INTRODUCTION

ROSSMORE PAPERS

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Rossmore Papers (T2929)

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Summary


Although the papers bear the PRONI prefix 'T', which usually denotes photocopies, they are present in the original. The only exceptions are c.25 important architectural drawings, the originals of which were destroyed when Lord Rossmore's house in the demesne of Rossmore Park was burnt down by terrorists. The rest of the papers in the house would have shared the same fate, but for the very fortunate accident that they had been lent to PRONI for conservation and photocopying (which is why they were given a 'T' number). Following the destruction of his house, Lord Rossmore generously decided that his best course of action was to allow the originals to remain with PRONI. This deposit of 1972-1973 consisted of personal and political papers which came originally from Rossmore Park. It was followed, nearly 25 years later, by a further deposit from the office of Messrs Martin & Brett, Mill Street, Monaghan, solicitors (and former tenants) to successive Lords Rossmore. This latter deposit of estate office-type material, from 1703 onwards, is in the main rather late and disappointing: that from Rossmore Park, though very largely 19th century and therefore late, is far from disappointing.

One important adjunct to, or rather stray from, the archive, is a volume of maps in the private possession of Mr and Mrs Christopher Pringle, Glenview, Monaghan. The surveyor was Arthur Richards Neville, and the maps reveal that in 1790 the estate comprised 83 townlands and over 8300 Irish acres (equivalent to 11,960 statute acres), all in the barony of Monaghan, Co. Monaghan, and mostly centring on the county town of Monaghan itself. The volume has been microfilmed by PRONI under reference number MIC624. The list of the rentals section of the archive, T2929/38, sets out how - from c.1892 onwards - the estate was arranged and managed, and what were its component townlands and streets in the town of Monaghan.
Printed Sources

The archive, with the exception of a little late 17th and 18th-century correspondence, and the recently deposited leases and deeds dating from 1703, is 19th and 20th century in date. Information about the 18th century background to the family and estate will be found in A.P.W. Malcomson, 'The Earl of Clermont: a Forgotten County Monaghan Magnate of the Late Eighteenth Century', in Clogher Record, vol. xiii (1973). Some additional information about the complicated descent of the property in the period 1732-1790, which was not drawn upon in that article because not known about at the time, will be found in Ethel M. Richardson, Long-Forgotten Days (Leading to Waterloo) (London, 1928), pp. 243-263. A fuller perspective on the subject is provided in E.P. Shirley's History of the County of Monaghan (London, 1877-1878), pp. 213-216. Anecdotal of the second half of the 19th century and early years of the 20th is provided in the 5th Lord Rossmore's Things I Can Tell (London, 1912), which contains some incidental information of use and a great many stories which, though pretty tame by today's standards, gave great offence - particularly in Co. Monaghan - at the time of the book's publication. The Irish Architectural Archives's catalogue raisonné, The Architecture of Richard Morrison (1767-1849) and William Vitruvius Morrison (1794-1838) (Dublin, 1989), contains an important section on the building of Rossmore Park, almost entirely based on T2929.
The history of the family and the estate

Originally, the future Rossmore estate belonged to the Blayney family, Lords Blayney. As E.P. Shirley puts it, 'The consequences of the Rebellion of 1641 and the Revolution of 1688 were scarcely less disastrous to the loyal family of Blayney than they were to the native chiefs and others of the Irish families who still retained their property in the barony of Monaghan; it may be said, indeed, that they never recovered their position in the county. The 2nd Lord died in 1646; his eldest son, Edward, 3rd Lord, pressed by monetary difficulties, sold the whole of his estates to Thomas Vincent of London in the years 1648 and 1653; and although his brother, Richard, who succeeded to the title as the 4th Lord Blayney, married the daughter and heiress of Mr Vincent, and thus recovered the estates, the distractions of the times consequent on the Revolution of 1688 greatly affected the value of the property, which appears not to have been in a prosperous condition even before that period ... .

