



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

DRAPERS' COMPANY

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Drapers' Company Estate Archive (D3632)

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Summary

The Drapers' Company archive documents the history of the Drapers' 'adventure' to Ireland, and their settlement in Co. Londonderry, from the early 1600s until the sale of their estates in the late 19th century. From the arrangement of the archive three broad categories can be discerned:

Records relating to the management of the estates, including minutes of the Company's courts and committees, c.1820-1891 (D3632/C); reports of Deputations, 1817-1884 (D3632/D); records of agents, 1827-1894 (D3632/D), and their correspondence, c.1780-1900 (D3632/G); financial records, c.1750-1900 (D3632/F); and litigation records, mainly c.1800-1900 (D3632/H).

Records of land tenure, and of the Drapers' dealings with their tenants, including some 2,000 leases, c.1820-1880 (D3632/B); rent records, 1813-1890 (D3632/K); and petitions and memorials, 1808-c.1900 (D3632/J).

Records reflecting the growing diversity of interests of the Drapers' Company in such matters as: education, 1807-1906 (D3632/S); medical care, 1817-1889 (D3632/T); and philanthropy, 1829-1882 (D3632/U).



The Plantation of Co. Londonderry

The Drapers' involvement in Ireland began in January 1610 when James I more-or-less compelled the livery companies of the City of London to undertake the plantation of 400,000 acres of the newly named county of Londonderry. From the distribution of land between the companies, the Drapers emerged with holdings in the barony of Loughinsholin in Co. Londonderry comprising the Divisions of Moneymore, Brackagh, Slieve Gallion, and Ballinascreen.



The townlands in the Drapers' Proportion

The following is a list of the townlands in the estate, arranged alphabetically:

Annahavil	Ballyforlea	Ballygonny
Ballygruby	Ballyloughan	Ballymoil
Ballynure	Boveagh	Brackaghreilly
Brackagh Slieve Gallion	Carmean	Carnamoney
Carncose	Carndaisy	Cloane
Cloghog	Coltrim	Coolnasillagh
Coolsaragh	Cranny	Cullion
Derrycrummy	Dunnabraggy	Drumcoaready
Drumrot	Drummeen	Dunlogan
Dunman	Dunmurry	Duntibryan
Durnascallon	Gortahurk	Gortanewry
Gortnaskey	Iniscarn	Keenaght
Killytoney	Kirley	Lecumpher
Lisalbanagh	Lismoney	Longfield
Moneyguiggy	Moneyhaw	Moneymore Town
Moneymore townland	Moybeg Kirley	Moydamlaght
Moyheeland	Moykeeran	Quilly
Tamlaghtmore	Terressan	Tirgan
Tullyboy	Tullynagee	Turnaface



Seventeenth-century viscissitudes

D3632/A (which is arranged on a straight chronological basis, rather than thematically, because of the diversity of the documents within it) reflects the problems faced by the Drapers during the early years of their settlement. From the beginning there were claims and counter-claims to possession of land, rivalries and complaints between agents and tenants, difficulties in extracting rents from unreliable tenants, and the swallowing-up of the Company's money by corrupt agents.

The first agent, Robert Russell, was sent from England with a salary of £20 per year. His function was to oversee the collection of rents, and to reorganise building works including that of the castle which was to be built in each manor. In 1613 Sir Arthur Chichester, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, wrote to Russell (A/25) complaining about the dangerous condition of the castle, part of which had fallen down - Russell had apparently failed to have the castle roofed; by 1621 no action had yet been taken, and completion of the castle was still being advised (A/159). Apart from this Russell charged to the Company personal expenses which he incurred, built a brewery which he monopolised, and eventually was imprisoned for debt. A document of 1618 (A/105) shows Russell's unpopularity with the inhabitants of Draperstown who drew up a certificate of complaints about him.

