

‘Sources in the National Archives for researching the Great Famine’

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The Great Famine imposed a severe strain on the Irish government. Of the various offices and boards that constituted the Irish administration, the ones which were affected in a very direct way were the Chief Secretary’s Office, the Poor Law Commission, the Relief Commission, and the Office of Public Works. This article is an attempt to bring to the attention of those interested in famine research, whether at local or national level, collections in the National Archives which span the famine period. These collections not only document the actual measures taken to alleviate distress, but are also an invaluable source for other types of research, such as an analysis both of the extent of distress and of government response at local level, as well as the degree to which prevailing theories of government had an impact on the administration of relief.

In this, the first of two articles relating to sources for famine research, the concentration will be primarily on the archives of the Chief Secretary’s Office. The second article will include detailed accounts of the records which are still being processed, namely the Relief Commission and famine related material in the archives of the Office of Public Works.

Chief Secretary’s Office*

As chief executive of the Irish administration, the Chief Secretary naturally had a role in the efforts to alleviate the distress caused by the Great Famine, with his office functioning as a channel for communication between the Treasury in London and such central government agencies as the Relief Commission, the Poor Law Commission and the Office of Public Works, on all matters relating to the disbursement of public monies in the administration of relief. The CSO also received reports, memoranda, letters and memorials concerning the distressed state of the country and the archives of the CSO preserved in the National Archives are an indispensable source for any study of the Great Famine. The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office, spanning the years 1818 to 1924, consist of one main series of bound volumes which, together with a number of sub-series, are used as finding aids to a main series and sub-series of incoming reports, returns, letters and memoranda. The incoming communications or *papers*, and their finding aids, form the largest class of archives of the former Chief Secretary's Office. In all, there are 337 volumes which serve either as indexes to incoming papers, or

as registers into which abstracts of information relating to these papers were entered, and as indexes to these registers. Subjects covered by the papers include cholera epidemics, cattle plague, economic depression, breaches of law and order and rebellion and political unrest, as are as the more mundane aspects of the day-to-day government of the country, such as the preparation of Treasury estimates, the payment of gratuities and pensions to civil servants, the administration of justice and the prisons and the preparation and enactment of legislation. The incoming papers were received from a wide variety of individuals, institutions and government offices.

The title of the class derives from the way in which these papers were dealt with by the registry staff of the CSO during the period 1840–1922. When received at the CSO, each individual incoming paper was given a unique reference number allocated consecutively from a straight numerical sequence. The registry clerks then entered or *registered* details of each of these papers in ascending numerical order by reference number of the individual paper in large volumes. Thus the registers present information abstracted from each paper in ascending numerical order by paper reference number. Generally, the indexing and registration of papers was conducted on an annual basis, with the first paper received in a given year being allotted the number 1, the second the number 2, and so on. The complete reference number of each individual paper was then a composite of the series title, the number allotted and the year in which it was registered. For example, the complete reference number of the first paper registered in 1853 is cited as *Chief Secretary's Office Registered Paper 1/1853 (CSO RP 1/1853)*, and that of the second as *CSO RP 2/1853*. Once the papers had been registered and the matter to which they related disposed of, the papers were then filed away in numerical order by reference number.

The system of recording information relating to incoming papers altered over the period 1818 to 1922 as various methods were experimented with in order to ensure that the registry of the CSO could produce quickly any available papers on a given subject. From 1818 to 1839, the registry clerks of the CSO *indexed* rather than *registered* all papers and the volumes for these years form annual indexes to incoming papers. It was not until 1840 that the Chief Secretary's Office adopted the system of registering details of all incoming papers in ascending numerical order by reference number in bound volumes designed specifically for the recording of information relating to each paper in tabular format across the full opening of each page, including columns for date of document, date of receipt, from whom received, subject matter of paper and how disposed of.

The system of registration introduced at this date remained in use for twelve years and it thus spans the years of the Great Famine. It was also from 1840 that the practice of amalgamating related papers to form files was adopted as a consistent practice. So, if several papers on the same or a related topic were received in a given year, or over a period of several years, then they were assembled and filed under the reference number and year of the latest incoming paper. As previous papers on a particular subject were removed from their appropriate place for annexation to the latest related paper, the

register entry relating to the paper removed was amended to indicate this fact by the inscription in the register of the reference number of the paper to which the removed paper was annexed.

There was no system of opening and registering of files on a particular subject and of placing all relevant papers in a file jacket as is done at present in many government departments and offices. Instead, files of papers grew or evolved through the amalgamation of individual papers on a related topic, sometimes over a period as great as twenty years, but more often over a period of two to five. Indeed, it was not until the early years of the twentieth century that the practice of even putting each file of accumulated papers in a file jacket was adopted in the CSO. Prior to this, associated registered papers were attached to each other using straight metal pins (hazardous to the physical wellbeing of the documents, to the maintenance of associated papers as part of the same file unit and even to researchers making use of them) and brass paper tacks, or tied together by means of lengths of silk or linen ribbon. In this way, registered papers filed under a particular number may vary in content from a single document to a large mass of papers extending over a period of years. In some instances, files of papers accumulating over a lengthy period of time became extremely bulky and were split into at least two files of more manageable size and the register entry annotated to indicate this. Therefore, from 1840, the annual registers also had to include a column to note the reference number of any subsequent communication on the same or a related subject.

In order to permit access to the information relating to individual or accumulated papers contained in the registers so as to facilitate their retrieval, indexes to the registers were maintained by the clerks of the CSO. There are volume indexes to the registers for each year and each one is divided into alphabetical sections, or cuts, in which all papers received in a given year were indexed under the initial letter of the name of the individual, organisation or institution from which they emanated, or under the subject matter to which they related, and the papers' respective reference numbers recorded. Within each alphabetical cut, index sub-headings/categories were created for the indexing of frequently received papers from a particular official (such as a magistrate), government office, etc., or on a recurring subject matter. For example, the alphabetical cut C tends to have index sub-headings under which were recorded all papers relating to *crown witnesses* and *crown lands*; and the alphabetical cut P, sub-headings for the recording of numbers of all papers relating to *public works*, *penitentiaries* and the *police*.

When the CSO commenced its registration system in 1840, incoming papers were divided into two categories: *first division*, which related to the maintenance of law and order, and *second division*, consisting of incoming papers relating to all other administrative matters. In allocating reference numbers, all odd numbers were given to first division papers and all even to second division. Separate registers were maintained for first and second division papers with separate indexes. In addition to dividing papers into the above two categories, there was a further refinement of the registration system whereby the reference numbers of all first division correspondence

were given a numerical prefix to denote the county to which the content of the paper related: the reference numbers allocated to all reports of crimes and outrages committed in County Antrim were given the prefix 1, those committed in County Armagh, the prefix 2 etc. Alphabetical prefixes to the registered numbers of all second division papers were used to indicate their subject matter: A – the magistracy and the administration of justice generally; C – crown witnesses, their payment and the prosecution of criminals based on their evidence; E – religious and church matters; F – grants of money to charitable and other institutions; f – levying and payment of fines; G – the administration of prisons; H – Board of Health; I – policing; M – military matters; O – administration of the civil service generally; P – Metropolitan Police; W – public works; Z – miscellaneous.

Researchers who wish to make use of Registered Papers must first search the index to the numerical registers. In the case of research for documentation relating to the alleviation of distress, the indexes to second division correspondence should be checked. Once the registered number has been obtained from the index, the numerical registers should then be consulted. The relevant register entry will indicate from whom the letter was received, the date of letter and date of receipt at the CSO, the subject of the letter, and the way in which the matter was disposed of. The researcher should note the alphabetical prefix given to the paper reference number and whether a later paper was received by checking the subsequent communication column. Where there is an entry of a number in this column the register should be checked under this number and the step repeated each time the subsequent communication column contains an entry. It is only where this column is blank that the paper may be requested under the reference number of that particular entry. The researcher should also note that numbers of incoming papers relating to distress in famine years were given the prefix Z when registered.

Distress Papers (March 1846–September 1847)

The Distress Papers form a sub-series to the Chief Secretary's Registered Papers which were begun in March 1846 when the need to respond to the crisis forced the CSO to give separate treatment to incoming papers relating to distress. That the Distress Papers constitute a sub-series to the main series of CSO registered papers can be seen from the fact that registered numbers given to all incoming papers relating to measures to alleviate distress were allocated independently of the main series, with all papers being allotted reference numbers consecutively from a straight numerical sequence. In addition, the letter D was used as an alphabetical prefix to all of the reference numbers. In contrast to the main series of registered papers, the Distress Papers were not registered in the conventional sense of the word, but were separately indexed in the four volumes listed below:

- CSO CR 70 Index to Distress Papers Vol 1, 1846
- CSO CR 71 Index to Distress Papers Vol 2, 1846
- CSO CR 77 Index to Distress Papers Vol 1, 1846–7
- CSO CR 78 Index to Distress Papers Vol 2, 1846–7

The second of the volumes for 1846 (CSO CR 71) was for some time mistakenly considered as an index to volume one (CSO CR 70). However, it is in fact the index to the very earliest of the Distress Papers in the sub-series. There are no registers of Distress Papers and the researcher consulting the indexes does not need to refer to a second numerical register once a search of the Distress Paper indexes has been completed.

Each of the volumes is divided into alphabetical cuts under which incoming papers are entered alphabetically under name of the correspondent. Because so many of the papers relate to particular areas of the country, the papers were further indexed in subsections of the alphabetical cuts under the name of the area to which they related. In addition to the alphabetical cuts, each volume has separate subject matter cuts for the entry of frequently received communications from the Relief Commission, the Office of Public Works, the Treasury and the Home Office. Each incoming paper was indexed in the appropriate section of the register under the name of correspondent, whether an individual or a government department, and the area of the country to which document referred.

When using the Distress Papers, the researcher must first of all check the appropriate alphabetical cut for reference to the name of the individual correspondent. Once this is found, the reference number must be noted and the paper requested using the entry number under which the details of the paper are entered in the index. Other information recorded in the index, such as subject matter of letter, date of letter and of receipt in the CSO, can also be noted – however, the researcher should take special care to check the subsequent communication column and, if there is an entry of a later paper, to consult the appropriate entry in the manner described above so as to ensure that the document ultimately to be consulted is the final document on the matter. If the name of an individual correspondent is not known, the geographical subsections under each of the alphabetical cuts can be checked under the name of the place for which information is sought. This will not only give the number of the Distress Paper, but will also provide the researcher with the appropriate alphabetical or subject matter cut under which fuller details of the paper can be found. Thus the Distress Papers are an invaluable source for those studying the progress of the Famine in a particular area.

The content of the Distress Papers tends to be standard – applications from various localities for the expenditure of monies under the Famine relief legislation; letters from the Treasury concerning the spending of such monies; letters concerning the establishment of relief committees; the calling of extraordinary presentment sessions and reports on the extent of distress among the people.

While the Distress Papers sub-series accumulated as a direct response to famine conditions, there are other CSO records which present a wonderful source for Famine research, often constituting the major source for a particular subject. One such instance is convict management, as the voluminous collection of convict prison correspondence does not begin until the formation of the Government Prisons Office in 1851. It is therefore

essential to examine the indexes to the CSO records including the registered papers described above, for the relevant years under various headings.

Although not specifically famine documents, they nonetheless are a very good source for examining the impact of the crisis on the management of convicts, particularly with reference to its effect on crime and prison statistics, on criminality as a response to distress, and on the effects of distress on prevailing penal theory etc. In this period the most common sentence handed down for what were then considered serious offences, was that of transportation to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), usually for a period of seven years (the other terms were ten years, fourteen years, or life). The term *convict* referred to the more serious offender who received a sentence of either death or transportation (after the passing of the Penal Servitude Act in 1853, the sentence of penal servitude replaced that of transportation). Until the passing of the General Prisons Act in 1877, all aspects of convict management, including the transportation system, were under direct government control, and expenses incurred in the administration of the Convict Department were financed from exchequer funds. Local prisons, housing the less serious offenders (usually referred to as local prisoners), under the direct management of the Grand Juries, were funded from the local rates and were subject only to government inspection, not control. Convicts were usually housed separately in local or county gaols, however, while awaiting the carrying out of their sentence.

Subjects covered in these papers include supervision of convicts prior to embarkation, the engagement and fitting out of convict vessels, the supply of provisions and medicines for the voyage, conveyance of convicts to the ships for embarkation, medical inspection of convicts prior to embarkation, provision for the transporting of convicts' children etc. At the outbreak of the famine, pressure from the Australian authorities for the ending of the system was so severe that it was decided in 1846 to suspend temporarily all transportation of Irish males for the following two years. This coincided with a large increase in transportation sentences due to the Famine, and caused a crisis in the Convict Department. The problem was avoided with respect to female convicts, as the numbers of females sentenced to transportation during 1847 did not increase at the same rate as the males.

In the ensuing interval, the haphazard ticket-of-leave arrangement was tightened up and the system was completely re-modelled under the secretary of state for the colonies, Lord Grey. Under the old system, the convicts, having been embarked as soon as possible after receiving their sentence, worked for unspecified periods in domestic service or in public labour gangs. Pending good conduct, they eventually received – at the governor's discretion – a conditional pardon or ticket-of-leave. This excused convicts from compulsory labour, allowing them to work for themselves. The new re-modelled system which was put into operation when the transporting of males was resumed in 1848, was a three stage system known as the exile system. Under the exile system each convict was to spend between 12 and 18 months in solitary confinement in prison at home, one to three years on public works

in Gibraltar or Bermuda (this applied only to men), leading to the third stage which was transportation to Australia on ticket-of-leave.

This re-modelled system contained many inconsistencies, not least of which was its lack of clarity in relation to female convicts. As there was no equivalent to the public works at Gibraltar and Bermuda for women, the intention seems to have been that facilities would be made available to aid reformation, both in prison and on board ship. (The term usually adopted to illustrate the requirement for successful reformation was *moral and industrial training*.) This process was to continue on arrival in the colony, where they were to be removed to a new penitentiary to be built near Hobart in Tasmania (transportation to New South Wales ended in 1842). The new penitentiary was to replace two old run-down barracks used to house the convicts, one near Hobart and the other at Launceston. After six months reformatory treatment there, a process would begin leading to a probation pass on release. Like the ticket-of-leave, this would enable them to enter employment.

It was not possible to operate this system in Ireland because lack of accommodation made it impossible to fulfil the strict 12 to 18 months of solitary confinement which constituted the first phase of the regime. Accommodation consisted of a temporary depot which had been opened at Spike Island in 1846 for men and depots at Cork and Grangegorman, Dublin, for women, both of which were overcrowded because of the increased intake due to the famine. The CSO correspondence charts this decline of the system. In 1849, a proposal was put forward by Lord Grey that, instead of all Irish convicts being allowed to travel with tickets-of-leave, which was now the case, only those with the minimum sentence of seven years who were well behaved could in future do so. For those with longer sentences it was planned to commute their sentence to terms of imprisonment to be served at home (1). As well as seeking the approval of the governor of Van Diemen's Land in this matter he also asked if he might himself arrange some training for Irish transportees on their arrival which would *prevent them being too suddenly exposed to the temptations of the colony*. It was also envisaged that they would contribute to the cost of their removal from Ireland. (2)

Governor Denison did not agree to this and complained that of the 298 Irish female prisoners disembarked on the *Pestonjee Bomanjee* in January 1849, 272 had been convicted in 1847 and four in 1848 so that, having undergone only a short period of imprisonment, they were now ticket-of-leave holders earning higher wages and living better than they ever could have hoped to do in their native country...they seem not to look on their removal as a punishment. Besides, it was impossible to enforce the ruling whereby they were to contribute financially to the cost of their removal (3). The counter argument put forward by the Irish government, however, was that the crimes of the Irish convicts were not the result of *profligacy and vicious contamination*, insisting that their offences were merely thefts to which they were driven by distress connected with the possession of land or with local feuds and factions:

These crimes are not considered by the people to involve the same degree of moral turpitude as they would in England, nor does it follow that their perpetrators, when unexcited by the causes, should be irreclaimable characters. Transportation has till lately, been viewed with the greatest terror by the Irish, and the severance from home and family ties, except where starvation awaits the unfortunate criminal in his own country, has been regarded with much more fear than any term of imprisonment. It is doubtless most desirable that the system of transportation with tickets-of-leave should not be regarded in the light which Earl Grey apprehends nor will there be much danger of this when the precise nature of the liberty they will enjoy under ticket-of-leave shall be impressed upon the minds of the convicts (4).

Despite the protests, Governor Denison refused in July 1850 to allow any more Irish convicts to travel with tickets-of-leave. Instead they were to go out, as previously, to work in gangs on public works. He declared his decision to be based on their *insubordinate habits* and *subservience to their religious instructors*, which rendered them unfit as settlers (5).

Transportation Registers (1836–1857)

The Irish transportation registers originally spanned the entire period the system was in operation, between 1790 and 1857. Unfortunately, the registers covering 1790 to 1836 were destroyed in the fire at the Four Courts in 1922. The surviving registers, compiled by the clerks in the Convict Department soon after the transportation sentence was handed down, contain the convict's name, age, date of conviction, term of transportation, crime, name of trial judge and name of sessions or assizes where tried. A *remarks* column often indicates the name of the ship on which the convict eventually sailed and the date of sailing, whether the convict received a discharge or if the convict died before embarkation.

Details of males are entered to the front of volumes and females to the back. Entries are arranged under counties, principal cities and towns. The registers were meticulously compiled until 1848, after which, possibly because of pressure on the administration due to the Famine, some of the details are not entered. The volumes are only available on microfilm in the Reading Room at the National Archives. The reference numbers to the relevant volumes are as follows:

GPO TR	6	Transportation Register 1845–1847
GPO TR	7	Transportation Register 1847–1848
GPO TR	8	Transportation Register 1848–1849
GPO TR	9	Transportation Register 1849
GPO TR	10	Transportation Register 1850–1851
GPO TR	11	Transportation Register 1851

Prison Registers

Like the Transportation Registers, the prison registers which span the Famine period are also worth consulting. Because of the level of detail entered, they lend themselves to many types of research into the nature of criminal activity, such as the way in which the severe rural distress resulted in the increase in certain types of crime, and to what extent, if any, this led to a change in the profile of the transportee during the period.