That part of it which was in the barony of Monaghan ... [was] sold by Henry Vincent, 5th Lord Blayney, to Alexander Cairnes Esq. [son of John Cairnes of Donaghmore, Co. Donegal, and descended from a family settled at Orchardston, Kirkcudbright], in the year 1680. In 1708 this gentleman was created a baronet ... with a special remainder, for want of male heirs, to his brother, Henry, afterward [1732] the 2nd and last baronet. The example of the Blayney and Vincent alliance appears to have been followed on this occasion, Mary, the only daughter and heiress of Sir Alexander Cairnes, having married Caldwallader, 7th Lord Blayney. But he died without issue in 1732, and his widow re-married the Rt Hon. Lieutenant-Colonel John Murray, afterwards M.P. for [Co.] Monaghan, to whose daughters the Monaghan estate descended. ...' In fact, the estate passed in 1732 to Sir Henry Cairnes, 2nd Bt, Mary Cairnes's uncle, who was an elderly and childless man. She did not succeed to it until his death in 1743, which was closely followed by that of her husband, Colonel Murray. In the brief interim, Lady Blayney (as she continued to call herself, in spite of her second marriage and of the fact that her first marriage had been particularly unhappy) executed a settlement of the estate whereby it would descend to her children by Colonel Murray, to the exclusion of any children, even male children, she might have by a subsequent husband.

The eldest Murray daughter, Frances, again in the words of E.P. Shirley, '... married William Henry Fortescue, Earl of Clermont. The second, Elizabeth, Robert Cuninghame, created Baron Rossmore with a special remainder in 1796. The third, Mary, died unmarried. The fourth, Anne, married the Rt Hon. Theophilus Jones [and had a son, Henry, who died young]. The fifth married in 1764 Henry Westenra, whose eldest son, Warner William, eventually succeeded, according to the terms of the patent, on the death of his uncle Robert Cuninghame, the 1st Lord Rossmore, in 1801 as 2nd Lord Rossmore ... . [At this stage, the only house on the estate was, in
the words of the 3rd Lord Rossmore, "a paltry cabin, unfurnished and mean". The handsome seat of this family at Rossmore Park [known in the 1820s and 1830s as Cortolvin Hills] in the parish of Monaghan was erected by Warner William, 2nd Lord Rossmore [to the designs of Richard and William Vitruvius Morrison], but greatly increased and improved by the good taste of Henry Robert, 3rd Lord. The beautiful view from the terrace in front of the house deserves mention, as being by far the richest example of sylvan scenery in the county of Monaghan. ..."
Queen Anne and Queen Bess

Because of this extremely complicated family history, the Westenras, Lords Rossmore, though their ancestor in the female line had acquired the estate as long ago as 1680, did not actually come into full possession of it until 1827. It belonged successively to Sir Alexander and Sir Henry Cairnes between 1680 and 1743; in part to Mary Cairnes, Lady Blayney, from 1743 to her death in 1790; in part to her eldest daughter, Frances Murray, Countess of Clermont, from 1764 to 1790, and more or less in whole from 1790 to Lady Clermont's death in 1820; and between 1820 and the death of the last of Lady Clermont's aged sisters in 1827, its ownership was shared in a rather bewildering fashion between and among the old ladies and Warner William Westenra, 2nd Lord Rossmore. Since 1805 he had been in the extraordinary position of acting as Governor (or Lord Lieutenant) of Co. Monaghan, though technically without owning much or any land in the county. It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that his son and he irreverently described the last of his aunts as 'Queen Anne' and 'Queen Bess'!

The archive includes three isolated components which are best described individually, because they otherwise distort its covering dates: these are a bundle of Quitrent receipts for the Westenra estates in King's and Queen's Counties and Essex, 1610-1809; letters, 1663-1664 and 1686-1693, to Peter Westenra, MP for Athboy, Co. Meath, and others, mostly from Peter Westenra's brother-in-law, Thomas Bligh of Rathmore, Athboy, whose agent he was, mainly about estate and financial affairs, with some references to the Williamite War, Co. Meath politics, etc., (and one letter, of 1664, to Derrick Westenra in Amsterdam - an interesting reminder of the Dutch origin of the Westenra family); and letters, 1705-1733, to the Cairnes family, mostly to Sir Alexander Cairnes, 1st Bt, about the affairs of his Co. Monaghan estate (later the Rossmore estate), and also of the estate of the Davys family, Viscounts Mount Cashell, at Glanfin, Co. Dublin.

