



Public Record Office
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INTRODUCTION

PORTER PAPERS

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Porter Papers (D1390/10, N/19, LR1/178/1)

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Summary

The papers of the Porter family of Belleisle, Lisbellaw, Co. Fermanagh, and Clogher Park, Clogher, Co. Tyrone, 1828-1950, derive from four different sources: the Porter section of the Falls & Hanna of Enniskillen solicitor's archive comprises c.900 documents and volumes 1830-1950, but mainly c.1880-1950; John Grey Vesey Porter's (incomplete) set of his own newspaper, *The Lisbellaw Gazette*, comprises 16 volumes (including one from a different provenance), 1879-1885, 1887, 1889-1899 and 1901; the Irish Land Commission sale papers from the Land Registry archive (LRI) relating to the Porter estates, in Tyrone as well as Fermanagh, comprise c.500 documents and volumes, 1828-c.1940; and 8 rentals of the Co. Fermanagh estate of Thomas S. Porter and John Porter-Porter, 1895, 1900, 1902, 1904-1905, 1910, 1915 and 1920.



Family history

The Porters are an interesting and rather unusual example of an English clerical family which thrived in the Church of Ireland *and* settled in Ireland permanently.



*John Porter, Bishop of
Clogher*

The founding Porter was John Porter, who had been Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, and came to Ireland in 1795 as a viceregal chaplain to the 2nd Earl Camden, Lord Lieutenant, 1795-1798. There was a convention that viceregal chaplains ended up bishops. But John Porter fared exceptionally well because, after only a two-year purgatory in the remote and undesirable bishopric of Killala in Co. Mayo, he was promoted to the unusually valuable bishopric of Clogher, where he remained from 1797 to his death in 1819. His son and heir, the Rev. John Grey Porter, was in 1813 preferred to the prebend and rectory of Kilskeery, also in the diocese of Clogher, which he held until his retirement in 1871. But the bishop's palace and the son's rectory were 'official'

residences, so it was natural that a family bent on putting down roots in Ireland should be on the lookout for a family seat.



The Belleisle estate

The Belleisle estate came on the market in 1830. Since the Plantation, it had belonged to the Gore family, baronets, of Manor Gore, Co. Donegal. The last of this branch of the Gore family was Sir Ralph Gore, 6th Bt and one and only Earl of Ross (1725-1802). He had greatly ornamented the pleasure grounds, particularly with follies and garden buildings designed by the well-known Thomas Wright, but the main house was still the modest lodge built by his father in c.1720. Lord Ross had died without legitimate issue, leaving Belleisle to his natural daughter, Mary, wife of Sir Richard Hardinge, 1st Bt. The rental of the Belleisle estate was just over £2,200 in 1828 (PRONI, LR1/84/1/11), so the Hardinges were far from affluent. For whatever reason, in 1809 they let the house and demesne of Belleisle and the islands immediately surrounding it. Lady Hardinge died in 1824 and Sir Richard in 1826. His nephew and successor, the Rev. Sir Charles Hardinge, 2nd Bt, of Tunbridge, Kent, had no connection with Ireland and presumably no interest in Belleisle. Accordingly, in 1830, Sir Charles and his trustees sold the entire Belleisle estate, consisting of the manors of Belleisle and Carrick, together with a small leasehold addendum acquired by Sir Ralph Gore, 4th Bt, in 1724, to the Rev. John Grey Porter of Kilskeery for £68,000.