The most comprehensive prison register for the period is the massive volume, containing 3,500 entries, relating to the convicts held at Grangegorman Prison from 1840–1853. Formerly the Richmond General Penitentiary, the prison was established in 1836, and was the first all female prison in the British Isles, housing both local prisoners and convicts awaiting transportation. The convict quarters were entirely separate from those of the local prisoners. The staff of the prison was exclusively female except for the governor, a clerk, a hall porter and six watchmen. Its main function with respect to convicts was to provide employment skills and basic schooling during the three months or so the convicts would be incarcerated before embarkation.

By the outbreak of the Famine, hostility among the colonists was such that they were insisting steps be taken to ensure convicts were trained and educated to the extent that they would be capable of earning their living on arrival in the colony. The number of convicts compared to local prisoners was small before the outbreak of the Famine: on the day of inspection early in 1846, they comprised only 12 out of a total of 287. The numbers increased dramatically over the Famine years, however, often exceeding 300. To cater for these there was a mere 50 cells and four day rooms, and the staff consisted only of the governor and head matron, four deputy-matrons, a store-keeper, clerk, messenger and watchman.

Because of the level of detail it contains and the datespan, it will lend itself to all sorts of statistical analysis with respect to female criminality during the Famine. As each convict arrived at the prison, details were entered into this register. It contains for each convict details of age, crime, sentence handed down, location in which conviction took place, date of conviction, marital status, literacy level, trade or occupation, and number of previous convictions. The reference number of the volume is as follows:

Prisons 1/9/7 Registry of Female convicts, Grangegorman Depot, 11
July 1840–22 December 1853

There is also a number of local prison registers covering the period – the index to these is entitled Department of Justice, Prison Registers, and can be consulted at the National Archives.

Letter Books

There are for the period, some volumes of outgoing letters from the Convict Department on all aspects of convict management. The main concern during the Famine, however, appears to be the fear of the outbreak of disease in the convict depots and on board ship. There were constant complaints of unhealthy convicts being transferred from the county gaols for embarkation. In 1848, a circular from the head of the Convict Department, Herbert Hitchins, to the governors of all local gaols, requested that only those who were in good health and free from infectious diseases were to be admitted to the depots (6). The volume references are as follows:

CON LB 1 26 May 1845–3 February 1851
GPO LB 1 21 May 1846–3 August 1849
GPO LB 2 27 January 1849–20 December 1852
GPO LB 12 7 July 1849–14 December 1851

Convict Reference Files

It would be reasonable to assume that most transportees were dissatisfied with the sentences meted to them, and sought ways of having them mitigated. Petitioning the Lord Lieutenant was the only real hope of relief. The Lord Lieutenant referred petitions to the trial judge, the local constabulary and sometimes to the governor of the gaol in which the convict had been incarcerated, in an effort to verify the truth of arguments being put forward by the petitioner in support of a mitigation of sentence. These, along with the petition written by the convict or by someone on his behalf, often resulted in quite bulky submissions being returned, known as Convict Reference Files. These were then re-submitted to the Lord Lieutenant, who very often concurred with the opinion of the judge, allowing the original judgement to stand. There are upwards of 10,000 in the National Archives spanning the period 1836–1924 (including local prisoners as well as convicts). Female petitions represent approximately half those of male convicts.

It has yet to be determined, for example, whether there was an increase in the number of petitions submitted during the Famine, if the percentage of successful petitions rose, or whether distress was cited more frequently by petitioners in support of applications for redress. (Of the 103 petitions submitted by female convicts between 1845 and 1852, 49 were successful. Of this number at least 19 were on the grounds of old age, chronically bad health, or large numbers of dependents). Convicts often protested that they could prove previous good character with no prior offences. They sometimes blamed their downfall on the bad influence of other family members or associates, or claimed that, because the judge was using them as a deterrent, the sentence handed down in no way reflected the nature of the crime.

Petitions received during the Famine include those seeking clemency because of the size of their families, with women often petitioning to be allowed to bring their children on the voyage with them. In 1847 Mary Byron wished to bring her three children with her to the colony, but was only permitted to bring two, one aged three, the other aged nine years. The case of

the eldest, aged thirteen, was to be reconsidered when the male convicts were due to travel (7). In 1848 the petitions of Mary and Johanna Kelleher from Bantry, Co. Cork, both of whom were serving twelve months imprisonment sentences, was investigated. It was found that they had committed the offence in order to be transported, as they wished to travel with their mother who had received a seven year transportation sentence. When the real motive was discovered they were discharged and placed on the ship with their mother as free settlers (8). Bridget Devlin got a ten year transportation sentence for forgery in 1848, while her daughter, aged twelve, got a ten month imprisonment sentence for the same offence. She petitioned that the daughter's sentence be remitted to enable her to travel with her mother. The petition was successful (9).

It was very difficult to obtain a mitigation of sentence on health grounds. Pregnancy or extreme youth were not mitigating factors. In 1848 the petition of the relatives of a 12 year old, who pleaded that her sight was failing due to cataracts, was unsuccessful: while it was admitted her eyes were tender, she was not actually blind (10). There is a slight sprinkling of petitions which state the convict's wish to be transported. In 1849 Margaret Byrne from Carlow had her death sentence, which was imposed as a result of an arson attempt made by her on an occupied house, commuted to transportation for life. She stated that she had committed the crime in anticipation of a transportation sentence (11).

Before ordering up a Convict Reference File, the researcher must first consult the relevant Convict Reference Book, which is an index to the files. The files are ordered alphabetically and by year. The relevant references are as follows:

Convict Reference Book, CON CRB 3 (1844–1848);
Convict Reference Book, CON CRB 4 (1848–1850)
Convict Reference Files CRF (1845–1850)

The Office of Public Works

The Office of Public Works, or Board of Works, was in existence less than fifteen years when the scale of the crisis in the potato crop was becoming apparent at the close of 1845. (The OPW was established by an Act of Parliament passed in 1831 entitled an Act for the Extension and Promotion of Public Works in Ireland (1 & 2 Will. IV c.33).

The nature of the Board's response to the catastrophe, a subject of debate among historians, was to concentrate on providing employment for the destitute poor under acts passed early in the parliamentary session of 1846 for the sole purpose of affording relief by employment: 9 Vict. c.1 (public works); 9 Vict. c.2 (county relief works); 9 Vict. c.3 (construction of piers, harbours and other works to encourage sea fisheries) and 9 Vict. c.4 (drainage). In August of that year, when the scale of the crisis was becoming clearer, the government was given additional powers to employ the labouring poor by means of treasury loans (9 & 10 Vict. c.107). This resulted in a daily

average of up to 90,000 people being employed that year. The details of the Board's activities were set out in special monthly reports which were subsequently submitted to parliament.

The establishment of the Board, which consisted of three commissioners, including the chairman, was altered by adding two new commissioners and consolidating the duties performed under the legislation relating to drainage, fisheries and Shannon improvement. The number employed on all works (not just relief schemes) during the week ending 26 December 1846, represented ten per cent of the working population. Under the legislation providing grants for the promotion of sea fisheries (9 Vict. c.3), 195 memorials seeking grants were immediately received, 35 of which were successful at a cost of just under £80,000.

Considerable difficulty arose with the nature and quality of the work performed on these relief schemes and in controlling the huge numbers of labourers involved. A major problem was that schemes were largely confined to local work, such as the building of roads, which was generally under the control of the Grand Juries. The limitation of schemes in this way proved unsatisfactory, as some areas desperately needed roads, whereas others did not, and where roads in adjoining districts were to be constructed, a measure of co-ordination was required. This was invariably lacking, resulting in the completion of many schemes for which there was no need or demand. In defence of the work carried out at this time, the Board asked that these works be judged only on the grounds of positive utility and considered solely as an effort to obtain labour in return for subsistence. Another perceived abuse was that of paying wages by the day rather than by the task, so enticing labourers away from farmers and other employers.

The number of destitute rose to almost 750,000 in late 1846, many of whom were unable to work. Between October 1846 and the autumn of 1847, a daily average of approximately 100,000 men were employed on relief schemes under the Poor Employment (Ireland) Act, 1846 (9 & 10 Vict. c.107). Although expenditure on distress was mainly in food relief under the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act, 1847 (10 Vict. c.31), overall expenditure remained at the same level.

Unfortunately, most of the Famine records were destroyed in the 1960s. There is still, however, some material surviving which is an excellent source for research into the period. The most comprehensive is that relating to the fishery, pier and harbour works carried out under the relief legislation mentioned above, where funds were made available for constructing, extending, repairing or improving harbours, piers, quays, landing slips, approach roads etc.

The legislation also provided for making navigable cuts through shoals, connecting adjacent bays or inlets, erecting engines, beacons, or harbour lights, and other similar works useful for the encouragement and promotion of the sea fisheries. No grant was to exceed £5,000 or be greater than three quarters of the cost. The balance was to be provided by a loan charged either

on the county, the district, or the proprietors of adjacent lands. The initiative in making application for such assistance was left to those locally interested. The works, when complete, remained vested in the Board of Works, and were to be maintained out of the rates and tolls collected for their use.

Any resident, proprietor or occupier of land near the seacoast could apply. Memorials signed by the various interested parties were forwarded to the Board of Works, who then requested the government to obtain a report on the feasibility of the project by the Inspectors of Fisheries. The Board was itself, however, responsible for the actual sites of the piers and had to undertake any necessary surveys in regard to these. If the survey and examination of the locality proved satisfactory, the Treasury could provisionally approve the work and sanction the grant or loan. A Provisional Declaration was then prepared, describing the proposed works, stating the estimate, amount of grant and/or loan, time of repayment of loan and rate of interest, indicating also the area to be charged for repayment.

Copies of the Provisional Declaration, maps, plans, sections and estimates were then lodged, for not less than two weeks, in a convenient place (usually a court house) within the county or district from where the loan was to be repaid. A local newspaper was also notified and objections had to be forwarded to the Board within two weeks of the placing of this notice. A public meeting was then called to hear objections, after which the plans could be changed. If there were still objections, another meeting was held.

If the project was proceeded with, all preliminary expenses were to be part of the costs of the works otherwise the applicants had to pay. When the plans and estimate were approved, the work was put out to tender. If a reasonable tender could not be procured, the Board carried out the work itself. When finished, the works were handed over to the counties as public property. This material in the OPW archives carries a prefix OPW 8. Within this series there are files on over 220 fishery pier and harbour works carried out during the Famine. A full list of these is available at the National Archives.

Possibly the most interesting and useful document to be found on practically every file is the application form or memorial. Usually composed by a literate member of the community such as a clergyman, landowner or shopkeeper, they generally gave detailed accounts of the distress in the locality, and many were forwarded to the Board directly from the local relief committees. The signatories were local landowners, often indicating the exact location and extent of their lands, farmers, shopkeepers, clergymen, fishermen etc. Many of the files simply contain memorials and nothing more, indicating that the project was not proceeded with. If a project was approved, the file will contain other documents such as estimates (some of these were prepared in the locality and included with the initial application) and engineers' reports. These give descriptions of the structure and location of the various piers and harbours.

Also on file are Admiralty sanctions, copy contracts, specifications, declarations (to which are often attached plans, sections and estimates), schedules of prices, schedules of tolls bye-laws, lists of plant and machinery required, public notices calling meetings of ratepayers, labour returns (including names, rates of pay and amounts earned by individuals), progress reports and details of expenditure.

The Relief Commission

The temporary Relief Commission was established in November 1845 in response to the failure of the potato crop, to administer temporary relief supplementary to that provided by the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act, 1838. The members of the first Commission represented the various government departments in Ireland which were expected to co-ordinate relief; Colonel Duncan McGregor, police commissioner, Sir James Dombrian, Inspector General of the Coast Guard, Edward B Twistleton, a poor law commissioner, Sir Randolph Routh of the Commissariat Department of the Army, Colonel Harry Jones of the Board of Works, Sir Robert Kane, a distinguished scientist, Theobald McKenna, Assistant Under Secretary and Edward Lucas, Under Secretary. Captain John Pitt Kennedy, former Secretary of the Devon Commission acted as secretary. The Commission was reorganised in January 1846, disbanded in August 1846 and reconstituted in February 1847 under the Temporary Relief Act with Jones, McGregor, Twistleton, Routh and Thomas Redington, Under Secretary, as members.

The remit of the Relief Commission was to advise the government as to the extent of potato loss and distress within Ireland, to oversee the storage and distribution of Indian corn and meal and to direct, support and co-ordinate the activities of local relief committees. The Commission collected information from all local official sources regarding the advance of the potato disease and the condition of the populace. Reports were received from lieutenants of counties, resident magistrates, poor law guardians, the constabulary and the coast guard. These were collated and used to calculate the probable extent of food shortages.

Local relief committees were established on foot of instructions issued by the Relief Commission in February 1846. These were voluntary bodies consisting of local dignitaries, county officials, poor law guardians and clergymen. Their main duties were to encourage local employment, raise subscriptions and to purchase and distribute Indian corn from the depots established by the Relief Commission. The relief committees were financed by local voluntary subscriptions and could apply to the Lord Lieutenant for grants in proportion to the money subscribed locally. The Relief Commission instructed local committees to publish their subscription lists so as to discourage non-compliance by recalcitrant landowners.

They were also directed to maintain lists of residents in every townland, noting the personal circumstance of each and were allowed to issue tickets of employment for public works. This function passed subsequently to the Board of Works, following allegations of mismanagement and the relief committees

were limited to compiling lists of those eligible for employment. By August 1846, some 650 committees had been established. The majority were in the south and west of the country. There were fewer in the midlands and east and none in Armagh, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. Local committees were also reorganised on foot of the Temporary Relief Act, 1847.

The Relief Commission was one of the main components of the Peel administration's official response to the Famine. The replacement of Peel with the Whig administration of Lord John Russell and the deepening crisis saw the other components of relief – the public works and the poor law system – assume greater significance and limited the role of the Commission as the central relief authority.

The collection is broadly broken down into an administrative series, a series of distress reports from the constabulary, resident magistrates, lieutenants of counties, and local officials. There is a further series of incoming letters which is broken down into two sub-series: straight numerical from the beginning of the Commission's activities until August 1846, and, when the commission was re-constituted in February 1847, on a baronial basis. They were mainly from local relief committees, lieutenants and deputy lieutenants of counties, local clergy, and concerned citizens. There is also a series of constabulary returns from May 1846, a selection of returns from relief committees and reports from county inspecting officers.

As the listing of the papers of the Relief Commission is ongoing the arrangement is under revision and the main series of inward correspondence is being entered on a database. The collection is available for consultation in the National Archives, and although there is not as yet a comprehensive list available, every effort will be made to facilitate researchers.

*Immediately subordinate to the Lord Lieutenant and appointed by him, the Chief Secretary served as head of the Lord Lieutenant's secretariat. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the destruction of the *Undertaker* system in the Irish Parliament and its replacement by the installation of the Chief Secretary as a member of the Irish Commons, brought him and his activities into the political sphere to a greater extent. In the aftermath of the Act of Union, the presence of the Chief Secretary in Parliament in London and his position as chief executive of the Irish administration increased his status relative to that of the Lord Lieutenant to the point where the latter was little more than his nominal superior. Several Chief Secretaries would attain the rank of cabinet minister, while the role of the Lord Lieutenant diminished. During the eighteenth century, the separate administrative offices of the secretariat of the Lord Lieutenant evolved into one central office surrounding the activities of the Chief Secretary. Its business was the supervision of the workings of the various boards and offices that constituted the Irish administration.

Notes

- 1 J. Cornwall Lewis to Thomas Redington, 17 May 1848 (NAI, CSORP/1849/G10919).
- 2 Thomas Redington to William Denison, governor, Van Diemen's Land, 30 June 1849 (NAI, CSORP/1849/G10919).
- 3 William Denison to Lord Grey, 31 January 1849 (NAI, CSORP/1848/G10919).
- 4 William Somerville to Horatio Waddington, 27 June 1849 (NAI, CSORP/1849/G10919).
- 5 William Denison to William Somerville, 1 October 1849 (NAI, CSORP/1850/G6675).
- 6 Theodore McKenna to inspector general of constabulary, 10 April, 1848 (NAI, Convict Department Letter Book (1845–1851)).
- 7 NAI, Convict Reference File 1847/B3.
- 8 NAI, Convict Reference File 1848/K39.
- 9 NAI, Convict Reference File 1848/D21.
- 10 NAI, Convict Reference File 1848/H45.
- 11 NAI, Convict Reference File 1848/B25.

Irish Archives

This article is an online version of the article 'Sources in the National Archives for researching the Great Famine' by Marianne Cosgrave, Rena Lohan and Tom Quinlan. The complete printed version with illustrative examples of the document types mentioned appears in *Irish Archives*, the [Journal of the Irish Society for Archives](#), Spring 1995.

‘Sources in the National Archives for researching the Great Famine: the Relief Commission Papers’

**Marianne Cosgrave, Archivist, National Archives
Journal of the Irish Society for Archives, Autumn 1995**

This is the second of two articles in *Irish Archives* on famine sources in the National Archives. The first article in the spring 1995 issue dealt with the role and functions of the Relief Commission in the administration of relief from 1845 to 1847. This article provides a more detailed account of the content and structure of the papers of the Relief Commission and addresses the value of the collection as a source for analysing the official response to the famine, the nature and extent of distress at a local level and the measures instituted nationally and locally to alleviate distress.

The Relief Commission was established in November 1845 with a remit to advise the government as to the extent of potato loss and distress, to oversee the establishment of depots for Indian corn meal and the sale of said meal to local relief committees and landlords, to liaise with the Office of Public Works relative to the administration of public works under the relief acts and to support, direct and coordinate the activities of local relief committees. The collection reflects these activities and breaks down into four series: RLFC1 – an administrative series; RLFC2 – a series of distress reports received by the Chief Secretary's Office from lords lieutenant of counties, the constabulary, resident magistrates and local officials; RLFC3 – a series of incoming letters which is broken down into two sub-series: straight numerical from November 1845 to 15 August 1846 at the conclusion of the first phase of the commission's activities and baronial from September 1846 to mid-1847; RLFC4 – returns from the constabulary, county inspecting officers and relief committees relative to the extent of potato cultivation and the activities of relief committees.