Other (slightly extraneous) items are the will, 1702, of William Ley of [?Kiliben], Co. Tyrone, the will and codicil, 1809, of town and subsequent testamentary papers, 1810-1910, a copy of the will of John Wilson of Newry, 1820, and a probate of the will, codicils, etc, of Henry Robert, 3rd Lord Rossmore, and subsequent testamentary papers, 1854-1907.

The estate office-type material comprises: leases and conveyances, 1703-1961, of rural and urban property in and around Monaghan town; title deeds, deeds of settlement and mortgages, 1737-1922 and 1954, including the settlement made in 1768 on the marriage of Anne Murray, third daughter of Mary Cairnes, Lady Blayney, and the Rt Hon. Theophilus Jones; rentals and rent books for the Rossmore estate, c.1892-1940 and 1958-1959; legal case papers and some miscellaneous accounts, 1732-1946, including a valuation of the furniture in Rossmore Park, [1858?]; and Irish Land Commission sale papers, c.1889-1936.
Two highlights are: a grant of 1739 from Colonel John Murray, husband of Lady Blayney, to the Presbyterians of Monaghan town of a site for their meeting house, signed by the principal figures in the local Presbyterian community; and a somewhat damaged grant of 1792 to the Earl of Clermont of a weekly market in the town of Monaghan. The market house was designed by Samuel Hayes of Avondale, Co. Wicklow, a friend and neighbour of General Cuninghame, 1st Lord Rossmore, and has the date 1792 inscribed on its pediment. The grant is thus an important link with an important building in Monaghan.
The 2nd to the 5th Lords Rossmore

The family, personal, political, sporting and estate correspondence, from 1786 onwards, of the 2nd, 3rd and 5th Lords Rossmore (the 4th Lord having been extremely short-lived) is the great strength of the archive. Because the 2nd, 3rd and 5th Lords Rossmore were highly individualistic (the 2nd and 5th to the point of eccentricity), their papers contain some unusual and revealing material on democratic politics, both Green and Orange. The local politics and local government of Co. Monaghan are the dominant theme, but frequent reference is also made to the patrimonial Westenra property (and attendant political influence) at Sharavogue, Kinnity, King's County. The 3rd Lord Rossmore was Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of Co. Monaghan, 1838-1858, and his letters and papers in this capacity are voluminous, frequently vitriolic and very instructive. The 5th Lord Rossmore was a celebrated Orangeman, whose dismissal from the Co. Monaghan magistracy in 1883 as a punishment for his staging an anti-Parnellite demonstration at Rosslea, on the Fermanagh-Monaghan border, gave rise to a debate in parliament.

Writing to Lord Dufferin on this subject on 14 December 1883 (PRONI, D1071/H/B/D/78/126), the Countess of Dartrey, wife of the Lieutenant of Co. Monaghan and a supporter of the Liberal government of the day, commented: '... You will have seen how indignant (and I think most justly so) Ulster has been and is at the action of the government towards Rossmore. ... They have transformed a hot-headed, rather foolish youth into the hero of the day, and by refusing to let him see the second report of McTernan, R.M., on which they profess to ground his dismissal from the J.P. ship, they have violated the fundamental axiom of British [law] that every man shall now fully of what he is accused. ... Meantime, the religious bitterness has become quite dreadful. ...'
The representative peerage system

Another prominent political theme in the Rossmore papers is the 2nd Lord Rossmore's controversial campaign from the late 1820s to reform the representative peerage system, Scottish as well as Irish. This seems to have come to an end when he was suppressed with a UK peerage in 1838. Another Scottish dimension is provided by the Arran Islands estate which the 3rd Lord Rossmore inherited in right of his wife, a natural daughter of the 8th Duke of Hamilton.

