



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

HILL (OF BROOK HALL) PAPERS

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Hill (of Brook Hall) Papers (D642)

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Summary

The Hill papers comprise c.2,865 documents, 1618-1925, deriving from the Hill family of Brook Hall, baronets, and also documenting the related families of Rowley of Culmore, Co. Londonderry, Beresford of Coleraine and Walworth, Co. Londonderry, and Curraghmore, Co. Waterford, Spence of Strabane, Co. Tyrone, and Rea of St Columb's, Londonderry City.

The Hills descend from Samuel Hill, Cromwell's Treasurer for Ireland. They became inter-connected with the other families through a series of 'good' marriages: the marriage in 1694 of another Samuel Hill and Mary, daughter and heiress of Hugh Rowley of Culmore; the marriage in 1772 of Sir Hugh Hill, 1st Bt, and Mrs Hannah Spence, widow of Robert Spence of Strabane; the marriage in 1788 of Sir George Fitzgerald Hill, 2nd Bt, and Jane Beresford, niece of the 1st Marquess of Waterford; and the marriage in 1831 of George Fitzgerald Hill, subsequently 3rd Bt, and Elizabeth, daughter and co-heiress of John Rea of St Columb's.



Documents of title and estate papers

The archive includes title deeds, leases, legal papers, maps, surveys, valuations, rentals and accounts, relating to the Hill/Rowley property in the city and liberties of Londonderry, 1740-1897, in the liberties of Coleraine, Co. Londonderry, 1660-1812, and at Tobermore, Co. Londonderry, 1660-1844, and to the Rea property in the liberties of Londonderry and at Glenmaquin, Co. Donegal, 1795-1897.

There are also: title deeds relating to the Hill's property in the parish of Finvoy, Co. Antrim, 1770 and 1785, and title deeds and maps relating to their property in the Killough and Strangford areas, Co. Down, 1713-1788, including a map of Killough by John Sloane, 1713, and maps of the manors of Ardglass and Strangford, by Garret Hogan, 1734, together with the commissions of Hugh Hill, 1st Bt, as Collector of the Revenue at Strangford, 1756 and 1761; title deeds, leases and legal papers relating to the Hill/Spence estate in the barony of Rossclogher, Co. Leitrim, 1736 and 1765-1810, brought into the Hill family through the Hill-Spence marriage of 1772; title deeds relating to the estate of the 3rd Viscount Massereene in the barony of Cremorne, Co. Monaghan, 1700-1702; and leases and legal papers relating to the Lough Neagh fishery, 1788-1826, leased by the Hills from the Marquesses of Donegall.



Wills and testamentary papers

There are many pre-1858 wills among the title deeds, as follows: copy will and probate of Samuel Hill, Coleraine, 1694; copy will of John Hodgson, Ballynascreen, Co. Londonderry, 1730; copy will and codicil of Alexander Stewart, Ballylough, Co. Antrim, 1739-1740; copies of the will of Rowley Hill, Walworth, Co. Londonderry, 1739; copy will of Robert Spence, Strabane, 1759; letters of administration with will annexed of Mrs Jane Semple, 1759; letters of administration of Miss Charity Hodgson, 1759; will, 1759, and letters of administration, 1760, of Samuel Hill, Strangford, Co. Down, 1760; will of Mary Hodgson, first wife of Sir Hugh Hill, 1760; copy will of John Mulholland, Kingston, Jamaica, an ancestor of the Rea family, 1767; copy will of the Rev. Dr Benjamin Bacon, 'Glebe Hall', Co. Londonderry, 1769; will, 1788, and letters of administration, 1789, of Miss Letitia Hill, Dublin; copy will and codicil of the Rev. Edward Fanning, Dublin, 1790-1791; letters of administration of the Rev. Charles Ray, 'Donogh', Co. Donegal, 1792; copy of the will and probate of Mrs Anne Nesbitt, Dublin, 1795; copy will of the Rt Hon. John Beresford, 1803; letters of administration of John Rea, Londonderry, 1810; copy of the will and probate of Mary McCausland, Jackson's Hall, Coleraine, 1825; copy of the will and probate of John Rea, St Columb's, 1832; and copy of the will and probate of William Henderson, naval surgeon, Foyle View, Londonderry, 1846.



