

Normanton Papers (T3719)

Summary



Walpole's Administration (1743)
*Bookplace of Charles
Agar, Earl of Normanton*

The Normanton papers, which run from 1741 to 1809, are the letters and papers of Archbishop Charles Agar, 1st Earl of Normanton (1735-1809), third son of Henry Agar (1707-46) of Gowran, Co. Kilkenny, by his wife, Anne (1707-1765), daughter of Welbore Ellis, Bishop of Meath, and a younger brother of James Agar, 1st Viscount Clifden (1734-1789). The Agars of Gowran owned c.20,000 statute acres in Co. Kilkenny, and controlled the two south Kilkenny boroughs of Gowran and Thomastown. This gave them a minimum of four seats in the Irish House of Commons, plus a fifth when an Agar was elected for the county of Kilkenny. On the strength of this considerable parliamentary influence, Charles Agar's eldest brother, James (1734-1789), was created Baron Clifden in 1776 and Viscount Clifden in 1781.

Charles Agar's ecclesiastical career began with his appointment in 1763 as first chaplain to the Lord Lieutenant, the 2nd Earl of Northumberland, and as rector and vicar of Ballymagarvey and Skryne, diocese of Meath. He was then, successively, dean of Kilmore (and rector of Annagh, alias Belturbet, Co. Cavan, in the same diocese), 1765-1768, bishop of Cloyne, 1768-1779, archbishop of Cashel, 1779-1801, and archbishop of Dublin, 1801-1809. He was the Church's leading spokesman in its efforts to resist the progressive dismantling of the Penal Laws against Irish Roman Catholics, and he was the leading defender of a Church Establishment under frequent political attack from anti-clerical or greedy Anglicans in the Irish House of Commons, as well as from Roman Catholics, who remained outside parliament until twenty years after his death, but were restored to the parliamentary franchise in 1793. For the quarter of a century and more between c.1770 and 1800, he was very prominent in the Cabinets of successive lords lieutenant of Ireland and a formidable speaker, intellect, man of business and tactician in the House of Lords. His highest ambition, the archbishopric of Armagh, eluded him, but he did have the consolation of a remarkable accumulation of temporal as well as spiritual honours, to say nothing of the accumulation of great wealth. He was created Baron Somerton in 1795, Viscount Somerton in 1800, and Earl of Normanton in 1806, and died possessed of an estate which his wife reckoned was worth £10,000 a year (a considerable underestimate, because in addition to landed property of nearly that annual value, it comprised something like £350,000 in investments).



Cashel Palace Hotel, information leaflet
Cashel Palace Hotel

Agar's wife was Jane (1751–1826), daughter of William Benson of Downpatrick, Co. Down, sometime a merchant in Abbey Street, Dublin, but a member of a well known clerical family in the diocese of Down and Connor. Agar had married her in 1776 and they had three sons and a daughter.

For the younger son of a substantial squire, whose origins, even by Irish standards, were recent, this was a quite remarkable achievement. In the process of making it, Agar needless to say made enemies: fellow-churchmen and fellow-politicians who were envious of his almost universally acknowledged ability; country gentlemen with parliamentary influence who resented the way in which he frustrated their efforts to fleece the Church; Catholics who hated him for his efforts to oppose or at the very least delay measures for placing them on a footing of religious, civil and political equality with protestants; English ministers, whether holding office in Great Britain or, more usually, Ireland, who leaned on him and yet feared him, and who recognised that, while generally amenable to their behests, there were some issues on which he was likely to dig in; opposition politicians, again in Great Britain as well as Ireland, who thought the contrary, and that he was time-serving and a trimmer; and so on. He also, it should be emphasised, had many admirers.

[Introduction to Normanton Papers](#)