RLFC1 – the administrative series is not sufficiently comprehensive to document the day to day administrative activities of the commission, victim perhaps of the over enthusiastic ministrations of an official in the State Paper Office, who described the papers in 1902 as *miscellaneous of very little value*, but they do provide an insight into the workings of the commission. The series includes registers of papers received from the Chief Secretary's Office from September 1845 to April 1846, registers of the relief committees and the names and addresses of officials of relief committees to whom printed instructions, copies of relief acts, minutes and account books and tickets for public works were sent from April 1846 to March 1847 and a register of incoming letters from November 1845 to April 1846. There are also copy minutes of meetings of the commission from 2 January 1846 to 25 April 1846 and on the 8 and 12 June and 15 August 1846. The commission sat at least three days a week and occasionally on six. They considered reports from their officials, entertained representations and deputations from local committees

and lords lieutenant of counties and recommended grants to relief committees.

The series also contains tracings of relief districts in counties Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Clare, Cork, Down, Donegal, Fermanagh, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo, Roscommon, Tipperary and Westmeath, applications for positions within the commission, returns of incoming correspondence showing the progress of the blight, the complaints of scarcity, the applications for relief and the response to same for the weeks ending 21 March 1846, 4, 11 and 25 July and 15 August 1846 and replies from consular officials in Italy, France, America, Canada, Germany and Poland to confidential circulars issued in October and December 1845 respecting the 1843–1845 potato crop in their consular districts. The circulars queried the extent of potato cultivation, the nature and incidence of any potato disease, the possibility of exporting potatoes to Ireland and the existence of laws limiting or otherwise affecting the export of potatoes. The replies include a report on the market price of corn and grain in Warsaw and Prague for the quarter ending 30 September 1845.

Also included are: abstracts of cases for relief received from the Mansion House Committee, the coast guard, lords lieutenant of counties, resident magistrates and miscellaneous sources from 14 November 1845 to 9 December 1845; abstracts of letters received by the Mansion House Committee between 11 and 19 November 1845, arranged by county; abstracts of letters from the Poor Law Commission, Poor Law Unions and Office of Public Works from September 1845 to March 1846; and references to employment and suggestions for relief abstracted from incoming correspondence from October 1845 to March 1846.

The administrative series also contains schedules of the applications for committee papers, food, grants, depots and public works, together with the donations recommended in response and general communications referred from the Under-Secretary from 15 October 1846 to 27 January 1847. Included with the schedule for 25 to 27 January are a list of fifty deaths from want nationwide. This is the earliest and most extensive death list processed to date within the collection. The deaths are generally attributed to want of food and destitution and include Patrick McMullin of Magheraculmonee, Co Fermanagh, *a labourer returning home from the public works, his rate of wages not sufficient to support him and his family*, Catherine Reilly of Kilkelly, Co Mayo, *found dead [from] exhaustion from want of food, a living child clasped in her arms*, Jeremiah Shanahan, Harriet Sweeney, Jimmy Houlihan aged eleven months, his sister Mary aged nine years, John Meelihan, Jimmy Connell, Jimmy Driscoll, Cornelius Harrington and Catherine Connelly, all of starvation in Bantry, Co Cork, Thomas Tully of Claddagh near Ballina, Co Mayo, *a pensioner, whose family and himself having 6d a day pension had no pity felt for them* and from Goleen, Co Cork, *a beggar boy, a stranger, found dead, mangled by dogs, want the supposed cause, his body was buried without a coffin*.

RLFC2 comprises transmittals from the Chief Secretary recorded under the Z or miscellaneous series in the registered papers of the Chief Secretary's Office. They date from October 1845 through 1846 and include reports on the nature and extent of potato disease and the incidence of local distress from the constabulary, lords lieutenant of counties, boards of guardians and resident magistrates. Also included are suggestions as to the cause of and remedies for the potato crisis, returns of destitution, petitions and memorials for relief and public works. The memorials derive generally from magistrates, gentry and landed proprietors, but are occasionally sent and signed by or on behalf of the destitute inhabitants of a famine affected townland or parish.

RLFC3 – the series of incoming letters received by the Relief Commission is the most comprehensive series within the collection and consists of two sub-series: RLFC3/1 – numerical and RLFC3/2 – baronial. This article concentrates on RLFC3/1, the numerical sub-series, which comprises c. 5400 letters received from November 1845 to August 1846. The content of the letters tends to be standard: accounts by relief committees and local officials of distress among the labouring population; applications for Indian corn; memorials for public works under relief legislation from relief committees and the distressed; appeals for grants; subscription lists for the relief of the poor; directives from the Treasury regarding the administration of relief and the expenditure of government monies, letters from the OPW seeking information on distress within particular areas, enclosing reports of distress and approving or rejecting applications for public works; distress reports from poor law unions and assistant poor law commissioners; and letters from Richard Pennefather, Under-Secretary, authorising payments to relief committees. Taken as a whole, this sub-series provides a cumulative and comprehensive overview of the first year of the Great Famine.

The efforts of the Relief Commission in November and December 1845 were initially concentrated on assessing the extent of the blight and preserving the remainder of the crop. Reports were received from locals, coast guard officers and OPW officials on the state of the potato crop. Estimates of crop losses varied, none in Finglas (RLFC3/1/117), a quarter in Clifden (RLFC3/1/21), two thirds in Drogheda (RLFC3/1/108), but many reported provision price rises and hoarding by farmers and warned of probable shortages to come. The arbitrary effect of the blight in 1845 is reflected in a detailed report from Constabulary Sub-Inspector John Donoghue, who attributed the delayed return of his report to divergent opinions amongst the clergy, gentry and respectable farmers as to the extent of blight in the Tinahely district of Wicklow (RLFC3/1/267). There was also disagreement within the commission as to the nature and extent of the disease. Sir James Dombrain, Inspector General of the Coast Guard and a member of the commission disputed the assertion of Sir Randolph Routh, chairman of the commission, that the scarcity along the Galway and Mayo coastline represented part of the annual cycle of distress on the western seaboard (RLFC3/1/3474).

The Poor Law Commission issued a regular questionnaire on the potato crop to all poor law unions from December 1845 seeking information on the extent of the blight, the methods used by the peasantry and the unions to preserve sound potatoes and recycle diseased potatoes, quantity of land under potato cultivation, the proportion of the population wholly dependent on the potato, average prices of potatoes, wheat, barley, here and oatmeal, admissions to workhouses, incidence of disease attributable to the crop failure, and changes in labourers wage rates (RLFC3/1/177).

The responses to the questionnaire were forwarded to the Relief Commission. There were occasional replies from poor law unions in Ballymena, Antrim, Skibbereen, Carrickmacross and Wexford, but consistent returns from three particular unions, Ballinrobe, Downpatrick and Newry and they provide a micro study of the social, economic and geographic effects of the famine in the spring and summer of 1846. The Lord Lieutenant, Lord Heytesbury, appointed a scientific commission in October 1845 to suggest means of preserving potatoes which were sound when dug, of utilising diseased potatoes and of procuring seed potatoes for the 1846 crop. Dr Robert Kane was a member of both the scientific commission and the Relief Commission and RLF3/1 contains letters from Kane, his commission colleagues, John Lindley and Lyon Playfair and interested agronomists relative to the inclusion of diseased potatoes in the workhouse diet, the use of lime as a preservative, the propagation of seed potatoes and the construction of properly ventilated storage pits to counteract dampness, which they believed to be one of the causes of the blight. Instructions on the building of ventilation pits were circulated by the thousand, but to no avail. The Inspecting Commander of the Dunkeehan Coast Guard reported on 1 February 1846 that potatoes in fifteen of the twenty pits examined were in an advanced state of decay (RLFC3/1/470). RLF3/1 also includes letters from Jasper Rogers of Nottingham Street, Dublin, for whom the Relief Commission provided funding to conduct experiments in the workhouse of the South Dublin Union into the extraction of dextrine and farina from diseased potatoes and the conversion of diseased potatoes into wholesome food.

There are also regular weekly returns of the export of potatoes, barley and oats through various ports, and explanations for the calamitous effect of the partial failure of the crop. The Earl of Ross blamed the repeated subdivision of land by tenants (RLFC3/1/2106), others attributed it to inadequate husbandry and problems affecting the conacre system (RLFC3/1/2697). There were also allegations of hoarding by farmers and profiteering by farmers and speculators. The Marquess of Clanricarde, Lord Lieutenant of Galway, warned that speculators were hoarding meal (RLFC3/1/852) and in Cork, the Kilmeen Relief Committee reported that provision merchants were forcing the needy to provide securities to pay for food at fifty per cent above market prices (RLFC3/1/3261).

The Relief Commission received its first application for assistance from Rev Patrick Harley, parish priest of the Aran Islands on 21 Nov 1845 (RLFC3/1/38), but did not receive formal instructions from the Treasury relative to the role and functions of the commission until 21 January 1846 and

did not issue the Treasury approved instructions to local relief committees until 28 February 1846. In the directive of January 1846, Charles Trevelyan, assistant secretary of the treasury, cautioned *that landlords and other ratepayers are the parties legally and morally responsible for affording due relief to the destitute poor, the measures and officers under Sir Randolph Routh to be considered mere auxiliary to persons of property in each neighbourhood. Landed proprietors are not to be superseded by the direct agency of the officers of government* (RLFC3/1/557). In further directives in 1846 Trevelyan insisted that relief should not exceed subsistence (RLFC3/1/3816), sought the cessation of relief at the earliest practicable period and urged more stringent control of relief committees to ensure the proper use of relief funds (RLFC3/1/4068). The government appeared determined to ensure that the landed classes did not abdicate their responsibilities towards their dependents, that public funds were not misused and that the burden of relief would not fall wholly on the exchequer.

The rules, which were intended to govern the formation and activities of local relief committees were published in February 1846. The lords lieutenant of counties were instructed to form voluntary committees in areas of potential and actual distress. The committees were to comprise: lords lieutenant or deputy lieutenants, magistrates of petty sessions, officers of the Board of Works, clergymen of all persuasions, poor law guardians, coast guard officers and resident magistrates and *such other active and intelligent gentlemen as the lieutenant may select*. (RLFC3/1/2209). The main duties of the committees were to encourage local employment, raise subscriptions and to purchase and distribute Indian corn from the depots established by the Relief Commission.

The lords lieutenant of counties and their deputies appointed central relief committees based on baronial divisions and local sub-committees based on parishes and electoral divisions. During the spring and summer of 1846, some 650 relief committees were appointed. The majority were in the southern and western counties, particularly Cork, Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway, some in the midland and eastern counties and fewer still in Ulster. In general the committees were appointed and operated without incident, although there were a number of local difficulties: opposition by the Midleton Board of Guardians in Cork to the use of baronial rather than poor law divisions (RLFC3/1/1437); the failure to form relief committees for Mohill, Co Leitrim (RLFC3/1/873) and Ahascragh, Co Galway, because of a lack of suitable personnel and disinterest on the part of the gentry respectively (RLFC3/1/3563); a conflict between the central and sub-committees of the barony of Muskerry West as to the division of subscriptions (RLFC3/1/2983); a dispute between the Nenagh and Monsea committees in Tipperary as to the control of a public works scheme (RLFC3/1/3597); a disagreement between the Kanturk and Kilbrin committees in Cork as to responsibility for the relief of one thousand two hundred paupers in Grenane (RLFC3/1/3644); a complaint about the exclusion of two Roman Catholic curates from the Turlough and Kildacommoge committee in Co Mayo (RLFC3/1/3586) and in Clare, the disruption of a meeting of the Kilkee committee by Rev Michael Comyn and a mob of parishioners (RLFC3/1/343).

Clergymen of all persuasions were active on relief committees. Many served as secretary or treasurer and there were a number of joint Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland secretaries in Cork, Tipperary and Wexford. The clergy were active within their communities and were able to provide first hand accounts of the effects of the famine. The Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland ministers convened a public meeting to address the state of the poor in Enniskeen, Co Cavan (RLFC3/1/480). In Mayo, Rev Patrick McManus formed an ad-hoc committee to relieve the poor of Kilgeever (RLFC3/1/1884). E.W. Shuldham, chairman of the Dunmanway Relief Committee noted that he had secured the support of the Catholic clergy (RLFC3/1/1782), a priest dispersed a food march in Banagher (RLFC3/1/3857) and the Relief Commission ensured that copies of the printed instructions for the preparation and cooking of Indian corn meal were sent to the parish clergy for dissemination among the people (RLFC3/1/1207).

The primary function of the relief committees was to raise funds with which to purchase and distribute the imported Indian corn stored in government depots. There were depots in all the principal towns, with seventy six sub-depots run by the coast guard and twenty nine others operated by the police. The relief commission was empowered to recommend grants to the committees in proportion to the monies subscribed locally, from a fund put at the disposal of the Lord Lieutenant by the Treasury. The commission instructed the committees to publish their subscription lists so as to discourage non-compliance by recalcitrant landowners. They were also ordered to bring the list of non-contributing landlords to the private notice of the Lord Lieutenant and to forward their subscription lists so as to allow the commission to assess an appropriate contribution.

A large proportion of the RLFC3/1 series reflects the activities of the relief committees and comprises: orders for Indian corn, applications to reduce the price of corn, complaints about the delivery and quality of corn, references to popular prejudice against Indian corn, appeals for subscriptions, lists of subscriptions, lists of non-subscribers, applications for liberal donations in aid of subscription funds and protests at the paucity of the Lord Lieutenant's grant. There were appeals for price fixing to counter profiteering and remonstrations against any interference with the operation of the market economy. In Cork, the Fermoy Board of Guardians appealed for a ban on the export of corn and potatoes and the removal of duty from imported corn (RLFC3/1/151), while in Wicklow, the corn factors, Perrin and Nolan, threatened to withdraw from the corn sector if the government reduced prices to uncompetitive levels (RLFC3/1/3226). Conversely, Perrin and Nolan were generous contributors to the fund for the relief of the poor of Wicklow town (RLFC3/2/9454).

Subscriptions varied, depending on the scale of distress, the effectiveness of subscription drives by committees and the ability and willingness of those targeted by committees to subscribe, but they were invariably characterised as inadequate to the needs of the destitute. The paucity of subscriptions was variously ascribed to the dearth of resident gentry and respectable contributors, suspicions about the use of subscriptions, absentee landlords,

estates in receivership and a preference on the part of some proprietors to relieve their own tenantry rather than assume responsibility for the relief of the tenants of a less conscientious landowner within the same relief district. George Wyndham, replying to a letter from Captain Kennedy, secretary of the commission, dismissed claims that his tenants in Clare and Limerick were a burden on other landlords and asserted that he had provided £1500 for the voluntary emigration of tenants to Canada (RLFC3/1/1255). James Molony of Tulla, Co Clare, attributed his refusal to associate with any committees to the misuse of funds by relief committees in 1822 (RLFC3/1/754). Pierce Mahony detailed his expenditure on the improvement of his estates in the baronies of Iraghticonnor and Clahmaurice, Co Kerry and refused to acknowledge the Lord Lieutenant's right to interfere with his rights as a landlord, implicit in the threat to report him to Dublin Castle for refusing to subscribe to the Listowel Relief Committee (RLFC3/1/3194). A number of landlords enquired about providing relief for their tenants and applied to purchase corn from the government depots. Viscount Harberton sought to purchase sufficient corn to support 2500 dependents on his brother's estate in Carbury, Co Kildare (RLFC3/1/1126) while in Cork, Charles Beamish proposed to establish a model farm on his lands in Doonesky (RLFC3/1/1445) and deplored the commission's dilatory response to his applications for Indian corn (RLFC3/1/4230).

Government grants were conditional on the relief committees acceptance of the regulations drawn up by the commission, namely the sale of Indian corn at cost price, exacting a task of work from those unable to pay and the prohibition of gratuitous relief, except to those who were incapable of giving a day's work, had no relatives to support them and were unable to gain entry to the local workhouse. Most committees agreed to abide by the commission's instructions, but in practice ignored the prohibition on gratuitous relief or applied it at their discretion, particularly in cases of acute distress. Many provided free food to families and individuals from whom labour could not be exacted, but whose removal to the workhouse would have been impracticable. The Raheen Relief Committee in Limerick provided free food to widows, young children, the old, and sick men incapable of labour, whose admission to the workhouse would have left their houses and plots of ground vulnerable to plunder and dereliction (RLFC3/1/3889). Committees also had to contend with popular resistance to the workhouse. In Cork, the Youghal Relief Committee reported 1250 destitute who refused to avail of 400 vacant places in the workhouse (RLFC3/1/3174) and in Mayo, the Ballyhooly and Kilmolara committee hoped that the old and infirm, subjected for the first time in their lives to the affliction of hunger and want, would be spared, *the painful alternative of resorting to the poorhouse, as many of them would rather submit to starvation and death* (RLFC3/1/3206).

The committees were instructed to provide employment for able bodied relief applicants. Many initiated small local improvement schemes which were intended to tide over the period of distress until the opening of government funded public works. In Innishannon, Co Cork, the committee employed 120 to repair roads and footpaths (RLFC3/1/4028), while the Tipperary committee whitewashed all the lower order of houses and dug sewers in response to

increased fever (RLFC3/1/3989). The funds of local committees were usually too limited to support employment over a prolonged period, but delays to the opening of public works and increased demands for relief meant that by the early summer of 1846 many committees had exhausted their funds and in some cases were providing relief out of their private resources. There were many pleas for additional grants and for a relaxation of the rules governing the provision of relief. In Tipperary, the Nenagh Relief Committee sought an additional grant to relieve 4000 paupers and 400 able-bodied labourers previously assisted by the now impoverished committee, while the Kilmichael committee in Cork applied to use the Lord Lieutenant's grant to provide Indian corn at a reduced price or gratuitously to the destitute who had pawned their clothing and bedding and were subsisting on cabbage. A draft reply directs the committee to avoid gratuitous relief by affording employment according to the instructions issued by the commission (RLFC3/1/4205).