The pre-1620 documents include several offers from individuals willing to occupy the (evidently lucrative) position of agent (see A/81 and A/83, letters from Rowley and Goodwin, 1617). There are also petitions to the Company from those wishing to take on the tenancy of the Drapers' Proportion (including Goodwin, 1614, Rowley, 1615, and Cooke, 1616, who indeed seem to have been employed by the Drapers on some kind of semi-official basis). Sir Thomas Roper was the eventual winner in this contest for the position of chief tenant. A lease of fifty-five years was granted to him in 1619 and under its terms he was to pay a premium of £450, and rent for the first twenty-one years of £230 per year. The selection of a single chief tenant for the whole Manor of Drapers set the pattern which was to continue until 1817. It explains why there are so few leases before this date (the few which exist will be found in D3632/A), and why there is a separate section in the list (D3632/B) for leases granted after the Drapers' Company resumed direct control of their estates in 1817.



Troublesome chief tenants

The Drapers' first chief tenant proved to be as great a disappointment to them as their first agent had been; he was equally skilled at falling into debt and managed to default on the rent within one year. In 1627 the lands held by Roper were granted to Peter Barker on a sixty year lease, but he too was unable, or unwilling, to pay the rent. The first long-term and reliable tenant was Sir John Clotworthy who in 1632 was granted a sixty-one year lease, renewed to him as Viscount Massereene in 1663. Eventually, after various assignments of the lease and a lengthy tenancy on the part of the Dawson family of Dawson's Bridge (ie Castle Dawson), Admiral William Rowley, husband of the Dawson heiress, became the tenant in 1751. His lease was renewed for his life and the lives of his heirs in 1756.



Direct Rule

By 1817 the Rowley lease was drawing to a close so the first of a series of Deputations from the Drapers' Company was sent to Co. Londonderry to report on the state of the land and its inhabitants (D3632/D1). The main recommendation made by the first Deputation was that the Drapers should resume direct management of their estates; hence the proliferation of leases to small farmers from c.1820 onwards (D3632/B).



Deputation Reports and Company minute books

Much of the Drapers' Irish business during the 19th century is described in the Reports of the Deputations, 1817-1884. More information about the administration of the Manor of Drapers can be found in the minutes of the Court of Assistants on Irish Affairs, and of the Committees on Irish Affairs (D3632/C).



Agents' correspondence

The agents' correspondence (D3632/G), comprising letters between the agents at the Drapers' Office, Moneymore, and the Clerks of the Drapers' Company at Drapers' Hall, London, is also particularly useful in this respect. Prominent among the agents are various members and successive generation of the Miller family, who began as agents to the last of the Rowleys, Sir William Rowley, 2nd Bt, and transferred their allegiance to the Company after his death. The 19th century saw the Drapers extending themselves into such varied activities as encouragement of new industries, agricultural improvements, education, charitable works, etc. This expansion is reflected in the agents' correspondence as well as in several discrete sections of the archive.



Land Purchase

By 1880, however, the Company had concluded that its Irish estates were no longer viable. The tenants were discontented after a series of bad harvests, and considerable arrears of rent were building up amid accompanying agitation for tenant right (D3632/K). It was decided, therefore, to proceed with the sale of Drapers' property under the terms of the 1881 Land Law (Ireland) Act and the 1885 Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act. This proved to be a protracted business, which culminated in the Drapers being accused, by a Parliamentary Commission, of unfairness to their tenants - an accusation which they were able to refute.

Next the Company was sued by its own solicitors, Glover & McGuckin, for the costs which they had incurred in administering the disposal of the Company's estates. The solicitors also claimed commission on the sales of land and on the collection of rents (D3632/H/2).

This was followed by a lawsuit against the Drapers by the Irish Attorney-General. A select committee of the House of Lords had ruled that the Drapers were merely trustees of the Irish estates, and that proceeds of the sale of their estates should be devoted to improvements in Ireland. The Drapers contested this and the verdict was eventually given in their favour by the Irish Master of the Rolls (D3632/H). Amid this storm of litigation, the sale of the Drapers' Irish estates was virtually completed by 1900.