Both the 2nd and 5th Lords Rossmore were noted patrons of the turf, and are represented by some interesting material on horse-racing, c.1800-1833 and 1860-1896.
Rossmore Park

There are 47 original or photocopied architectural drawings of the period 1809-1858, mostly relating to Rossmore Park, together with correspondence with or about Sir Richard Morrison, who completely rebuilt the house in the mid-1820s, and with William Hague (the architect of Hilton Park, Clones, Co. Monaghan, in the mid-1870s - see D/3465) about a proposed additional wing, 1876.

The already-mentioned Irish Architectural Archives’s catalogue of ‘The Architecture of Richard ... and William Vitruvius Morrison’ ... includes the following entry for Rossmore Park: 'During 1824 Richard Morrison was engaged in producing plans to rebuild the house then known as Cortolvin Hills for Lord Rossmore. His client's son, Henry Robert Westenra, expressed his opinion of the results in a letter to his father enclosing his "observations" on the designs, which were to be forwarded to Morrison: "The elevation I like very much; the interior arrangement is bad ... and the entrance gate, what every retired butcher and baker puts up at his lodge ... But as to the idea of deforming the beautiful face of our gracefully sloping hill, with grotesque terraces, straight lines and mathematical walks - the point of the compasses ought to be poked into the fellow's eye that proposed it." After receiving Morrison's response to his criticisms, Westenra reported to his father: "He writes in a rage, I think, at being found fault with, and huffily declares he finds it impossible for him to alter or amend his plan, and that it give him more complete satisfaction than any he ever produced, adheres pertinaciously to the gateway and his vulgar crests ...". In Westenra's eyes Morrison's plan was "a heavy and a monotonous according-to-rule idea, regularly heavy and uniformly dull, straight and formal".

Precisionlly what happened next is not recorded, but by the end of the decade William Morrison had replaced his father as architect of Rossmore Park. By 10 March 1829 he was writing to Lord Rossmore about finishing the new reception rooms and porch, enclosing "a sketch of the manner in which I propose to connect the new and old parts of the house". An estimate by Francis Donnelly of Monaghan for plastering these rooms is dated 7 October 1830. There must then have been a pause in the work, which was not, apparently, resumed until the summer of 1835, perhaps as a result of the death of Lady Rossmore's mother: "... we hear that Lady Elcho was left Lady R. £30,000", Edward Lucas wrote to Henry Westenra on 4 May, "which will come very opportune for the building of New Haddon Hall".

Ascertaining what the Morrisons built is now made more difficult by the subsequent remodelling and eventual demolition of the house, though ... [what seems to have happened is that] the pre-existing gable-ended house was turned into a servants' wing and a new suite of public rooms was built to the north east. The front of this new block faced north, a two-storey Jacobean facade with a square entrance tower at its west and a projecting room with a Dutch gable flanked by octagonal pinnacles at its east end. The front was topped with pierced stonework crenulations as was the octagonal tower which terminated the block on its east side. Three surviving designs by William Morrison (which were photographed before they were destroyed by fire) were for the details of the entrance porch, for the Tudor plasterwork ceiling in the boudoir in the octagonal tower and for the short range which linked the servants' wing.
to the new parts of the house; this included a gabled tower more typical of the mature
Elizabethan style which Morrison developed in the 1830s at Hollybrooke and Clontarf
Castle.

In 1854 William Deane Butler produced plans for remodelling the house, which were
not executed but which are helpful in indicating the extent and appearance of the
Morrisons' work. Four years later the house was remodelled and awkwardly
enlarged to designs of Lanyon & Lynn of Belfast. The north front and servants' wing
were then much altered, but the south elevation of Morrison's design remained
substantially intact. During the 1940s Rossmore Park became unoccupied. It was
unroofed after the Second World War and the ruin demolished in 1975.'