Relief committees were instructed to compile lists of the families in every townland with observations as to the personal circumstances of each. These were seen as a means of gauging the demand for relief, preventing abuses and controlling the provision of relief. A few committees forwarded their lists to the commission. Their informational value varies, some record the number of families in townlands, others record the names of distressed families, the number in each family, the number able to work and the quantity of food available to them. In Leitrim, The Mohill Board of Guardians forwarded a list of distressed persons within the electoral division of Rinn (RLFC3/1/1846). In Cork, the Kilshannig Relief Committee compiled a survey of the families with and without housing and land (RLFC3/1/2079). In Clare, the Clareabbey committee listed the men relieved by the committee, detailing family size and amount of land (RLFC3/1/2945) and the Passage West Relief Committee in Cork forwarded a list of indigent room keepers most in need of relief (RLFC3/1/2165). Although the majority of committees did not provide lists, many recorded the overall number in distress and in receipt of relief: 2000 destitute in the parishes of Ballyhea and Ballyhoura, Co Cork (RLFC3/1/3978); 888 relieved in Freshford, Co Kilkenny, in the last week of June (RLFC3/1/3887); 1200 fed daily in Killarney (RLFC3/1/3641) 226 families out of 900 in distress in Partry, Co Mayo (RLFC3/1/2846).

Many relief committees warned of popular unrest, the menacing discontent of the peasantry (RLFC3/112977). These forebodings did not materialise. The incidents of unrest recorded in the papers of the Relief Commission are minor and statistically insignificant: threatening notices in Cavan and Limerick warning against the sale of potatoes out of the area (RLFC3/1/2224) and participation in public works respectively (RLFC3/1/1255); threats to steal cattle and sheep in Mayo (RLFC3/1/3088): an attack on mills and bakeries in Fethard, Co Tipperary (RLFC3/1/1570) and on a cargo vessel of corn in Clare (RLFC3/1/1666); refusal to pay rents in Kilglass, Co Westmeath, with attacks on bailiffs and process servers (RLFC3/1/316); public works in Leitrim vandalised by Molly Maguires (RLFC3/1/3336); food and labour marches in Skibbereen, Co Cork (RLFC3/1/1819) and Lorha and Dorha, Co Tipperary, the latter led by Anthony Moylan, a known repealer (RLFC3/1/1536). Some committees were worried about famine unrest, as is evidenced by their

requests for police assistance to distribute Indian corn, but may also have used the prospect of civil disorder to alert the government to the gravity of the situation and to expedite the provision of relief.

The provision of employment during periods of scarcity was a standard government measure to relieve distress. Local officials, the clergy and relief committees had been clamouring for public works from autumn 1845 and the government introduced additional public works legislation in March 1846. The procedure for initiating public works was time consuming and cumbersome and there were constant complaints from relief committees about delays. The distressed area or committee prepared a public works memorial for adoption at a special presentment session. If approved, it was sent to the Relief Commission and then to the OPW for examination. An OPW engineer or surveyor would then inspect and report on the proposed works. On receipt of his report, the OPW would accept or reject the memorial, cost it and seek funding from the Treasury.

The criteria for approval of public works were stringent, schemes had to be justifiable on the grounds of public improvement and were not to be undertaken at public expense, merely on the plea of affording employment (RLFC3/1/602). RLFC3/1 contains a number of letters from J.C. Walker, secretary of the OPW, rejecting applications because they were not properly prepared, too costly, too extensive or would benefit private landowners unduly. An application by the Earl of Kingston to create an artificial lake in Mitchelstown was rejected (RLFC3/1/1327) and the Freshford Relief Committee in Kilkenny fulminated against the rejection of a memorial because of an error on the part of the inspecting officer (RLFC3/1/3984). Works were also delayed by demands for compensation from landowners. In one instance the OPW asked the Relief Commission to instruct relief committees in Tipperary North Riding to persuade local landed proprietors to allow public works on their lands to proceed and to agree to settle compensation claims at a later date (RLFC3/1/3698). The memorials were mainly for road works, although there were some appeals for the construction of piers and harbours, river drainage and improvements to inland navigation. The series also includes informal memorials from land owners, clergy and the distressed, seeking relief and the opening and extension of public works.

The relief committees were responsible for issuing tickets to relief applicants for admission to public works. RLFC3/1 contains occasional returns detailing the numbers employed on public works, 28511 for the week ending 16 May 1846 (RLFC3/1/2562), 91579 for the week ending 13 June 1846 (RLFC3/1/3363). There were a number of complaints, mainly from the OPW, of interference, mismanagement, and indiscriminate ticketing by committees as well as abuses by stewards. Colonel Harry Jones, chairman of the OPW, complained that the surveyor of the Shannon works in Drumsna could not get enough labourers because the indiscriminate distribution of work tickets by committees was encouraging sloth (RLFC3/1/3009). J.C. Walker worried that agricultural labourers would use the public works as a bargaining tool to increase the price of their labour (RLFC3/1/1461). There were protests about an illiterate overseer in Waterford (RLFC3/1/3944), the non-payment of

labourers in Carrick-on-Suir (RLFC3/1/4172) and higher wages paid to two stewards on works in Aughagower, Co Mayo, the son and cousin of the works superintendent (RLFC3/1/3763). The Treasury subsequently issued a directive in July 1846 limiting the power of relief committees to issue tickets.

The operation of relief through late 1845 and the spring and summer of 1846 was predicated on the assumption that Ireland was facing a short-term crisis which would end with the arrival of the 1846–1847 crop. To this end, the OPW rejected or sought the modification of public works proposals that were too extensive to meet the needs of the emergency (RLFC3/1/3242) and suggested in July 1846 a gradual reduction in the numbers employed on works and a reduction in the rate of pay to encourage farm labourers to make themselves available for the harvest (RLFC3/1/4540), while the Treasury ordered the gradual closure of all the public works from August 8, despite protests from relief committees, who were issuing warnings about the failure of the 1846 crop.

The first phase of the activities of the relief commission were concluded, however on 15 August. According to Edwards and Williams, it had spent £105,246 8s 8d on Indian meal from America and £45,923 0s 1d on meal from Great Britain and purchased oatmeal in Ireland for £6,544. The total expense, including freight, kiln-drying and grinding, came to £185,000, of which £135,000 was recovered from sales, the cost to the exchequer being £50,000. Taking into account the grants to relief committees, public works and to the relief commission, the government expended £365,000 in grants and provided £368,000 in loans to meet the scarcity (1).

The final series within the collection RLFC4 contains reports by inspecting officers appointed by the OPW and responses from the constabulary and relief committees to circulars issued by and at the behest of the commission. The series includes responses by constables in every parish and sub-district nation wide to a circular issued by the Inspector-General of Constabulary, Colonel Duncan McGregor in May 1846, seeking the extent of land under potato cultivation in 1844, 1845 and 1846, the proportion let in conacre, and the alternate crops sown in the land, which would, under ordinary circumstances, have been planted with potatoes. The commission circularised relief committees in August 1846 with seventeen questions about their activities including: the total amount of relief subscriptions received; the amount of donations from government and other sources, such as the Calcutta Relief Fund; the quantity and price of Indian meal purchased and resold, the number of individuals to whom Indian meal was sold weekly; the losses incurred by the committee; the numbers in receipt of direct relief; the numbers required to work for relief; the nature of relief work; the rate of payment on relief works; the expenditure on relief works; and the amount of monies and meal in hand. The series contains replies from Waterford, Clare, Laois, Offaly and Tipperary to the August 1846 circular. The OPW also appointed county inspecting officers to liaise with and report on the activities of relief committees and the series includes regular reports from November 1846 to March 1847 from the inspecting officers for Cork, Kerry, Galway, Limerick, Mayo, Tipperary, Westmeath and Wexford.

The papers of the Relief Commission are being entered on a database, which the National Archives will make available on CD-ROM and on the Internet in due course. The cause, extent and legacy of the Great Famine are still matters of some debate. It is hoped that the listing of the papers of the Relief Commission will contribute to a greater understanding of the calamity.

Note

R.D. Edwards, and T.D. Williams, (eds), *The Great Famine: studies in Irish History*, (New York, 1957), p 221.

Irish Archives

This article is an online version of the article 'Sources in the National Archives for researching the Great Famine: the Relief Commission Papers' by Marianne Cosgrave. The complete printed version with illustrative examples of the document types mentioned, appears in *Irish Archives*, the [Journal of the Irish Society for Archives](#), Autumn 1995.

'Hospital records in the National Archives of Ireland'

Brian Donnelly, Archivist, National Archives

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The following article provides a general overview of the holdings of the National Archives of Ireland – hereafter NAI – in respect of hospital records and collections of medical interest. The NAI has acquired over the years, many collections of hospital records relating to both defunct and existing institutions. Many of these were accessioned through the Business Records Survey which operated under the auspices of the Irish Manuscripts Commission between 1970 and 1993 and was thereafter incorporated into the NAI.

Main collections

The most comprehensive collection of hospital records in the NAI is that of the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin (DUB 22). Described by one academic as the greatest collection of maternity hospital records in the world, the archives begin in 1745 when Dr Bartholomew Mosse opened his first lying-in hospital in George's Lane off South Great Georges Street and predate the construction in 1757 of the present hospital building. There is a substantial survival of material from the 18th century, including administrative records, operational records, account books, deeds and leases and loose documentation. The records are only available to those who have received authorisation from the hospital itself.

The records of the Coombe Hospital, Dublin (DUB 55) include minute books (1864–1938), auditor's reports and accounts from 1896, as well as some loose correspondence, while some old patient records are retained by the hospital itself. The NAI holds a small quantity of records relating to the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin (DUB 54) which includes a complete series of operations registers (1887–1949) and a medical register for the period 1897–1902.

The records of St Columba's Mental Hospital, Sligo (SL 1184) were accessioned following the closure of that institution some years ago. This hospital was opened in 1855 and catered for the counties of Sligo and Leitrim. There is quite a substantial survival of records, including a fairly complete set of registers of admission dating from the opening of the hospital and some patient casebooks from 1892. The latter record staff interviews with patients, together with notes on their condition, providing a precious and valuable insight into the human psyche. Those wishing to consult these records must obtain authorisation from the Health Service Executive.

The records of St John's Hospital (97/40), the old Sligo county home, were transferred to the NAI when that institution was demolished in the 1990s. They include three indoor registers relating to admissions and discharges to the county hospital for the period 1930–1942 and a complete run of registers of deaths in the county home from 1934. There is a complete run of indoor registers relating to the Sligo workhouse and its successor, the county home (1910–1987) which gives details of persons admitted which often include reference to their medical condition. The collection also includes an indoor register relating to Tobercurry workhouse for the period 1911–1921.

The NAI holds some records of the Richmond District Lunatic Asylum, now St Brendan's Mental Hospital. This was the largest of the public mental hospitals established in the 19th century and catered for Dublin city and some of the surrounding counties. The records include a complete run of manuscript minute books (1815–1893), some printed minute books after 1900, a register of admissions, discharges and deaths (1846–1848), registers of admissions (1863–1877) and an incomplete run of registers of discharges and deaths from 1878. The bulk of the records of this institution remain in the hospital and include the remainder of the admission and discharge books, which together constitute a complete run from 1814 to the late 20th century, a marvellous run of casebooks – many with photographs of patients from about 1880 – and a very large collection of committal forms dating from the 1820s.

The NAI holds the records of the Board of Control which had general control of the district asylums in addition to records relating to the Office of Inspectors of Lunatic Asylums, the first of whom was appointed in January 1846. The first minute book of the Board of Control (999/784) covering the period 1817–1826, gives a valuable insight into the beginnings of the mental health infrastructure in the early 19th century. The NAI also holds additional minutes from 1860–1898 but many of these are in poor condition and may not be immediately available for research purposes. The records of the Office of Inspectors of Lunatic Asylums (OLA) include an inspector's report book (1845–1854) and a fairly complete series of letter books (1848–1910), some of which are in poor condition.

In addition to a very large collection relating to the Meath Hospital, which includes a wide range of administrative and operational records from 1805 (2007/128), the NAI holds some interesting material relating to the drive against tuberculosis in Dublin from the 1940s consisting of registers of admissions and discharges for St Mary's Chest Hospital (1948–1965), Rialto Hospital (1953–1961) and a TB hospital surgical treatment register (1942–1950) (DUB 63). An important run of proceedings books relating to the tuberculosis section of Dublin Corporation forms another collection during the period 1945–1955 while manager's orders relating to the health services section (1955–1959) (2005/164) which give a great insight into the anti-tuberculosis measures initiated in the metropolis, can also be consulted in Bishop Street.

The hospital holdings of the NAI were greatly augmented in 2006 by the transfer of several collections of great interest from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, mainly relating to institutions which closed in the 1980s. We are very grateful to Ms Mary O'Doherty of the Mercer Library for her cooperation and assistance in relation to this transfer. The records include minutes of the Dublin House of Industry from 1772 and of the House of Industry Hospitals which later occupied the same site in Brunswick Street (2006/86).

A very large collection of 20th-century casebooks relating to these hospitals had been taken in by the NAI some years ago which includes minutes of the management committee of the Richmond Physical Society (1812–1838). The records of Monkstown Hospital (2006/96) comprise minute books (1877–1973), annual reports (1848–1985), a journal of the Rathdown Dispensary (1812–1823) and an account book of Rathdown Fever Hospital (1835–1874). The minute books of Mercer's Hospital (2006/97) run from 1736–1972 and the collection includes a variety of operational records from the 20th century.

The archives of the Royal City of Dublin Hospital, Baggot Street (2006/98) include minute books (1878–1965), as well as a substantial collection of administrative and operational records. The records of Jervis Street Hospital (2006/99) include 20th-century casebooks and theatre registers. The records of the old county infirmaries established by the Grand Juries in the late 18th century, have a very poor survival rate, which makes a minute book of Monaghan County Infirmary (1768–1857) (2006/100), of particular interest. Another unusual collection of great historical interest is that relating to the Queen's Institute of District Nursing in Ireland (2006/101). This body was set up with monies collected for Queen Victoria's jubilee and trained and supplied nurses throughout the country in cooperation with local district nursing associations. These records which begin in the late 19th century and run up to the 1960s include minutes, correspondence, reports and operational material.

The NAI also holds a small collection of records relating to the Lady Dudley Nursing Scheme. This body supplied nurses to some of the most remote and impoverished areas in the country and the records include a photographic album dating from the 1930s which shows many of the nurses and the buildings from which they were then operating. Included among the wide range of smaller accessions of medical interest are a copy recipe book against diseases dated 1775 (999/90), an account of the dispensary at Dundrum, county Dublin (1819) (M 4847) and papers relating to the amalgamation of St Mark's Ophthalmic Hospital, Lincoln Place, Dublin, with the National Eye and Ear Hospital in 1891–1892 (M5778). Other smaller and more unusual sources in the NAI for the history of medicine are discussed in more detail in my colleague Aideen Ireland's article in this journal.

The Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers

One of the most important sources for health and hospitals in the NAI are the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers (CSORP) whose office performed in 19th-century Ireland, many of the functions of the Home Office in England. The alphabetical indexes to the main series contain many references to hospitals. Prisoners' petitions survive from 1791 and the health of individuals is often specifically referred to in appeals for clemency. Another important series within the CSORP is the Convict Reference Files – some of which relate to the confinement of lunatics in prison and their subsequent transfer to lunatic asylums. The material covers the period 1843–1869.

Another important source of medical interest are penal records. Prisoners were given a medical examination on arrival in prison and detailed records of their health were kept while incarcerated. From about 1880 onwards, the files include photographs of persons sentenced to penal servitude. The NAI also holds registers of Fenian and Land League agitators arrested in the 1860s and the 1880s, which include much detail relating to the health of those imprisoned. The CSORP records include files relating to the appointment of prison doctors and papers relating to the imprisonment of suffragettes which give an insight into their treatment while in prison.

Cholera Papers and Poor Law records

The Cholera Papers are an important source for chronicling epidemic disease in the 19th century. These contain applications for loans by local parish or district boards of health during the cholera epidemic of 1832. The application forms for assistance are arranged by county and often contain details of local economic conditions and information regarding the spread of the disease in a particular locality as well as arrangements made for hospital care of victims. The papers – which run up to 1834 – also contain some correspondence regarding the progress of the disease.

The NAI holds several important collections of poor law records which contain much of medical interest. The poor law system was established in Ireland in the late 1830s as an attempt to address the problem of widespread destitution. The country was divided into over a hundred poor law unions, each with a workhouse at its centre and was centrally controlled by the Poor Law Commissioners and later by the Local Government Board. A modern and centralised poor law system was increasingly utilised to implement new legislation – for example, it took over the old grand jury dispensaries in the 1850s and became increasingly responsible for sanitation and rural housing as the century progressed.

From the 1860s onwards, the workhouse hospitals became increasingly accessible to the general public. The minutes and other operational records of the poor law unions therefore contain much of interest relating to hospitals and medical matters. The orders dating from 1838 of the Poor Law Commissioners

survive as do those of its successors, the Local Government Board and the Department of Local Government and Health. Many of these orders – such as those relating to the appointment of midwives in dispensary districts – are of medical interest.

In general, the survival of the records of the poor law unions themselves are – with some exceptions – fairly poor outside the Dublin area and usually are confined to minute books. In Dublin, the old poor law administration was less radically modified in the early 20th century and the survival of records is therefore much greater.

The records of the North and South Dublin Unions (BG 78 and BG 79) which relate to Dublin city and the records of Rathdown Union (BG 137) which cover south County Dublin and north County Wicklow, include very complete runs of indoor registers giving details of persons entering the workhouse, as well as other operational records. The North and South Dublin Unions were amalgamated in 1918 into the Dublin Union and minutes of this successor body until 1943 and its indoor registers until 1938 are held in the NAI. All the indoor registers are available for consultation but application must be made to the Director of the NAI to consult the minutes for the period 1918–1943.