Correspondence

The correspondence section of the archive includes papers of Hugh Rowley of Culmore relating to his office as Storekeeper of the Ordnance, 1690-1692, and also correspondence and petitions, 1697, concerning his losses during the siege of Derry. There is a slim, copy out-letterbook of John Rea of Lifford [Co. Donegal, presumably an ancestor of Lady Hill, wife of Sir George Hill, 3rd Bt], relating to his business interests in Jamaica and also to the wine trade, 1778-1780 and 1787, and long and eccentric letter to Sir Hugh Hill, 1st Bt, from [Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry] concerning the Catholic Relief Bill, Protestant Ascendancy, the French Revolution, etc, etc, 1792. But most of the correspondence derives from Sir George Fitzgerald Hill, 2nd Bt (1763-1839).

The principal theme of Sir George's correspondence is politics, local government and law and order in Londonderry City and County, 1792-1830, reflecting his various roles as MP for Coleraine, 1791-1795, as Recorder of Londonderry from 1791, MP for Londonderry City (in succession to his father), 1795-1801 and 1802-1830, and for Co. Londonderry, 1801-1802, as captain-commandant of the Londonderry Yeoman Legion from 1796, and as major and lieutenant-colonel of the Co. Londonderry Militia, 1797-1822, and briefly and contentiously, its colonel, 1822-1823. For the short period 1798-1801, Hill held the lucrative sinecure of Clerk of the Irish Parliament and received a pension of £2,265 in the latter year in compensation for its abolition. Because his wife was a daughter of the Rt Hon. John Beresford and a niece of the 1st Marquess of Waterford, and Hill himself was the leading local representative of the mainly absentee Beresfords, his correspondence inevitably reflects the wider political concerns and ambitions of that dynasty, including their electoral interests in Co. Waterford, 1805-1830. It also reflects the most important offices he held, a Lordship of the Irish Treasury, 1807-1817, and the Vice-Treasurership for Ireland, 1817-1830.



Section one of Sir G.F. Hill's correspondence

The first section of his correspondence comprises 265 letters and papers, 1802 and 1810-1830, arranged in chronological order. This is at variance with the arrangement of the rest of his correspondence, which is mainly alphabetical by correspondent, and the inconsistency is explained by the fact that for over 30 years these 265 letters and papers were the only Hill papers held by PRONI.



*William Carr, Viscount
Beresford*

Many of them relates to Irish Treasury and Revenue business, reform of the financial side of the Irish Court of Exchequer, reduction in salaries and offices in the Treasury, Exchequer and Revenue, etc, etc. A principal correspondent is Edward Mitchell (First Clerk and 'Computer of the Off-Reckonings' in the Vice-Treasurer's office). Many other letters relate to local politics in Londonderry City and County and in Coleraine borough. A major topic of this section of the archive is the quarrel between the Beresford family and one of the sitting members for the county, the Rt Hon. George Robert Dawson, which involved Hill, Robert Peel (Dawson's brother-in-law), who was Home Secretary at the time, the Primate of All Ireland, Lord John George Beresford, the then head of the Beresford family, William Carr Beresford, Viscount Beresford, the Master-General of the Ordnance, and – inevitably – the Duke of Wellington, who was Prime Minister. There are also many letters about Hill's estate and business affairs in Cos. Londonderry and Donegal, including an abortive scheme of 1822 to sell Brook Hall to the Bishop of Derry as his palace.



Section two of Sir G.F. Hill's correspondence

A number of these topics, and correspondents, recur in the second, and much larger, section of Hill's correspondence, which runs from c.1790 to 1830.