The townlands

The deed of conveyance, dated 1 May 1830 (PRONI D1390/10/3/1) provides the following comprehensive description of the townlands and other components of Porter's purchase: '... all that and those the manor or reputed manor of Carrick estate with the several subdenominations thereof, viz.: Carrick, Ballymacmanus, Beragh, Behon, Beacho, Carrowkeel, Clogtogal, Coolbuck, Cloone, Crichamuack, Crogh, Crigaragallan, Derryclane, Derrihoney, Drumdron, Derryclawer, Aghedereoghlish, Ederaglush, Fahort, Fanghart, Farragh, Foxhill, Gorteene, Inish, Killee, Killigoan, Kildermot, Lagnaught, Lisreagh, Liskellaw, Lisbellaw, Portslinnagh, Motiernon, Mogairah, Mullybrill, Stoney Park, Mayonragh, Shanco, Snow Hill, Tallymacall, Topitnow, Track, Tatygar, Barniskie, Lanehill, Kiew, Loughie, Glasdrommond, Drumbrughas, Conlenowrane, Aughvagh and Tatenamallard, all situate, lying and being in the parish of Cleenish and the barony of Tyrkennedy in the county of Fermanagh aforesaid ..., and also all other the messuages lands and hereditaments being part of or appendant to the said manor and reputed manor with the several subdenominations thereof ... viz.: Aughekillymade, Derryholaght or Blackrock, Derryharney, Innishbeg and Belle Isle, all situate, lying and being in the parish of Cleenish, baronies of Tyrkennedy and Magherastephana and county of Fermanagh aforesaid ...'.



Fermanagh and Longford

Later in the 1830s, the Rev. John Grey Porter made further extensive purchases of land, in both Cos Fermanagh and Longford, this time from the 2nd Earl of Belmore. The Fermanagh lands alone had a rental of £1869 a year and cost him £75,000 (LR1/167L/1). The combined rental of all these estates (Belleisle included) was c. £6750 a year - a staggering scale of acquisition (even for one whose father had been in possession of the income of the bishopric of Clogher for 22 years), the more so as the Bishop and the Rev. John Grey Porter had each in their time to make provision for six younger children. Then, in 1850, a very curious coincidence occurred. In that year the bishopric of Clogher was merged with the archbishopric of Armagh (which it remained until 1886), and Porter seized the opportunity to buy the now abandoned palace and demesne, and re-named it Clogher Park. However, as so often in Ireland (Amiens Street versus Connolly Station; Wellesley versus Thomond Bridge, etc), the new name took a long time to gain acceptance. Years later, Porter's great-granddaughter, Evelyn Barrett, recalled in *An Ulster Childhood* (Chippenham, 1987), that when she was growing up there in the early 20th century it was 'still locally known as "The Parliss".'



Clogher Park

Paradoxically, Bishop Porter himself had had nothing to do with the building of Clogher Park: it had been built, in the period 1819-1823, by the three Bishops who **succeeded** him. It was presumably his son, the Rev. John Grey Porter, who made the alterations to the building of 1819-1823 which were noted by Evelyn Barrett. She describes Clogher Park as having a '... pillared portico above a flight of steps and two wings added in Victorian times [presumably by the Rev. John Grey Porter]. Classic restraint was relieved by a balcony running the length of the south front ..., in summer smothered in purple clematis and red and yellow climbing roses ..., like the warmth of a smile on the formal facade.'

By his will, made in 1869 and subsequently much embellished with codicils, he left Belleisle, Clogher Park and effectively all his landed property to his son and heir, John Grey Vesey Porter, with the proviso that his widow should enjoy Clogher Park for her life, together with the very large jointure of £3000 a year. The Rev. John Grey Porter presumably lived at Clogher Park, when not at Kilskeery, until his death in 1873, when he was succeeded there by his widow until her death in 1881. By 1890, it was the seat of John William Ellison-Macartney, MP for Co. Tyrone, 1874-1885, who had married Porter's third daughter, Elizabeth, in 1851. Eventually, Clogher Park was to pass to the Ellison-Macartneys' second son, and their occupation of the house must have been a grace-and-favour or leasehold arrangement anticipating this outcome. This supposition is made the more probable by the fact that their second son, Thomas Stewart Ellison-Macartney, had assumed the name Porter as early as 1875.