The NAI also holds some records of St Kevin's Hospital, the successor to the Dublin Union, including a fairly complete run of diagnostic registers for the period 1938–1953. The records of Rathdown Union (BG 137) constitute the largest and most representative collection of poor law records to survive in the country. The minute books run from 1839–1843, the indoor relief registers from 1841–1955 and there is a wide range of 19th and 20th century records relating to finance and relief. The collection also includes rural district council records which were responsible for sanitation and housing within their respective areas between 1899 and 1925.

Smaller collections of poor law records of medical interest include the Lismore Poor Law Union (BG 111) containing indoor registers (1906–1922) and an incomplete run of master's journals (1848–1916); Dromore West Poor Law Union (Sligo 8) which includes minute books on microfilm for the period 1916–1920; Castlecomer Poor Law Union (BG 57) which includes a register of births (1850–1859); Kilkenny Poor Law Union (BG 101) which includes a register of births (1899–1919) and a register of successful vaccinations against smallpox for Kilkenny no. 1 dispensary district (1880–1894) and Urlingford Union (BG 159) which includes vaccination registers for Johnstown district (1864–1899) and Baleen district (1898–September 1926).

Coroners' records

Initially transferred from the Crown and Peace offices in the 19th century and more recently from the county registrars offices, coroners' records are a useful source of medical information. Many of the earlier records were destroyed when the Public Record Office was blown up in 1922 but some 19th century coroners' records dating mainly from the 1880s are held in the NAI as are the Official Papers which include summary coroners' returns, giving name of deceased, date of inquest and cause of death etc. Such data survives for most Irish counties between 1835 and 1837 and for the years 1857, 1873, 1875, 1876 and 1878 with less extensive returns from 1858 to 1863.

Twentieth-century coroners' records also survive, with some counties being better represented than others. The most complete set of coroners' records survive for Dublin city, namely the morgue registers for the period 1871–1933. These provide details of bodies brought to the morgue and subsequent inquests on them, in addition to registers of coroners' inquiries and coroners' registers from the 1890s. The former relate to cases – later called natural causes cases – where there was some initial enquiry into a death but it was later decided that an inquest was not necessary. The coroners' registers relate to deaths for which inquests were held and files on deaths survive from the 1930s. Many of the files contain postmortem reports on the deceased and all provide a unique insight into the circumstances of an individual's death, generally through a police report and depositions of witnesses. These records are available to the public.

Records of government departments

The records of various government departments held in the NAI contain much of medical and hospital interest. The Dáil Éireann Local Government files (DELG) cover the period 1919–1923, a turbulent and violent period of great financial crisis. Much of the material concerns the implementation of the union amalgamation schemes which radically overhauled the old poor law system – particularly in rural areas – and involved the wholesale closure of workhouses, fever hospitals and county infirmaries and the opening of county homes and county hospitals.

The files of the Department of the Taoiseach are particularly valuable in relation to health legislation and policy. There is a series of correspondence registers relating to the Department of Health and Local Government covering the period 1920–1947 and these registers summarise incoming correspondence from bodies such as county councils, boards of health and public assistance, urban district councils and mental hospital committees and relate to a wide range of health issues. When the Department of Health was set up in 1947, the health-related files of the old Department of Local Government and Health were transferred to it and were subsequently divided into seven main series. These are now in the NAI and run from the 1920s to c.1960. Each of the series is generally arranged alphabetically by county and also by subject.

The A series relates to the provision of institutional health care and includes files relating to hospitals – including voluntary hospitals – dispensaries and children’s homes etc. The B series concerns food and drugs administration and relates to such topics as the control of infectious diseases – whooping cough, smallpox, polio, enteric fever, measles, diphtheria, venereal disease etc – pest control measures, disinfestation schemes and monthly reports of county medical officers etc. The D series concerns the treatment of tuberculosis and includes such subjects as tuberculosis hospitals, dental schemes, returns of patients and hospital staffing etc. The H series concerns the construction of health premises such as hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and dispensaries.

The L series relates to psychiatric care and includes files regarding reports, legislation and mental handicap etc. The M series concerns the school medical service general scheme and includes reports on school premises, dispensary surveys, outdoor nursing and domiciliary midwifery services, child welfare services and infant mortality statistics etc. The S series concerns Department of Health personnel and includes such subjects as personnel recruitment for hospitals, rules of conduct, salaries, conditions of service and qualification requirements etc.

The NAI also holds substantial records relating to the Department of the Environment, one of the successor departments of the old Department of Local Government and Health. While many of these files are currently unavailable for research purposes as they are not fully listed, they relate to areas of medical and health interest including water and sewerage schemes, housing schemes, control of nuisances and closure of graveyards etc.

The records of the Office of Public Works include letter books relating to the construction of lunatic asylums between the years 1835–1849, as well as plans and drawings relating to many of these institutions.

Access

In general, records in the NAI containing medical information about individuals after 1900 are closed. Some collections such as those of the Rotunda Hospital or St Columba’s Mental Hospital in Sligo, are completely closed unless authorisation has been obtained from the institutions concerned. A form of undertaking regarding confidentiality may also have to be signed before access to the material can be granted. Coroners’ files are generally available. Any queries regarding the availability of medical records should be addressed to the Surveyor of Business Records, National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin 8.

Irish Archives

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'The Rebellion Papers'

Deirdre Lindsay
History Ireland, Summer 1998

The collection known as the 'Rebellion Papers' in the National Archives, Dublin, has been described as 'the largest single source for the study of the 1790s'. The material ranges from the early 1790s to 1808, a period which witnessed developments that were to shape modern Ireland: the spread from revolutionary France of republicanism as a political doctrine and the genesis of Irish separatism; the reaffirmation of political Protestantism and its formal expression with the establishment and spread of the Orange Order; the growing challenge of democratic ideas to traditional authority; the increasingly militaristic response of government to the threat posed by political dissension at a time of international crisis, culminating in the open insurrection of 1798 and 1803; and finally the passing of the Act of Union which would ultimately become symbolic of the widening political gulf in Ireland for more than a century to come.

Origin and main features

Some of the material stems from official or semi-official sources: reports and correspondence from military personnel and from paid government informers; papers and letters of some (named) government officials; statements taken from state prisoners (ie. United Irish suspects and prisoners); lists of such prisoners, and numerous papers found on these at the time of their arrests; and proceedings of courts martial. A greater proportion consists of private letters to Dublin Castle, for the most part by those who would have described themselves as 'friends of government' – resident gentry, clergymen, local government office-holders, magistrates and busybodies who took it upon themselves to keep officials in Dublin informed of events and developments in their own areas.

The extent of correspondence is remarkable in itself: there are some 4,000 letters from January 1796 through December 1798. In the first six months of 1796 the number averaged thirty-five per month but for the same period in 1797 this had increased to 179, and in the months of May and June 1798 the number of letters reaching the Castle was 240 and 267 respectively. It is tempting to look at the volume of correspondence to the Castle over these years as some kind of barometer of political or military crisis, but caution must be exercised, not least because of the fortuitous means by which the material has come to survive to this day and in the form in which we now find it in the National Archives in Dublin.

Louis Cullen has traced the location of this collection of papers back to the Irish State Paper Office, Dublin Castle, in 1853, when, according to a report written in 1890, they were stored within two very large chests, officially sealed and displaying the words 'secret and confidential not to be opened'. When the

contents of these chests were sorted by State Paper Office archivists, they filled sixty-eight cartons and it is in this format that they are kept today in the National Archives. The listing of the material was of a standard nature, and these lists (or calendars) consist of five large ledgers. Volumes I and II list what might be described as rebellion papers proper, i.e. material relating to the state prisoners, courts martial, United Irishmen's papers, etc., mostly dating from 1797 and after. Volumes III, IV and V are calendars primarily of correspondence to the Castle, arranged in chronological order, from 1796 to 1804. The format of the lists is generally as follows: number (of paper); name (and sometimes address) of correspondent; date; brief summary of content.

Edward Cooke's role

The early eighteenth-century practice by Irish officials of retaining unofficial papers had fallen into abeyance by the 1750s. The fact that these unofficial papers should have been retained at all may be ascribed to the diligence of Edward Cooke, under-secretary at Dublin Castle from 1795. Cooke had first come to Ireland in 1778 as private secretary to the then Chief Secretary, Sir Richard Heron, and had been a member of the administration in Dublin Castle since then, becoming a member of the Irish House of Commons in 1790. He achieved a position of such influence by the mid-1790s that he was one of those whom Lord Fitzwilliam sacked during the latter's short and ill-fated viceroyalty in 1795. Reinstated to his post as under-secretary in the military department after Fitzwilliam's downfall, Cooke's position in the Castle was enhanced and his importance to government confirmed when in 1796 he was appointed under-secretary in the civil department by the new viceroy, the Earl of Camden. This was a key position in the Irish administration, involving close supervision of the day-to-day business of government, particularly during the frequent absences of the Chief Secretary, Thomas Pelham, due to ill-health.

Cooke was much more than just a civil servant through which intelligence was channelled to the government. The number of letters addressed to him by name, the nature of the information offered and advice sought, all indicate that Cooke's role was pro-active: many letters are a response to enquiries made by the under-secretary. Cooke's vigour as an administrator contributed to the extent of the correspondence. Letters to other individuals in, or connected with, the administration (eg. Chief Secretary Thomas Pelham, or John Lees, Postmaster General) are also to be found among the Papers, indicating the under-secretary's role in screening correspondence, collecting information and analysing the various strands of intelligence reaching the Castle. The exact nature of Cooke's political role remains elusive, however, since while many letters written to Cooke remain, much less survives of correspondence written by him. It was not customary at this time either to register or to copy incoming correspondence which was non-official, nor were copies routinely kept of out-going correspondence to private individuals. The result is that, while we have an abundance of views from Cooke's correspondents, Cooke's reaction or advice must often be inferred.

The State of the Country Papers

The Rebellion Papers also tell us a great deal about the way in which the administrators in the Castle worked, with letters being passed from one official to another in the course of business. In similar manner, there is evidence that many letters were passed by Cooke to others such as Pelham or Camden. Such letters were sometimes retained by these individuals and are to be found now in other collections, eg. the Pelham Papers, the Home Office Papers etc. Even within the Castle itself, some of the correspondence became separated from the main collection in Cooke's office and was lodged in other files. This is the most likely explanation for the fact that at least two other small collections of correspondence to the Castle for this period were subsequently uncovered by archivists and listed separately from the Rebellion Papers, as the 'State of the Country Papers' first and second series. The letters in these collections are indistinguishable in origin and purpose from those in the Rebellion Papers and should be regarded as correspondence to Dublin Castle which at some stage became separated from the main body of the collection.

The nature and importance of the correspondence

While the letters deal with a range of issues, 'law and order' looms largest. The ongoing war with revolutionary France meant that security, whether against external enemies or against subversion from within, was of prime importance to the government and its supporters. It is perhaps natural that 'friends of government' should be concerned with and seek to inform officials about any developments in their locality which they saw as a threat to the status quo. For this reason in early 1796, and at irregular intervals thereafter, the 'Armagh troubles' are the subject of much discussion. In February 1796 the Earl of Gosford described the situation in that county in grave terms:

Of late no night passes that houses are not destroyed and scarce a week that some dreadful murders are not committed. Nothing can exceed the animosity between Protestant and Catholic at this moment in the country

While Gosford's letter offers a detailed account of events in Armagh, it can be seen as an apologia for his own rather ambivalent stance and cannot be taken at face value. The Sheriff of Armagh, John Ogle, writing to Cooke from Newry in July, also gives a version of the origins of the Armagh dispute and includes an analysis of the sectarian problem:

The former [Protestants] will not be satisfied with the security and advantage they possess unless they may be allowed to bawl out Protestant Ascendancy, as on the twelfth and the latter [Catholics] will be found the more disaffected should any untoward event enable them to retaliate.

When, due to increasing concern about the possibility of French invasion, the government decided to sanction the establishment of corps of yeomanry, the manner of raising these becomes a dominant theme in letters to Dublin Castle from all parts of the country. In September 1796, Lt. H.I. Stuart (a member of the Stuart family of Grace Hill, Ballymoney) wrote from his post at Coleraine of

some of the difficulties he foresaw with the measure:

In the county of Down I am sure such a measure could very well be carried into effect, but in the county Antrim there actually are not those people who come under the description of yeomen – they are chiefly manufacturers, people who are supported without cultivating so much ground as would enable them to keep a horse in the manner required...A number of infantry could be raised who would in this country do more service than cavalry, where you could scarcely in any direction cross the country for a mile without coming into bogs and swamps

The raising of a yeomanry corps was enthusiastically greeted in some parts. For example, a meeting to promote the plan at Lismore, County Waterford in October 1796, was described by Sir Richard Musgrave as ‘a numerous assembly’ at which his wholehearted backing of the yeomanry proposal was met by ‘bursts of applause’. Musgrave noted that ‘most of the persons present were papists; which shows how much popularity Grattan and his good coadjutors have acquired among the honest, the sober and industrious papists of Ireland’. In Omagh, County Tyrone, James Buchanan reported an attendance of nearly 2,000 people in a Presbyterian meeting house and commented: ‘The greatest spirit of loyalty and of resistance to the French and Belfast principles were aroused and appeared among them’ The inhabitants of Belfast, on the other hand, showed less enthusiasm for the government-sponsored corps. Colonel Lucius Barber wrote in January 1797 that yeomanry corps had been got together consisting of about 150, ‘such as they are’ and that ‘much intrigue and interest was employed to collect even that number’. There were problems reported also elsewhere: John Bell wrote about the efforts which he and other ‘well-affected’ people of County Longford were making to raise a cavalry corps:

You cannot think what a party is made against us, and every means devised to deter men from enrolling in any association that government is to have anything to do with. These have distinguished themselves by cropping and holding meetings every night in Granard; I am convinced their plans are hostile to King and Constitution; there seems to be an injunction between the Presbyterians and the Roman Catholics.

The spread of ‘disaffection’ and the activities of seditious groups, particularly the United Irishmen, is a constant theme. Thomas Knox, a regular correspondent, writes to government in July 1796 about the area around Dungannon:

It is a folly to shut our eyes to the situation of the country. It is teeming with treason and what is worse, treason methodized. It will surely be wisdom to oppose system to system. If it be true that the conspirators are formed into companies and ready to rise at the shortest notice, ought we not to take a lesson from them, ascertain our strength and have a rallying point in each district. If they are up before us we are lost.

Describing the 'changed nature of the country' (near Coleraine), John Richardson writes in October 1796 that 'hardly a man can be found in the rank of a farmer, manufacturer, and labourer even to say he is willing to take the oath of allegiance'. The north-west was not, it seems, so disaffected: at the same time Thomas Conolly reported the willingness of his tenants near Derry to form yeomanry corps. Richardson was aware of the significance of Belfast: 'it is apparent that the disposition to rebellion is more or less in proportion to the distance from that seat of mischief'. He identified trade and lines of communication with Belfast as a key factor in the spread of the United Irishmen. Conolly's confidence regarding the loyalty of his tenants was soon to be shaken. On 19 November 1796 he reported that the people on his estate were 'as rebellious and wicked as in any part of the north'.

Many of the letters are concerned not only with the threat of sedition but also with the prescriptions for countering it. In April 1797, William Lambert reported from Edenderry, County Offaly, that night-time robberies of arms were causing alarm to the local magistrates particularly since they had failed to obtain any convictions. The writer suggested that the authorities should respond by burning the houses of suspects:

The measure...seems severe, but if something severe is not adopted sufficient to stop the progress of these villains, who are increasing their numbers and acquiring firearms every night, every house in the country must fall a sacrifice to them immediately and very soon after the towns.

While many of the letters were aimed at persuading government of the need for action, others provide insights into people's political consciousness:

I have often asked men who I knew to be disloyal, what all this outrage and combination by oaths was intended for, and they all answer 'to obtain a reform in Parliament', [and] at the same time declare most solemnly that they are steady in their attachment to the King, and that they do not wish for the French to make a landing among us

Thus reported Edward Moore of Aughnacloy in March 1797 in a letter to John Lees. The same letter reveals a more mundane grievance:

In the different parts of the country where I have an opportunity of hearing the minds of the people I find that the salt tax, and not taxing absentees, is loudly complained of. The poor family (say they) never sit down to a meal of potatoes, that this tax is most aggravating, while the great man carries off all the wealth of the country and does not assist in the expenses of the kingdom where his property is protected.

The radical politics and democratic sympathies of northerners had repercussions for farmers and other traders from Ulster. John Pollock wrote from Navan in October 1796 of his efforts to prevent the people of County Meath 'being abused by the factious and traitorous attempts of emissaries of the North'. He explained:

In Kells fair yesterday there were few northern buyers and no man there could purchase stock unless he could get a resident gentleman here to endorse his bill. Their conduct and their politics were execrated and the stagnation which took place, owing to their not being credited for a shilling, has powerfully turned the minds of the people here against them

Correspondents routinely reported to government anything of a political nature which occurred in their locality. The Rebellion Papers can therefore be an important source for the local historian. They are often full of vivid detail regarding local people and events. On the eve of insurrection, for example, a letter from Kells describes the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone for the new Catholic church in the town by the Earl of Bective in April 1798. Such glimpses into more mundane aspects of life in Ireland at this time have their own attraction. It is sometimes possible, where a resident is a regular correspondent, to trace a significant number of events for a particular area over a number of years. However, on this point, caution should be exercised in relation to their reliability and partiality as witnesses.

Dublin Castle's loyal correspondents

The most notable of the regular correspondents to Cooke was the Marquis of Downshire. In the series of letters between them Cooke's role can most clearly be seen, in maintaining and reinforcing a communication network with loyalists in the counties perceived to be at risk from sedition. Downshire's letters are certainly some of the most entertaining, with his arrogant frankness only too obvious. Writing in November 1796, for example, Downshire voiced his opinion of the Presbyterian clergy:

The Presbyterian ministers are unquestionably the great encouragers and promoters of sedition, though as yet they have been cunning enough to keep their necks out of the halter. I think it hard that the rascals should enjoy the King's bounty to enable them to distress and destroy his government. It would be a good time to reduce the [Regium] Donum to what it was in King William's time if not to take it away entirely

Downshire's pre-eminent position of influence is clear in a letter on the issue of raising yeomanry corps, when he warns the government:

Pray do not be too easy in admitting offers [to raise corps] or so undecided with your friends, or if I am to have anything to do in this county pray do not let others act without my knowledge.

