letters from Sir Archibald Edmonstone and Richard Gervais Ker concerning the negotiations for the purchase of the Red Hall estate, 1779-1780. However, this group consists principally of letters from David Ker to his brother, Richard, 1799-1822, including his copy out-letter book, 1791-1811, which relate in the main to the management of the estates at Portavoe, Montalto and Clough, but which also touch upon Lord Downshire's support for David Ker in obtaining the seat for Blessington in 1796, and the civil unrest in Cos Antrim and Down before and during the 1798 Rebellion. There are also some business letters and accounts of David Ker. The third group, consisting mainly of the correspondence of Richard Gervais Ker which relates principally to family affairs, also contains business letters from Carew Eilers, London, for the firm of Ker, Brookland & Priest, 1793-1794, and letters from Benjamin Porter on a Continental tour, 1818-1820.

The remaining items include: letters from David Stewart Ker and his wife, Anna Dorothea Ker, on a tour of the Middle East, 1845-1846; and correspondence, etc, relating to the election of D.S. Ker as an independent candidate for Co. Down, 1852.