The 'Regency' period

Meanwhile, by at least 1858, and probably from his coming-of-age in 1839, Porter's only son and heir, John Grey Vesey Porter, had come to live at Belleisle. The house into which he moved was not entirely as Lord Ross had left it. At some point in the early 19th century, a Regency, bow-fronted drawing-room had been added to the left-hand end of the c.1720 range, and a new staircase had been built on to its rear. Thereafter, the house was neglected. Alistair Rowan writes, in *The Buildings of Ireland: North West Ulster* (London, 1979): '... by 1837 the place had become dilapidated and was "about to be rebuilt" by the Rev. J[ohn] Grey Porter, whose son, John Grey Vesey Porter, added the stable court in 1856 and some time before 1890 recast the entire house in a free manorial style, with a multi-gabled entrance front, large mullioned bays, and a high, five-storey tower at the south-east corner [i.e. the right-hand end of the 18th-century range] to command a view of the lough. The architect was Morley Hurder. The effect is grand enough in places, but incoherent. ...'



Railways and libel actions

As well as building the 1856 stable block at Belleisle, Porter had endeavoured to benefit the estate indirectly by becoming, in 1854, one of the original shareholders of the Dundalk & Enniskillen Railway Co., which obtained parliamentary authority not only to make the main line from Dundalk to Enniskillen, but also to make branch lines, among other places, to Lisbellaw (the nearest town to Belleisle). Subsequently, the Company decided to make the branch line to Lisnaskea, instead of Lisbellaw, and - sensibly enough - to concentrate first on making the main line from Dundalk to Enniskillen. This led to a direct clash of interests between Porter and the Chairman of the Company, the 3rd Earl of Erne, who owned Lisnaskea. In consequence of this, Porter opposed the change of plan by petition to parliament and by legal proceedings in the Court of Chancery, which contributed to putting the Company to an expense of £20,000 in costs. When these efforts were unavailing, Porter in August 1858, published a 'malignant production' accusing Lord Erne of using his position in the Company to promote the prosperity of his own estate, to the detriment of the interests of the other shareholders. Lord Erne responded by bringing an action for libel against Porter, which was heard in the Court of Queen's Bench on 12 and 14 February 1859 (Report of the Trial of an Action for Libel ... by an Eminent Short-Hand Writer [Dublin, 1859]). In the event, the jury found for Lord Erne, but awarded him damages of only £300 instead of the £2,000 which he had claimed. This was mainly because, although the intent of Porter's pamphlet was plain, the language actually used was arch and satirical and fell short of explicitly accusing Lord Erne of corruption.



A scandalous affair

Porter's next appearance in the Dublin Courts was of an altogether more distressing nature. In 1863 he had married Elizabeth Jane Hall, daughter and co-heiress of Richard Hall of Inishmore Hall, Derrybrusk, near Belleisle; he was 47 and she was about 18. The marriage was desirable from the financial point of view and because the Belleisle and Inishmore estates 'marched'. But it was childless and, it would seem, unhappy, partly on account of the disparity in their ages, and partly (it may be conjectured), on account of Porter's cantankerousness. In September 1870, Mrs Porter formed an illicit liaison with one Capt. Leonard Poynter of the 16th Regiment, then stationed in Enniskillen. Porter found out about this affair in December and, with the aid of his butler and other men-servants, lured Capt. Poynter to Belleisle, where (according to Crawford) he was considerably knocked about, had his hair and one side of his luxuriant moustache cut off, and was then severely horse-whipped by Porter personally. Capt. Poynter brought an action for assault and battery against Porter and claimed damages of £10,000. Porter would probably have been well advised to have settled out of court. Instead, a packed Dublin courtroom was regaled for almost a week with salacious details of the doings of Mrs Porter and Capt. Poynter at Belleisle. In the end, the jury - obviously composed of stern Victorian paterfamiliae - found for Capt. Poynter, but awarded him a farthing in damages. Shortly afterwards, Porter successfully sued for divorce. His wife and her parents retired to London, where Mrs Porter died, still only in her early forties, in 1887.