Some months later Downshire's plans for having County Down proclaimed 'disturbed' (and therefore made subject to the draconian regime of the insurrection act) met with some legal misgivings on the part of the Privy Council. Downshire's reaction in a letter to Cooke was typically forthright:

Let them [the members of the Privy Council] be assured that the Justices [of the Peace] who live in the county, who act without salary, fee or reward, but at the hazard of their lives and properties, feel as much difficulty and as much

repugnance in putting a harsh law in force as anyone who sits at the Board.

His emphasis on the role of the resident gentry in the north, the frontline of loyalist defences against the United Irishmen, was a clever attempt to apply pressure:

I wish you and your privy council were obliged to live here for three weeks, you would all by acclamation and I daresay in the utmost haste and irregularity and without attending to precise words or form, be for proclaiming not only this county but Belfast and the province of Ulster...If there is a rebellion and His Majesty's loyal subjects murdered, let it be on your heads that are comfortably sitting in your closets in Dublin and pretending to decide without knowing how bad we who reside in the country know the state of it to be. Thus, my dear Cooke, I have stated my real sentiments. I am no alarmist, I am an enemy to terror. I love my King and my country and will do what I think my duty, though inconvenient to myself or disagreeable to others.

Taking the correspondence as a whole, those who wrote to the Castle were generally those who identified themselves with the government, supported its efforts and sought to uphold its authority: the 'loyal' whose interests the Camden administration protected. As well as those genuinely concerned with their lives and properties, the correspondents also included some whose motives were more self-serving, for example, those who wished to ingratiate themselves with the administration, or who sought to defend themselves from criticism from another quarter. It is important to note that the correspondence is derived primarily from one section of the polity: letters from 'liberal' gentry or magistrates are rare. Political opponents of the government tended not to write to the Castle and the result is a rather lop-sided collection of information.

With an overabundance of evidence from loyalists but only occasional contributions from liberals and others who favoured conciliation of the 'disaffected' by moderate reform. Such contributions usually take the form of a short, and fairly frank, exchange of views between Cooke (or Pelham) and a local political opponent, generally prompted by a local incident of concern to the latter. It is this characteristic – the absence of a sustained commentary on events by the political opposition to Camden's government – which is perhaps the most glaring limitation in the collection and it must be taken into consideration by any researcher.

Conclusions

The archive is a treasury of information for researchers of the period, but one which requires cautious use. In particular one should investigate the credentials of each author, as far as possible, through the usual directories. The background, social status, religious/political persuasion of the writer should be taken into consideration in assessing the value of his evidence. Nothing should be taken at face value in these letters: even the language used is open to interpretation. For example, what is really meant by the description 'active magistrate'? Reports to the Castle must be viewed as part of a fuller picture of local events and should be considered in the context of

wider social and political developments at this time. However, all of this is grist to the mill for historians

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Further reading

D. Lindsay, 'The Rebellion Papers' in the Federation of Ulster Local Studies' *The Turbulent Decade: Ulster in the 1790s* (Belfast, 1997).

L.M. Cullen, 'Politics and Rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' in Hannigan and Nowlan (eds.), *Wicklow: History and Society* (Dublin, 1994).

History Ireland

This article is an online version of the article 'The Rebellion Papers' by Deirdre Lindsay which was published in [History Ireland](#), Summer 1998.

'Sources in the National Archives for research into the transportation of Irish convicts to Australia (1791–1853)'

**Rena Lohan, Archivist, National Archives
Journal of the Irish Society for Archives, Spring 1996**

The exact origin of the use of transportation as a penal measure is obscure, but it seems to have developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from a need to avoid what were considered the destabilising influences of particular groups, such as the banishing of Irish Catholics to the West Indies during Cromwellian times (1). When, in the eighteenth century, the death penalty came to be regarded as too severe for certain capital offences, transportation to North America, in the absence of an adequate alternative, became popular as a mitigation of such sentences (2).

By the time North America was replaced by New South Wales as a suitable penal colony after the American War of Independence, capital punishment, except in the case of very serious crimes, had largely been replaced by transportation (3). Legislation permitting transportation from Britain to New South Wales was first passed in 1784, and an equivalent Irish act followed in 1786 (26 Geo. 111 c.24). The British act did not name the destination, merely providing for transportation 'beyond the sea, either within His Majesty's dominions or elsewhere outside His Majesty's dominions'. The Irish statute provided for removal 'to some of His Majesty's plantations in America or to such other place out of Europe'. This difference between the two acts appears to have had the effect of enabling transportation to Australia from England to get under way in 1787, while there were difficulties with the Irish act. The passing of further legislation in 1790 (30 Geo. 111 c.32) designed 'to render the transportation of such felons and vagabonds more easy and effectual' rectified matters and the first shipload of convicts left Ireland for New South Wales at the beginning of April 1791. Between 1787 and the termination of the system in 1853, Australia received over 160,000 convicts, approximately 26,500 of whom sailed from Ireland (4).

When a transportation sentence was handed down, the convict was usually returned to the local or county gaol until preparations were made for transmitting him or her to the port. Transportees from the southern counties were housed in the city gaol at Cork. Built over the old gate to the northern part of the city, it was in decay and constantly overcrowded. Convicts brought to Dublin were housed, along with other offenders, mostly in Newgate and Kilmainham gaols. Like its namesake in London, Dublin's city gaol, Newgate, was under constant criticism from reformers because of its deplorable condition and the fact that all categories of offender were housed together. Kilmainham was Dublin's county gaol, with arrangements for convicts much the same as in Newgate except that transportees were separated from debtors and petty offenders. From 1817 a holding prison, known as a depot, was provided in Cork to house the large numbers of convicts accumulating

there (5). From 1836 a depot was provided in Dublin for female convicts and between the Great Famine and the opening of Mountjoy convict prison in 1850, temporary depots and Smithfield in Dublin and Spike Island in Cork harbour were opened to take males.

Due to the rich store of late eighteenth and nineteenth century administrative records held at the National Archives, the researcher is assured of an abundance of material on this subject; whether for the purpose of genealogical investigation, for academic research into the administrative and political framework in which the transportation system developed, the technicalities of its operation, or the reasons for its eventual demise. This paper will attempt to explain to the reader the composition and arrangement of each of these, to give an account of the type of material they contain, and to explain how they can best be used. The appropriate record collections, or series, are:

Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers
Official Papers
Government Prisons Office papers
Convict Letter Books
Transportation Registers
Prison Registers
Convict Reference Files
Prisoners Petitions and Cases
Free Settlers Papers
Transportation database

Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers

With respect to the history and operation of the system, the records of the centre of government administration during the nineteenth century, the Chief Secretary's Office, are the best source. The collection spanning the years 1818–1924, is known as the Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office (CSO RP), and consists of all the incoming letters, reports, returns and memoranda to that office which accumulated in the course of business, in addition to an annual series of bound volumes in which details of these communications were recorded and which act as indexes or finding aids to the papers themselves.

Unfortunately for the researcher, the method of recording the details of incoming papers altered over the period during which convicts were transported. From 1818 until 1839, the registry clerks of the CSO *indexed* rather than registered the papers, with the result that for these years the volumes simply act as annual indexes to the incoming papers. In 1840, the system of registering details of all incoming papers in ascending numerical order by reference number and the amalgamation of related papers to form files began. Thus, information on each paper appears in tabular format across the full opening of each page, including columns for date of document, date of receipt, from whom received, subject matter of paper and how disposed of.

The corresponding accumulations of documents on related topics were assembled together under the reference number of the latest incoming paper. The register entry relating to the paper removed was amended to indicate this fact by the inscription in the register of the reference number of the paper to which the removed paper was annexed. To facilitate the retrieval of the papers, there are volume indexes to the registers for each year. Each one is divided into alphabetical sections or *cuts*, in which all papers received in a given year were indexed under the initial letter of the name of the individual, organisation or institution from which they emanated, or under the subject matter to which they related. Within each alphabetical cut, index sub-headings were created for the indexing of frequently received papers from for example, a particular government office, or on a recurrent subject – with respect to transportation, the alphabetical cut is C for convicts or P for prisons (6).

As finding aids for contemporary research purposes, these volumes are difficult to use. They are on open access in the Reading Room, but before embarking on a research project, an intending researcher is advised to consult the duty archivist. To call up a document in this series, the reader must prefix the reference number with the letters CSO RP. When citing documents from this series in theses or publications, the author must prefix the reference number with the letters NAI, CSO RP. Like all other series discussed below which contain correspondence, the records of the Chief Secretary's Office contain a very large volume of material on the supervision and treatment of convicts in the depots prior to embarkation and on preparations for the voyage. For instance, a government enquiry in 1817 into abuses in the system vigorously scrutinised the activities of all those involved in the management of convicts. Those conducting the investigation found the cost of maintaining convicts to be too high, the procedures for carriage to the port and for embarkation to be slow and inefficient and the fees paid to sheriffs, gaolers, and contractors who provided stores and provisions for the voyage to be exorbitant (7). As a result, the general and medical supervision of convicts was taken over by Dr Edward Trevor (8) who quickly set about redressing these perceived grievances (9).

Much of the early material on transportation in the CSO RP concerns the efforts made by Trevor to implement the recommendations of the enquiry. In detailing his efforts to reduce costs and improve efficiency, he reveals a great deal about the running of the Convict Department both before and after he took office (10). He claimed to have abolished the unnecessary cost of demurrage (11) by insisting that high sheriffs of counties and cities order the local inspectors and medical officers of their gaols to see to the health, cleanliness and clothing of convicts before they were sent to Cork. He also claimed to have made large reductions in clothing costs by arranging for all garments to be made by the convicts themselves (NAI, CSO RP/1818/C29), to have introduced competition among the traders and shopkeepers for the provisioning of convict supplies (NAI, CSO RP/1819/T67) and to have reduced overcrowding by increasing the speed with which warrants for sailing were prepared and sent (NAI, CSO RP/1819/T91). He believed that in order for the system to work to optimum efficiency, the movement of convicts from the gaols to the ships should be as speedy as possible. In 1818, he reversed

a decision by the surgeon superintendent of the ship *Elizabeth* to keep back four female convicts on the grounds of ill health – on conducting his own investigation, he found that three were perfectly fit to travel (NAI, CSO RP/1818/C88).

The papers chronicle very well the workings of the system covering, as well as Trevor's period as head of the Convict Department of the Chief Secretary's Office, those of his successors James Palmer and Edward Cottingham and the first head of the newly formed Government Prisons Office, Herbert Hitchins, who took office in 1850. The papers indicate that, apart from security, the main preoccupation of the authorities was that the process of embarkation should take place as efficiently and cheaply as possible. This necessitated particular attention being paid to convicts' general health and maintenance before embarkation and to some extent, particularly in the later years of the system, to vocational and educational training. There were constant efforts to ensure that there was a period of detention at the depot before embarkation, that convicts washed and were free from infection, especially as the surgeon superintendents were ordered not to reject any convict capable of undertaking the voyage, apart from those obviously suffering from serious or contagious diseases, women in an advanced state of pregnancy or having recently given birth, the very elderly, or those suffering from mental afflictions.

Although there is plenty of evidence that convicts who were deemed to be too ill to travel were presented again and again before further sailings until finally embarked, the process of embarkation seems in general to have been very carefully monitored by the doctors who examined the convicts medically, known as *medical superintendents*. Fear of epidemics, such as dysentery, typhus and cholera, breaking out in the ports and then transferring to the ships was one of the main medical concerns. As early as 1832, during the cholera epidemic, the hulks at Cove and Kingstown (12) were isolated and convicts had to observe the most rigid attention to cleanliness (NAI, CSO RP/1832/T1813). When cholera broke out on the ship *Java* in 1833, she was cleared of her stores and every part cleaned, ventilated and fumigated (NAI, CSO RP/1833/T3539).

An indication of how confident the Convict Department had become in the excellence of health procedures for female convicts can be gleaned from the sharp rebuke the surgeon superintendent, John Moody, received from the superintendent at Grangegorman depot, Marian Rawlins, when he complained in 1852 about the filthy and diseased condition of the female convicts embarked on his ship, *Blackfriar*. Rawlins defended her actions by stating that all the prisoners were clean on embarkation, but that unless they were daily inspected they would unquestionably, after several days, be in the state Dr Moody described. She protested that none were put on board that he objected to, either convicts or children. She said the slightest previous symptom of insanity did not appear in any convict embarked on the *Blackfriar* and *that there is a large number of old and useless women sentenced to transportation is perfectly correct, but we consider it our duty to have their sentence carried into effect as far as practicable.*

Herbert Hitchins also complained about Moody's remarks, saying that the strict procedures long in force had been carried out with great precision on the Blackfriar. He protested at Moody's having blamed others, including the prison officers, as the ultimate selection was in his hands and he had signed the list of prisoners fit to go. Both letters were sent to the Home Office with the suggestion from the Lord Lieutenant that some further enquiries be made into statements made by Moody. Moody then retracted his statement in a letter to the director general of the medical department of the Navy, saying that what he was referring to was slight gonorrhoeal infections, *such trifling affections not rendering them unfit to undertake the voyage* (NAI, CSO RP/1852/G4950).

The diet on board ship, which included fresh meat, vegetables, oatmeal and chocolate, seems to have been adequate and there is evidence that additional dietary provisions were often recommended when it was believed they could prevent disease. After 1845, a supply of apple potatoes was put on board all convict ships in order to prevent scurvy (NAI, CSO RP/1845/G5802).

Governor Franklin of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) complained in 1841 about the wretched state in which the Irish female convicts had arrived on board the ship *Mary Ann*. He asked that they in future be allowed to keep the clothes they possessed on conviction, as was the practice in England, as on landing they were invariably *in a state unfit to be admitted into a respectable house*. The authorities insisted, however, that the rags worn by Irish convicts on conviction were unfit for use (NAI, CSO RP/1841/G13358).

One of the more confused areas was with respect to the transporting of convicts' children. It would seem that from the beginning, except in extreme circumstances, children were allowed to accompany their mothers without objection. No definite policy is discernible throughout the period, in fact there was an almost deliberate vagueness on the subject.

One explanation for the apparent lack of strictness on the part of the authorities may have been the fact that it was in their interest to have as many children as possible sent off in order to avoid their becoming chargeable on the rates, with resultant pressure from the Grand Juries. Many children therefore, were transported with their mothers and even in some cases with their fathers. It is not clear if special arrangements were made for children on board ship. The main preoccupation was to dispose of them in the cheapest way, whether on board ship or otherwise.

Trevor's economies included the transporting of as many as possible of convicts' children along with them. When in 1822, one of several very badly behaved women was threatened with not being permitted to bring her children, aged two and four years, on the ship, she apparently swore on the bible that if her children were not permitted to travel with her she would *destroy her own life*. When asked by the Chief Secretary under what authority children had been sent on former occasions, Trevor answered that it was under *verbal communication* made to him, as otherwise children would be *cast friendless on the world* if not allowed to embark and besides, no extra

expense was incurred as a result. On this occasion Trevor failed and the children were not permitted to travel (NAI, CSO RP/1822/2716).

By 1831 there was still no definite regulation concerning children, and another list of convicts' children, who were likely to become destitute, was forwarded for approval. Official ignorance on the subject is shown by the response from the Chief Secretary's Office, which was simply to let them embark *if it can be done without an improper infringement of the regulations* (NAI, CSO RP/1831/3317). Eventually it was the colonists who insisted on making definite regulations. The ending of the assignment system, whereby convicts were immediately put into service on arrival in the colony meant that children would no longer be dispersed throughout the colony with their mothers, but would have to be kept along with them at the prison.

In April 1841, Governor Franklin complained that there were 30 very young children on the ship *Mary Ann*, who had been admitted to an orphanage at a cost to the government of £10 a year for their maintenance. The letter was referred to the convict superintendent, James Palmer, who insisted that this was *a regulation practised in this country for upwards of twenty years, sanctioned by the Treasury and recommended and approved of by successive governments, but specially directing that the children should be under ten years of age.*

Yet again the original official document sanctioning the practice could not be found, but it was claimed that Chief Secretaries had always ordered such children to be embarked – *It has been a most humane regulation, and if now suspended I fear these orphans (as they would virtually be) will become a burden if not worse, to the country. The governor of New South Wales never objected to the numbers of children I have thus sent out to Sydney in the last thirty convict ships* (NAI, CSO RP/1841/G13358).

The question arises when examining these records, as to whether the apparent increasing determined administrative effort at efficiency led to improved conditions over time. Several examples occur, one of which appears in 1846, when it was decided for the first time to send out a matron on each ship containing females, to superintend the work and instruction of the prisoners and their children during the voyage. Matrons selected were to spend some time before embarkation in the depot where the prisoners were confined, so that they could make themselves acquainted with them. It was hoped this would put an end to convicts deceiving the surgeon superintendents into thinking they were fit for transportation when they patently were not. A letter from the Home Office enclosed a list of ten females who went out on board the ship *Green* and the ship *Phoebe*, who were reported upon arrival in the colony as unfit to earn their livelihood. The matron was employed at the same rate as her equivalent in England – £30 paid in advance as a gratuity, a free passage and a status on board ship which allowed her to dine *at the intermediate table*. During her two months in the depot previous to embarkation, she was paid at the rate of £40 a year, the same as the other assistant matrons (NAI, CSO RP/1846/G17770).

In 1850, a further improvement was made when it was decided to divide the sleeping decks of female transport vessels into three compartments by louvered boarding partitions and to appoint a separate matron for each division. When this was done, the method of fitting up the female convict ships was at last regarded as satisfactory by the authorities. The newly appointed matrons were directed to keep journals and to forward these on landing for the information of the government (NAI, CSO RP/1850/G6675).