In this section his principal correspondents are: his brother-in-law, John Claudius Beresford, agent for the Irish Society, Dublin banker and spectacular bankrupt, who writes about all manner of political and business affairs, 1805-1816; William Carr Beresford, then a Marshal in the Portuguese army, who writes about his victory at Albuera, 1812; Edward Cooke, Under-Secretary in the Civil Department of Dublin Castle, who writes about all manner of security matters in the period leading up to the 1798 Rebellion and about the Union and Catholic Emancipation, 1795-1802; George Robert Dawson, Under-Secretary at the Home Office, 1822-1827, and MP for Co. Londonderry, 1815-1830, who



Edward Cooke

writes about Catholic Emancipation and county electioneering, 1826 and 1829; Alexander Knox, private secretary to the Chief Secretary for Ireland (and a Derry friend of Hill's), who writes on similar topics to Edward Cooke, 1798-1800; Charles Henry O'Neill, Earl O'Neill, who writes about the Lough Neagh fishery and O'Neill's personal ambitions, 1810-1827; Robert Peel, who writes as Chief Secretary for Ireland (1812-1818) and later as Home Secretary about local political matters, unrest on the borders of Antrim and Londonderry and other public disturbances, robberies and the search for arms, the magistracy, the removal of 'rebels from the Derry corps', the Catholic Board, the 'disposition to turbulence and disquiet among the lower orders, and particularly in the North', the war waged by Hill against illicit distilleries, William Cobbett's attack on Daniel O'Connell, the use of the police, Peel's farewell to the mayor and citizens of Londonderry on his departure from Ireland, Hill's report on the general state of Antrim, Derry and Down and advice on the steps to be taken against the Catholic Association, etc, 1812-1818 and 1822-1827; and Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, later 2nd Marquess of Londonderry, who writes as lieutenant-colonel of the co. Londonderry Militia (1793-1800), as Chief Secretary for Ireland (1798-1801) and as a Co. Londonderry political magnate, about local militia, law-and-order and electioneering affairs, and about the Union, 1797-1802.



The Royal Belfast Academical Institution



Robert Peel, 2nd Bt



Of considerable interest to the history of the future RBAI, known locally as 'Inst', and to the history of education and Presbyterianism in Ulster, is a letter of 12 April 1817 from W. Knight, Professor of Natural Philosophy, John Young, Professor of Moral Philosophy, Andrew O'Beirne, Professor of Hebrew and Principal of the Classical Department, James Thomson, Professor of Mathematics, William Cairns, Professor of Logic and Belles Lettres, all of the Academical Institution, Belfast, to Robert Peel as Chief Secretary for Ireland, stating their reasons why the Belfast Academical Institution should not be closed down and explaining at length and in detail the relationship between the Institution and the Presbyterian Synod.

Sir G.F. Hill's escape from his creditors

Although the archive hobbles on into the 20th century, its main interest ceases in 1830. In that year, harassed by his creditors and probably also by being caught in the middle of the Beresford-Dawson rumpus, Hill decided to use his family and political influence to obtain for himself a well-paid post overseas. He served first as Governor of St Vincent, 1830-1833, and then as Governor of Trinidad, where he died in 1839.



The arrangement of the archive

As already indicated, the arrangement of the archive is not straightforward, and was dictated by the fact that it came to PRONI in two different batches, the first in 1953 and the second in 1986. The 1953 batch, consisting very largely of political correspondence of Sir George Fitzgerald Hill, 1802 and 1810-1830, was calendared and filed in guard books; with the result that it was not practicable to merge it with the long-subsequent and much bigger and more wide-ranging addition of 1986. The former bears reference D642/1-265; the latter has been broken down into alphabetical sections, D642/A-K. As long as the user remembers that D642/1-265 contains nothing but political and general correspondence of Sir George Fitzgerald Hill, and that further, similar material is to be found at D642/A/4-23, he will not go far wrong.