The Lisbellaw Gazette

In other, more useful spheres, Porter's career was equally eventful and confrontational. The best account of it will be found in Joseph Crawford, *Lisbellaw: 'The Hard Rocks'* (Enniskillen, 1992). '... His ambitions were often directed towards schemes which he considered were for the betterment of the inhabitants of the area and the countryside round about. ... The longest-lasting of his ventures was the woollen mill in the village [of Lisbellaw]. It was he who invited Mr John Eadie and Mr John Henderson to come to Ireland to take over the running of the factory which was then in an embryo state. ... In January 1879, he founded *The Lisbellaw Gazette and Co. Fermanagh Advertiser* This publication, which continued until May 1903 [just before Porter died], was primarily a vehicle for expressing his own set of ideals. It revealed his deep sympathy for the improvement of the tenant farmers and advocated the re-establishment of an Irish parliament, but with loyalty to the British Crown. ... It was also caustically critical of the Orange Order and some of the landlords and prominent local people. ... A full set of *The Lisbellaw Gazette* is to be found in the Public Record Office, Belfast [N/19/1-16. Actually, the PRONI set is not full. It covers the years 1879-1885, 1887, 1889-1899 and 1901. Other sets are required to complete it. The British Library holds, among other volumes, those for 1900, April, July and November 1902, and January-March and May 1903; and the National Library of Ireland holds 1886 and 1888. What is of particular importance about the PRONI set is that it is the longest run in any one location, and that, apart from the volume for 1879-1880, it is the set which belonged to Porter himself.] ...



Other ventures

Porter was instrumental in pressing for the construction of the Inishmore Viaduct [Carrybridge, near Belleisle] at the south-west end of that island, and indeed he largely financed the venture when it eventually came to fruition in the early 1890s. ... On the shores of the lake at Knockninny, he built the Knockninny Hotel in the 1870s For over a quarter of a century [starting in 1868] he operated a passenger and freight service on the loughs having two steamships which he called the Royal Erne Navy. ... [He also] owned a private steam vessel called, appropriately enough, the "Belleisle". ... In company with ... [W. C. Trimble of Enniskillen] owner and proprietor of *The Impartial Reporter*, with whom he was usually at variance], he agitated for the establishment of the Model School at Enniskillen; and he threw himself energetically - and expensively - into the campaign for the revival of the Protestant bishopric of Clogher as a separate see [shorn, however, of its episcopal Palace] The fray ended in victory for the separatists, with the election of Archdeacon Maurice Stack as Bishop of Clogher on 4 June 1886. ... ' Another prominent Clogher layman and campaigner for a separate see, the 4th Earl of Belmore, wrote of Porter, with marvellous understatement (PRONI D4121/F/2/B/1/8): '... He is a very peculiar man indeed, and not easy to work with. ...'



Political affairs

Crawford resumes: '... In the 1868 general election ... [he contemplated standing for Co. Fermanagh] as an independent candidate When the next general election came around in 1874 he ... felt sufficiently aggrieved with the sitting members, the Orange Order and [on] the land question, that he threw his hat in the ring. ... Not a man to be easily daunted [by his defeat on this occasion], ... Porter tried his fortune again in the 1880 general election, but was beaten into third place by W.H. Archdale and another member of the landowning aristocracy, ... Viscount Crichton of Crom [son and heir of his old adversary, Lord Erne]. Several of the newspapers astutely summarised ... Porter's political situation, showing that his only real support was the independent farmers. He had alienated the substantial blocks of votes in his altercations with the Orange, Green and landlord interests. ... [As he himself wrote in his book entitled (uncharacteristically)] *Some Agricultural and Political Irish Questions calmly Discussed*, ... "My great aim ... has been to try to show that, though we Irish Protestants and Roman Catholics cannot agree in religion, ... we could, and should, agree as fellow-countrymen in our public, political affairs" ...'