Despite improvements, pressure from the Australian authorities to end the system was so severe that in 1846 all transportation of Irish males was suspended for the following two years, causing a crisis in the Convict Department. A re-modelled system known as the *exile system*, where convicts were to spend periods in prison at home, followed by public works in Bermuda and Gibraltar, at the end of which they would be transported to Van Diemen's Land on ticket-of-leave (a type of probation), was designed by Lord Grey, the Secretary of State for the colonies. It was not possible to operate this system in Ireland because of overcrowding due to increased convictions during the Great Famine. In 1849 Lord Grey tried to persuade the authorities to allow him to arrange for some training for Irish transportees on arrival in the colony as an alternative (NAI, CSO RP/1849/G10919).

Governor Denison did not agree, complaining that of the 298 Irish male convicts disembarked on the ship *Pestonjee Bomanjee* in January 1849, 272 had been convicted in 1847 and four in 1848 so that having undergone only a short period of imprisonment, they were now ticket-of-leave holders *earning higher wages and living better than they ever could have hoped to do in their native country...they seem not to look on their removal as a punishment* (NAI, CSO RP/1849/G10919).

Despite protestations that Irish convicts were not the result of profligacy and vicious contamination and that their offences were merely thefts to which they were driven by distress connected with the possession of land or local feuds, Denison refused in July 1850 to allow any more Irish convicts to travel with tickets-of-leave, thus heralding the ending of transportation.

So, it can be seen from the records that the ending of transportation was largely forced by colonial opposition. The decision to end the transportation system was finally announced in a letter of 11 February 1853 from the Home Office. It included a request to be informed whether the Irish government was prepared for the immediate implementation of this measure. If this was not the case, the Home Office wished to know what portion of the convicts in confinement at that time in Ireland should be removed in order to give time and opportunity to increase prison accommodation. This was referred to Hitchens who informed Thomas Larcom, the Under Secretary, that the number of prisoners with transportation sentences in Ireland on 1 February 1853 was 4,500. He added, however, that while the estimates provided for 5,000, no steps had been taken to enlarge the prisons because a decrease had been anticipated in the number of convicts due to the ending of the Famine.

He thought that suitable accommodation existed for less than 4,000, with over 1,000 more expected as a result of the assizes and quarter sessions of 1853. He also believed that prolonged detention of convicts in the county gaols would not be tolerated for much longer by the county authorities.

Because of this situation, he recommended that two ships be chartered to convey 600 convicts to the colony (NAI, CSO RP/1853/1434). These ships were never dispatched however, and the last convict ship to leave Ireland for Van Diemen's Land was the *Midlothian* which reached Hobart on 24 February 1853 (NAI, CSO RP/1853/1434).

Official Papers

A second series of Chief Secretary's Office records entitled Official Papers (CSO OP), is a further collection of incoming papers which, although not registered, does not appear to differ in any significant way from the CSO RP. There are three sub-series of Official Papers. The first series (1788–1931) is listed in two volumes by date and subject of document. There is a comprehensive card index to these volumes giving volume number and page number within the volume.

The second sub-series (1832–1880) is listed directly on card index giving the reference number. The third series known as Official Papers, Miscellaneous Assorted (1780–1882), has an indexed descriptive list arranged in categories by subject matter of the papers, such as transportation, law, police etc. in bound volume format.

To call up a document in any of these three sub-series, the reader must prefix the reference number with the letters CSO OP, or in the case of the Official Papers, Miscellaneous Assorted sub-series CSO OP MA. When citing documents from this series in theses or publications, the author must prefix the reference number with the letters NAI, CSO OP, or NAI, CSO OP MA.

The Official Papers are also well worth consulting on transportation as the topics mentioned above tend also to be discussed in these papers. Because the series begins in 1788, it is possible to examine the system as it operated before the enquiry of 1817. There is for instance, correspondence relating to the state in which convicts were housed in their county gaols prior to being moved to the port. They were not usually moved until a sufficient number had accumulated to justify the expense of such a journey.

Because of overcrowding at Dublin and Cork, convicts very often had to remain in county gaols for some time, much to the annoyance of the local authorities or Grand Juries, who were responsible only for the custody of those with imprisonment sentences to be served in the gaol. Although it had been agreed that the Grand Juries provide clothing for the convicts, they invariably declined to allocate money for this purpose and as no government allowance was made for their upkeep, convict quarters in county gaols were usually neglected and in very bad condition.

Correspondence relating to this subject includes a letter from the governor of Roscommon Gaol to the Chief Secretary Robert Peel in 1816, in which he protested that seven women whose names he enclosed, were begging to have their transportation sentences carried out as quickly as possible because they could not bear the overcrowding and bad conditions prevailing in the prison (NAI, CSO OP/1816/462/20). Before the convict depot was opened in Cork in 1817 as a result of the enquiry mentioned above, there were several scandals relating to those brought from Dublin in sloops or brigs to await embarkation. Because of delays, transportees sometimes had to wait on board these vessels for extended periods in appalling conditions.

In 1815, Governor Macquarie of New South Wales complained of the high mortality rate on the *Three Bees* and the *Catherine*. The Inspector General of Prisons, Foster Archer, attributed this to the fact that the convicts had to remain in dock at Dublin for six weeks awaiting suitable winds. They received neither clothing nor bedding, which were considered an unnecessary expense due to the shortness of the journey to Cork. Because only a few were allowed on deck at once, they spent most of the time in irons in the hold in very unhealthy conditions. The journey itself was made in two days, but the sloop was again detained in Cork harbour before the convicts were removed to the ship. Archer insisted that in this case it was the long detention in port that probably caused the high mortality. To support his case, he told of returned convicts who had informed him that the period spent in the harbour was more distressing than the voyage and that *they underwent more suffering and sickness in the passage from Dublin to Cork than in that from Cork to Botany Bay* (NAI, CSO OP/1815/439/5).

Other subjects covered include religious controversies, such as an incident brought to the attention of the authorities in 1816, when the Roman Catholic chaplain complained to the Lord Lieutenant that he was refused access to the prisoners on board the ship *Surrey*.

Robert Harding, (Edward Trevor's predecessor as convict superintendent), admitted to having devised a new rule whereby the captain was no longer permitted to allow any strange person to go on board without directions from the Inspector General and that the chaplain in question had gone to the ship without having obtained the necessary clearance as stipulated under the new ruling. Harding added however, that the chaplain in question had not on every occasion in the past *confined his clerical duties to his own flock but has extended his pious care to the Protestant soldiers, by putting into their hands books for the purpose of making proselytes – these I have got from a good many soldiers*. The Lord Lieutenant directed that in future, no difficulty should be placed in the way of the Roman Catholic chaplain, but that every facility should be afforded to him for the purpose of visiting the convicts (NAI, CSO OP/1816/462/7).

Also in the Official Papers is the incident in 1838, when a bishop wrote from New South Wales complaining that the surgeon superintendent was compelled by the regulations, even though he was a Roman Catholic, to read Protestant prayers to an almost entirely Catholic ship (only about 5 per cent of

the ship's complement was Protestant), and had to distribute Protestant bibles, prayer books and tracts to the prisoners. He suggested that where the surgeon superintendent was Protestant, one of the Roman Catholic prisoners might read prayers for the remainder under proper superintendence. As a result, Palmer was instructed to consult with the surgeon superintendent of the next ship and with the archbishop, to prepare some prayers to be printed in a cheap form and distributed to the convicts on their embarkation (NAI, CSO OP/1838/329).

Like the CSO RP, these papers also contain information with respect to the official stance, if such there was, on the transporting of convicts' children. Expressing concern for the fate of eleven children whose mothers were due to sail on the ship *Canada* in 1817, Robert Harding made much of his arrangement to have the two youngest accepted at the foundling hospital of which he was governor, achieving even that only by what he considered a *very circuitous route*. The older children could not be got in by any means and so he asked the Chief Secretary for permission to send them with their mothers. There was apparently abundant room on board, as the ship had been chartered for 100 and *provided with all kinds of necessities for that number*. He believed that not more than 86 or 88 females would be fit to be sent, *and probably the surgeon of the Canada will object even to some of these*. The Chief Secretary answered that he did not have the power, and that application must be made to the colonial secretary, (NAI, CSO OP/1817/932).

Nothing appears to have been done about the matter but shortly afterwards the victualling agent asked that they be allowed to sail: *I really do not know what is to become of the poor children of the female convicts, as there is no place here to receive them, and they cannot be taken from the prison and thrown in the streets. As there is abundance of room in the ship, a small allowance of porridge would be the only expense to government and it would be a great comfort to the poor women* (NAI, CSO OP/1817/932). Later correspondence reveals that during the 1840s it was the practice in Ireland to allow male convicts to take their children on the voyage but this ceased with the temporary suspension of male transportation in 1847 (CSO OP/1847/99).

As with the CSO RP, these papers also reveal that every effort was made to get rid of as many convicts as possible onto the ships with certain exceptions. In 1835 the Chief Secretary instructed that *none were to be kept back except those who may appear to labour under diseases, which would be likely to be aggravated by the voyage or produce contagion, or those who from infirmity or old age might not be able to endure the voyage* (NAI, CSO OP/1835/90).

Government Prisons Office Papers (1850–1877)

From 1850 the government office responsible for the management of convicts was known as the Government Prisons Office (GPO). The records of this office, like the CSO, include incoming correspondence and a series of bound annual volumes in which the details were recorded and which, like the CSO

RP, act as finding aids to the papers themselves. Like the earlier CSO RP between 1818 and 1839, described above, the papers are simply indexed and the volumes act as annual indexes to the incoming papers.

The volumes are divided into subject matter cuts generally by name of convict prison or by the department within the civil service with which the GPO dealt. To call up a document in this series for consultation in the Reading Room, the reader must prefix the reference number with the letters GPO. When citing documents from this series in theses or publications, the author must prefix the reference number with the letters NAI, GPO.

The relevant volumes for research into transportation on open access in the Reading Room are as follows:

- GPO CR 1 1850
- GPO CR 2 1851–1852
- GPO CR 3 1853

Again, health issues predominate. The surgeon superintendent, when rejecting forty out of 225 females for embarkation on medical grounds in 1851, stated that the interests of the colony induced him to *select carefully the young and healthy* (NAI, GPO/1851/1215). Religion is another recurring subject revealing, in these later years, a belief held by some convicts that they could gain certain advantages by changing their religion. In June 1852, an enquiry was held into the case of a Protestant convict who wished to become a Roman Catholic. She had heard that the Roman Catholic women were being allowed to bring all their children out with them to Van Diemen's Land. She had no doubts of the truth of her Protestantism, stating that if she could get her child out to Van Diemen's Land with her she would *turn a Roman Catholic, I would have turned before if I had thought I could get my child out*. Hitchens refused her request because of her motive and because there was not enough time to comply with the regulations governing changes of religion. It transpired at the investigation that the woman had already been baptised by the Catholic chaplain and had attended mass. The rule however, stated that she must wait for two or three weeks before changing, which she had not done. Delia Lidwill, then deputy matron at Grangegorman, who had been present at the baptism, was punished by having her salary for the following year reduced from £60 to £50 (NAI, GPO/1853/Government 184).

There are also GPO letter books containing copies of outgoing correspondence replies and of other communications. The relevant volumes are as follows:

- GPO LB 1 21 May 1846–3 August 1849
- GPO LB 2 27 January 1849–20 December 1852
- GPO LB 3 8 January 1853–30 January 1854
- GPO LB 11 6 July 1846–10 January 1849
- GPO LB 12 7 July 1849–14 December 1851

Convict Letter Books

The series known as Convict Letter Books (CON LB) consists of volumes of copy outgoing letters and other communications which emanated from the Convict Department. The series beginning in 1843, possibly due to reforms carried out by Edward Cottingham who replaced Palmer in 1842, charts very well the later years of the system. The relevant volumes are as follows:

- CON LB 22 9 February 1843–16 April 1846
- CON LB 1 26 May 1845–3 February 1851
- CON LB 2 8 January 1851–31 December 1852
- CON LB 3 3 January 1853–31 December 1856

Comparisons with the earlier period show that in some ways, conditions were still very harsh. Convicts were still arriving in bad condition from the county gaols. In February 1844, nine female convicts with two children arrived at Grangegorman depot from Drogheda Gaol, Co. Louth, complaining that on reaching Drogheda they were all placed on straw in a cell on a stone floor *without fire or any covering whatever from the effect of which they have suffered severely* (NAI, CON LB 22 1843–1846). Two female convicts arrived in Grangegorman in March 1844 from Roscommon Gaol *dressed in a most scandalous way with a sort of man's jacket on over a flannel petticoat and no cloak, and also without a warrant or any returns whatever being sent with them from the gaol* (NAI, CON LB 22 1843–1846).

It would appear that the journey to the port was still causing problems, even though it simply meant carrying the convicts from the depot at Grangegorman to Kingstown. It was however, necessary to provide a large military escort to guard the cars carrying the convicts because of the rowdiness and frequent drunkenness on the journey. In April 1843, it had been necessary to provide sixteen cars to carry 64 convicts from Grangegorman to Kingstown (NAI, CON LB 22 1843–1846).

There were improvements however. From May 1843 there was considerable improvement when the admiralty supplied the necessary garments, sending them straight from the ship to the depot to avoid wasting time in fitting out the convicts at embarkation (NAI CON LB 22 1843–1846). There was concern shown for nursing mothers, when in January 1845, Cottingham asked that September to April be avoided for sailings because it was dangerous for nursing mothers to travel in jaunting cars in bad weather.

He also complained about the accommodation for mothers in convict ships, saying that the berths were inconvenient, if not dangerous, so far as women with infants were concerned, *each woman being allowed a berth separated by planks and so narrow that a woman with an infant could not sleep in one without danger* (NAI, CON LB 22 1843–1846).

With respect to health, in April 1848 a circular from Hitchins, to the governors of all local gaols requested that only those who were in good health and free from infectious diseases were to be admitted to the depots (NAI, CON LB 1 1845–1851).

Transportation Registers

When a transportation sentence (13) was handed down at a court sitting held at the local assizes or quarter sessions, the clerk of the crown in each county was required to furnish details to the government authorities in Dublin Castle, so that arrangements could be made to convey the convict to the port for embarkation on the next available vessel. When the details were received they were entered into registers by clerks in the Convict Department. These details recorded include the convict's name, age, date of conviction, term of transportation, crime, name of trial judge and name of sessions or assizes where tried. The registers also have a *remarks* column usually indicating the name of the ship on which the convict sailed and the date of sailing, whether the convict was discharged or pardoned, or if the convict died before embarkation.

From about 1848, probably due to the increase in numbers receiving such sentences, there is a deterioration in the standard of compilation of the entries in the registers and of the level of detail given, particularly with respect to recording the eventual fate of the convict. They therefore cannot, in this later period, apart from verifying that an individual received a transportation sentence, be cited as proof of transportation. The registers originally spanned the entire period the system was in operation, but those covering the years 1790 to 1835 were destroyed in the fire at the Public Record Office in the Four Courts in 1922. There is approximately one volume for each year, with details of males entered to the front of the volume and females at the back. Entries are arranged under counties and principal cities. The volumes can be consulted on microfilm in the Reading Room.

To call up a volume on microfilm in this series for consultation in the Reading Room, the reader must prefix the reference number of the volume with the letters GPO TR. When citing volumes from this series in theses or publications, the author must prefix the reference number with the letters NAI, GPO TR.

The volumes, reference numbers and microfilm roll numbers are as follows:

- GPO TR 1 1836
- GPO TR 2 1837–1838
- GPO TR 3 1839–1840
- GPO TR 4 1841–1842
- GPO TR 5 1843–1845
- GPO TR 6 1845–1847
- GPO TR 7 1847–1848

- GPO TR 8 1848–1849
- GPO TR 9 1849
- GPO TR 10 1850
- GPO TR 11 1851
- GPO TR 12 1852
- GPO TR 13 1853–1854
- GPO TR 14 1855–1856
- GPO TR 15 1857

Prison Registers

The registers of local prisons, convict depots and convict prisons will also contain details of convicts, varying in level of detail, and can be consulted by referring to the Department of Justice, Prison Registers Series. For instance, the register of female convicts for Grangegorman female convict depot covering the period 11 July 1840 to 22 December 1853 (Prisons 1/9/7), contains 3,500 entries. (Grangegorman depot had opened in 1836 as the first exclusively female prison in the British Isles. It housed females with imprisonment sentences as well as those sentenced to transportation. The prison's main function with respect to convicts was to provide employment training for them so that they might satisfy the ever increasing demands of the Australian authorities that they be fit to earn their living on arrival.) The register, an excellent source for statistical analysis, contains details of name, age, crime, sentence, location of conviction, marital status, literacy level, trade or occupation and number of previous convictions.

Convict Reference Files and Prisoners' Petitions and Cases

Petitioning the Lord Lieutenant was the only real hope of obtaining a commutation of sentence. Petitions, also known as memorials, were prepared by the convict or by a representative and referred directly, in the first instance to the Lord Lieutenant. He then referred them, via the CSO, to the trial judge, the local constabulary and sometimes to the governor of the local gaol to confirm statements made by the convict protesting innocence, age, size of family, or state of health as mitigating factors. All petitions were investigated thoroughly. The accumulations of documents which gathered as investigations progressed are known as Prisoners Petitions and Cases (PPC), from 1778 to 1835, and as Convict Reference Files (CRF), from 1836 to 1853. The files are arranged alphabetically by year, in straight numerical sequence. The finding aid for the petitions is a card index by name of petitioner or convict. The finding aids for the Convict Reference Files are the Convict Reference Books (1836–1853). To call up a Prisoners Petition or Convict Reference File for consultation in the Reading Room, the reader must prefix the reference number of the file with the letters PPC or CRF. When citing files from this series in theses or publications, the author must prefix the reference number with the letters NAI, PPC or CRF.

Approximately 7,500 petitions were received from men and just under 1,000 from women between 1791 and 1853. Given the proportion of male to female convicts, it would appear that women petitioned on average only half as often as men. Most successful petitions were on the grounds of old age, chronically bad health or insanity. Petitions from women seeking clemency only on the grounds of large family size were generally not successful. The transportation sentences of women convicted under the vagrancy act (mostly prostitutes) which was peculiar to Ireland, were remitted if security was given for future good behaviour within three months of the date of sentence being passed. It also appears that under the vagrancy act such sentences could not be commuted to imprisonment, and prisoners had to be either transported or discharged.