Porter-Porter

Porter died in October 1903, his energies sapped not only by old age but by blindness. He was succeeded at Belleisle by John, the second son of his sister, Adelaide Mary, and Nicholas Montgomery Archdale of Crocknacrieve, near Ballinamallard, Co. Fermanagh. Christened John Porter Archdale, the heir to Belleisle had changed his name to Porter-Porter in 1876. At Clogher Park, where he had never lived, Porter was succeeded by Thomas Stewart Porter, formerly Ellison-Macartney, the second son of his other sister. Since then, that branch of the family has oscillated between 'Porter' and 'Ellison-Macartney' in a somewhat bewildering fashion. Because there was nothing but demesne accompanying Clogher Park, Thomas S. Porter also succeeded to a share of the Porter estates in Co. Fermanagh.

The new owner of Belleisle, John Porter-Porter (1855-1939) had married in 1884 and had had five children, the eldest of whom was only eighteen in 1903. For the first time, probably, since the days of the Gores in the 1720s and 1730s Belleisle became a family home. In 1907, this change was given architectural expression. As has already been noted, the house had been considerably extended, and altered in character in the 1880s, in what Mark Bence-Jones calls (in *Burke's Guide to Irish Country Houses* [London, 1976]) '...the plain English Tudor manor-house style made popular by Norman Shaw and his disciples; producing [a new] entrance front ..., projecting porch and ... [the] tall church-like, battlemented tower [Now], in 1907 the entrance front was prolonged by a wing in Tudor style containing a long and lofty gallery with a timbered roof, an elaborate Tudor fireplace and overmantel and a minstrels' gallery, the balustrade of which has slender, turned uprights and would appear to be late 17th century or early 18th century woodwork brought from elsewhere. ...' From this 1907 building phase must surely also date the 'bachelors' wing' (a feature of many Irish country houses, but hardly necessary at Belleisle until there were daughters of the house to attract visiting gentlemen) which sticks out at right angles from behind the Regency drawing-room, on the north west side of the house.



Family portraits

An insurance inventory compiled for John Porter-Porter by Waring & Gillow Ltd, valuers, 180 Oxford Street, London, in 1915 (D1390/10/3/9/1), shows that Belleisle was well furnished and pictured. The valuation of the contents in 1915 was the large sum of £6,400, of which pictures accounted for £1,906. The pictures are also of special interest for the light they throw on family history. The most valuable single item was a portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence of John Porter, Bishop of Clogher. Of relevance to this is a very vaguely described portrait of 'Lord Camden', wearing the Order of the Bath - presumably the Lord Lieutenant who brought John Porter to Ireland as a viceregal chaplain in 1795 and promoted him to the bishopric of Clogher in 1797. Various Archdale family portraits are reminders that John Porter-Porter's father had changed his name from Archdale to Porter: these include Sir Audley Mervyn (1589-1675), the Hon. Mary Archdale (b.1742) and General Mervyn Archdale (1763-1839). A modern oil portrait, after Van Dyck, of Endymion Porter (1587-1649), Charles I's Gentleman of the Bedchamber and adviser on the royal picture collection, suggests an attempt on the part of the Porters to establish a Carolean ancestry. (If so, it was an unfortunate attempt, because Endymion Porter was a Gloucestershire squire and the Belleisle Porters claimed to be of an old Cumberland family!) There was also in Belleisle in 1915 an alleged Poussin, valued at as little as £20.



Miss Lavinia Baird

When John Porter-Porter died in 1939, he was succeeded by his second, but first surviving, son, Nicholas Henry Archdale Porter (1890-1973). He was childless, and had been long pre-deceased by his wife. The heiress to Belleisle was therefore his niece, Miss Lavinia Baird, only daughter of his sister, Audley Josephine, and William James Baird of Elie, Fife. Miss Baird made history by becoming the first woman deputy lieutenant in Northern Ireland (1983), and was later High Sheriff of Co. Fermanagh (1987). In 1991 she sold the Belleisle estate to the 5th Duke of Abercorn.