Successful petitions were often those which contained a request concerning children. In 1848 the petition of Mary and Johanna Kelleher from Bantry, both serving 12-month imprisonment sentences, was investigated. It was found they had committed the offence in order to be transported, as they wished to go with their mother who had been given a seven-year sentence. When the real motive was discovered they were discharged and placed on the ship with their mother as free settlers (CRF 1848/K39). Mary Campbell, aged twenty-three, who gave herself up to the police, was given a ten-year sentence for larceny. She stated in her petition in 1850 that she had committed the crime because of her illegitimate child then aged four. Her petition was successful and she and the child were sent out as free settlers on the ship *Blackfriar* (CRF 1850/C68).

It was extremely difficult to obtain a mitigation of sentence on health grounds. Pregnancy or extreme youth were not mitigating factors. In 1848 the petition of the relatives of a twelve-year-old who pleaded on the grounds that her sight was failing due to cataracts was unsuccessful because, while it was admitted her eyes were tender, she was not actually blind (CRF 1848/H45).

There is throughout the petitions a very slight sprinkling of those who actually wanted to be transported as quickly as possible. Eliza Brown petitioned in 1820 to be transported, as she could not fulfil the condition of her sentence, which was that she find bail within three months or be transported. On failing to find bail she begged to be sent off to Botany Bay immediately *to relieve her out of her present distressed situation* (PPC 1820/1442). Mary Kilrea's petition in 1820 asked if the Lord Lieutenant *through your accustomed tenderness and humanity to the distress would show such directions as you think most expedient on the subject in question to have petitioner removed and forwarded to her place of destination as speedily as possible* (PPC 1820/1503). In 1849 Margaret Byrne from Carlow had her death sentence which was imposed as a result of an arson attempt made by her on an occupied house commuted to transportation for life. She stated that she had committed the crime in anticipation of a transportation sentence (CRF 1849/B 25).

Free Settlers Papers

This small series, spanning the years 1828 to 1848, contains information relating to the relatives of transported convicts who were emigrated to join their convict relative at the expense of government. There is no separate hard copy finding aid and access to the information is through use of the transportation database described hereunder.

Transportation database

On the occasion of the Australian bicentenary it was decided by the Irish government that a database containing information such as the transportation register entries, and those prisoners petitions and Convict Reference Files of convicts transported from Ireland should be compiled. The records were microfilmed and a copy of the database and the microfilms were presented to the people of Australia as a gift from the Irish nation. A copy of the database is available in the Reading Room and can be used to access the original records. Each entry can contain name of convict, any alias, date of crime, date of trial, place of trial, details of crime, sentence, and additional information such as name of ship, details of family, place of origin etc. It can be searched by surname (exact or similar), by crime, and by name of ship.

Notes

1. Legislation providing for the transportation of offenders was first passed in 1597, though it was most probably never put into effect (39 Eliz. c.4). In 1666 further legislation was passed by which moss troopers convicted in Cumberland or Northumberland as *notorious thieves and spoil-takers* could be transported for life to America (18 Car. 2 c.3) The first Irish statute to mention transportation was 2 Anne c.12. See Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, v, 'The emergence of penal policy' (London, 1986), p 465.
2. Its use as a mitigation of the death penalty was in the case of capital statutes carrying *Benefit of Clergy*. This privilege, which was not abolished until 1827, was originally confined to members of the clergy who were tried for felonies in ecclesiastical courts. By the mid-seventeenth century it had been extended to literate laymen and women. Eventually it was widened to include all offenders, although it could be claimed once only, and the number of offences to which it applied was severely restricted. The number of capital statutes not carrying Benefit of Clergy (the 'Bloody Code') was still very large and was estimated in 1823 at 2003.
3. By the 1850s, the death penalty was restricted to murder and treason, and public executions ended in 1866. The lesser physical penalties were also curtailed or abolished – branding in 1779, the pillory in 1837 and whipping of women in 1819.

4. During the transportation era, the term *convict* referred to the serious offender who received a sentence of either death or transportation. After the passing of the first Penal Servitude Act in 1853, a new long term prison sentence replaced that of transportation. For details of names of ships, numbers embarked, numbers landed, dates, ports from which the vessels set out and their destinations, see Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships* (Sydney, 1974).
5. The removal of the male convicts to hulks in 1822 meant that conditions at the Cork depot improved considerably. During her tour of inspection of Irish prisons in 1826, the prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry, pronounced it to be *defective as to its conformation, but '...cleanly, comfortable and well superintended*. She was not convinced, however, of the need for such depots, and seemed more in favour of the English method of bringing the convicts straight from the county and city gaols to the transport ships for embarkation. (See Elizabeth Fry and Joseph John Gurney, *Report addressed to the Marquess Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, respecting their late visit to that country*, London, 1827, pp 21–2). The depot was not abolished until 1851 when it was closed because of its bad state of repair, only to be reopened in 1854 due to the increasing demand for convict accommodation following the ending of transportation.
6. For a comprehensive account of the history of the Chief Secretary's Office and of the arrangement and use of its records, known as the Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office, see Tom Quinlan, 'The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office', *Irish Archives*, Autumn 1994, pp 5–21.
7. *Report of the commissioners appointed by the crown to investigate certain alleged abuses in the convict department at Cork; together with the evidence taken before them*, 99, H.C. 1817 (343), viii, 104, 113–15.
8. The notorious Edward Trevor, ex-superintendent of Kilmainham gaol, where state prisoners were held in 1798 and 1803, claimed to have foiled an attempt at escape by Robert Emmet.
9. Until the recommendations of the report of the enquiry were put in place, three government officials were involved in the preparation of convicts for transportation: the *agent of transports* was appointed by the Chief Secretary to contract with a private shipowner to transport the convicts, the *victualling agent* had to provide for the convicts while on board ship in the harbour, and the *medical superintendent* looked after the convicts while in port, undertaking further medical examinations on embarkation. Supervision during the voyage was the responsibility of the *surgeon superintendent*.
10. Although the Chief Secretary's Office was set up in 1780, the surviving records date from 1818, by which time the transportation system had been in operation for 18 years. The department responsible for the

transportation of convicts was known until 1850 as the Convict Department, when it was renamed the Government Prisons Office.

11. This was a penalty paid to the shipowner for failure to discharge the ship within the time allowed.
12. A separate depot for convicts was finally opened in Cork in 1817, which housed both male and female convicts until 1822, when Trevor received authorization to place male convicts directly on a hulk (on the style of the notorious British hulks) in Cork harbour, freeing the depot for the exclusive use of the female convicts. Like the depot, both the hulk at Cork and a further *temporary* one at Kingstown, were run by the convict department, with the inspectors general reporting annually to government. The Kingstown hulk was proposed by Trevor in 1823 to save the expense of sending the prisoners from northern gaols to Cork. Because the Irish hulks were to be used only as places of temporary detention while awaiting embarkation, they had not even the sparse facilities of the British hulks, where convicts were allowed to work on shore for part of the day, resulting in extreme overcrowding on board at all times.
13. Transportation sentences were for periods of seven years (the most common), ten years, fourteen years or life. The nature of the sentencing policy behind these terms has not been fully researched. Linked with political conflict and agrarian unrest, the view that Irish men and women were transported for trivial first offences such as petty theft, has become part of Irish tradition. See Lloyd Robson, 'The origins of the women convicts sent to Australia 1787–1852' in *Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand*, xi, (1963) pp 43–53; Alan Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies, a study of penal transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and other parts of the British Empire*, (London, 1966); Portia Robinson, 'From Colleen to Matilda', in Con Costello (ed), *Ireland and Australia*, (Dublin, 1987), pp 96–110; Rena Lohan, *The management of female convicts sentenced to transportation and penal servitude 1790–1898*, (unpublished M.Litt, TCD thesis, 1989) pp 1–13.

Irish Archives

This article is an online version of the article 'Sources in the National Archives for research into the transportation of Irish convicts to Australia (1791–1853)' by Rena Lohan. The complete printed version with illustrative examples of the document types mentioned appears in *Irish Archives*, the [Journal of the Irish Society for Archives](#), Spring 1996.

‘The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary’s Office’

**Tom Quinlan, Archivist, National Archives
Journal of the Irish Society for Archives, Autumn 1994**

The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary’s Office consist of two main archival series covering the years 1818 to 1924, together with a number of sub-series of shorter date span within this period: They provide the researcher with valuable primary source material for research into Irish history during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The collection, which forms part of the Irish state papers, is now in the custody of the National Archives and is stored on site at its premises on Bishop Street in Dublin.

There is a distinction between archives we describe as *state papers* and those we call *public records* which is not always articulated and hence tends to remain vaguely understood, The distinction has its basis in developments in England where the records created by the courts, by commissions of enquiry, and by public offices and boards were regarded as being of a public nature, whereas the records of secretaries of state were viewed as the semi-private papers of a government minister and, as such, were not deemed to be in the public domain. This distinction was given legislative expression in both Ireland and Britain by their respective nineteenth century public records Acts, which preserved and rendered available to the public legal and court records, but which did not extend to the records of secretaries of state or government ministers. (1)

Irish state papers are the accumulated documents received or created by the offices of state which, until the termination of direct rule of Ireland by England in 1922, composed the Irish executive, headed by the chief governor of Ireland, and included the Privy Seal Office, the Privy Council Office and the Chief Secretary's Office. The office of chief governor of Ireland had existed from the twelfth century until the twentieth, but the actual title of the official who served in the post tended to vary: from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, the chief governor was normally styled *Justiciar*. Later the titles of *Lord Deputy* and *Deputy Lieutenant* came to be used, each title reflective of constitutional variations in the nature of the post. From 1700, the office of chief governor was filled by a succession of prominent English noblemen under the title of *Lord Lieutenant*. However, regardless of the title of the post, its purpose remained constant: the chief governor was appointed by the reigning English monarch to represent the Crown in Ireland and the holder of the post was always a peer of the realm, usually a nobleman, whose wealth and status rendered him a suitable regal representative. For the period for which state papers are extant, the chief governor's title was that of Lord Lieutenant and this title will be used throughout the remainder of this article.

The Lord Lieutenant had important political and administrative duties to perform. In theory, he was very powerful, holding statutory powers and wide powers of appointment to numerous offices within the Irish administration of which he was head. He could exercise the prerogative of mercy to pardon all crimes, with the exception of treason. He occupied a central role in Irish social life: there existed a vice-regal court, with its plethora of officials and court ceremonies, such as levées, over which the Lord Lieutenant presided. He gave balls and dinners, and appeared at a wide range of public functions, such as military parades, agricultural shows and academic ceremonies, and lent his support to a variety of philanthropic activities.

However, the power of the Lord Lieutenant was more apparent than real. While he had a comparatively free hand in dealing with Irish matters, he had to ensure that his general policies conformed with those of government in London. While a separate Irish Parliament existed, it was the Lord Lieutenant's task during each Parliamentary session to guarantee that no measures hostile to the policies and interests of government in London were passed, that the revenue bills were carried and that hostile enquiries into the expenditure of previous grants were prevented.

Much of his energies were devoted to the cultivation of various Irish political magnates to accomplish these ends. The Lord Lieutenant's responsibility was to Parliament in London and not to that in Dublin, even in the aftermath of Irish legislative independence in 1782. He therefore had no opportunity or motivation to try to secure personal support from the Irish Commons as his tenure of office was entirely dependent on British political circumstances. For most of the eighteenth century, the Lord Lieutenant was a member of the British cabinet, but from 1767, when the chief governor was required to be constantly resident in Ireland to exercise tighter control over the Irish legislature and the political magnates who controlled it, he ceased to attend meetings.

By 1780, the Lord Lieutenant was no longer regarded as being of cabinet rank. In the aftermath of the Irish Act of Union, his duties became largely ceremonial. By the middle of the nineteenth century, advocates for the abolition of the Lord Lieutenancy had emerged, arguing that in a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland the monarch no longer required separate representation in Ireland. It was pointed out that the office had now become a constitutional anomaly which provided a focus for nationalistic sentiment; keeping alive the notion of an independent Irish nation while continuing to be a drain on the British Exchequer.

Immediately subordinate to the Lord Lieutenant was his Chief Secretary, who was originally his nominee, coming to Ireland at the beginning and leaving the country on the termination of the Lord Lieutenant's period in office. The Chief Secretary served as the head of the Lord Lieutenant's secretariat. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, following the destruction of the Undertaker system in the Irish Parliament as a means of accomplishing the business of the government of the day, whereby Irish political magnates, in return for political favours and office within the Irish administration, had ensured that the

policies desired by the cabinet in London were carried in the Irish Parliament, the importance of the Chief Secretary grew. He was placed in the Irish Commons and the defence of government policy fell to him. After the passing of the Irish Act of Union, the Chief Secretary's status relative to that of his superior increased. As chief executive of the Irish administration, he grew more capable of dealing with Parliamentary business in London, spending the recess in Ireland and the Parliamentary session in Westminster, where his duty remained that of defending Irish policy in the House of Commons.

This resulted in his being in close contact with cabinet ministers in London and in his alignment with political groupings, and this tended to increase his importance at the expense of that of his nominal superior, especially as the Lord Lieutenant was now required to be resident in Ireland throughout his period in office. It is no surprise that appointments to the office of Chief Secretary came to be controlled by government in London and were viewed as political once the post ceased to be purely administrative in nature. Several Chief Secretaries would even attain the rank of cabinet minister.

During the eighteenth century, the separate administrative offices of the secretariat of the Lord Lieutenant developed into one central office surrounding the activities of the Chief Secretary. Its business was the supervision of the machinery of the Irish administration and the Chief Secretary's Office functioned as a channel of communication between government departments and offices in England and their counterparts or branch offices in Ireland. The office continued to function for the transaction of such business until 1922, after which time its activities were confined to supervising the transfer of administrative functions to the institutions of the newly established Irish Free State. The office was abolished in October 1924.

In 1702, a paper office was established for the purpose of keeping duplicates of records generated by the administrations of the various individuals who successively occupied the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Prior to this date, it had been the practice for each chief governor and his secretaries to carry away with them all papers pertaining to their period in office at the end of their tenure. Such papers tend now to be found in the archives of those English families whose scions held office in the administration of a chief governor, either in the custody of the British Library or other archival repositories in Britain. This practice of departing government officials proved to be of such inconvenience to the administration of an incoming chief governor that in 1702, in compliance with a suggestion made in 1697 by Lord Capell, then chief governor, a paper office was instituted by Queen's Letter to

'Keep Duplicates or Copies of all Kings' and Queens' Letters whereon any warrants, Orders of Directions are or should be given, signed or issued by your and our present Justices, and all your and their Successors, Chief Governors of our said Kingdom, and wherein also are to be kept Duplicates or Copies of the Entries of all Warrants, Orders, Petitions and Letters which have or shall pass the said Secretaries' Offices, or either of them (Duplicate or Copies of the private Letters of such Chief Governor or Governors only excepted)'. (2)

The office was also expected to be able to facilitate those who required copies of any records in its custody. In addition, the Letter directed that a room within Dublin Castle be fitted out for use as a paper office.

By the time the Irish Record Commission was conducting its investigations into the condition of the public records in the early nineteenth century, the duties of the office of Keeper of State Papers, as outlined in the Queen's Letter, appear to have atrophied: the State Paper Office was stated by the Keeper of State Papers to have no '*Records, Rolls, Instruments, Registers or Manuscript Books of any kind*'. (3) The Commission's report inferred, from the existence of a small number of volumes of duplicate records of the nature which the Queen's Letter required should be maintained, that the duties of the office had ceased to be executed soon after its establishment. It was observed that the office had not developed in the manner of its counterpart in England and that the post of Keeper of State Papers had become a sinecure worth £500 per annum. The duties attached to the post were discharged by the Deputy Keeper of State Papers, who was usually a clerk in the Civil Department of the Chief Secretary's Office and who, with the consent of the Chief or under-secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, provided copies of the original documents which were held in the Chief Secretary's Office. There was an annual salary of £10 paid to the Deputy Keeper of State Papers. The report of the Commission makes no reference to the location or even the existence of the state paper room which the Queen's Letter directed be provided.

The attention of the Record Commission was then directed to the records of a public nature held in the Chief Secretary's Office. It was reported that the records of this office consisted of books of entry of warrants and orders, and of original and other documents of the chief governors and their secretaries, all commencing in the year 1697. The books included entry books of government correspondence in which were entered copies of all official letters to government offices in England, together with replies. In addition, there were respective books of entry for copies of correspondence with a variety of government offices; such as the Treasury, the Post Office and the Customs and Excise Department; entry books for correspondence on ecclesiastical affairs, and on police and civil affairs. The records were stated to be in a good state of preservation, arranged in proper order and to relate mainly to

'Charters of Corporations; Creations of Public Institutions [and] of Peerages and Baronetages; Conventions, Dissolutions, and other matters relating to Parliament," Successions to Offices; Salaries and Allowances; Land; Crown and Quit Rents; Alnage, Prizage, Butlerage, Manors, Markets, Fairs, Ferries and Toll; &c.; Regulations for the different Branches of the Public Service; Licences of various kinds; Dispensations to Fellows of the University; Rewards and Privileges for Mechanical Inventions; Permissions to Families to change Names and Arms; various Writs; Manufactures; Imports and Exports; Embargoes and Quarantine; Coinages; Outlawries and Reversals thereof Pardons and Protections; Military Operations; Impressments of Seamen; Political Intelligence; Remunerations and Pensions'. (4)

The records of the Chief Secretary's Office represented such a large accumulation that a portion of them had, by 1810, been transferred to the Birmingham Tower and had become mixed with the records of other offices stored in that depository. In October 1812, the Record Commission recommended that the Wardrobe Tower in the Lower Yard of Dublin Castle, which stands today as the only surviving portion of the original medieval structure, be fitted out, under the supervision of Francis Johnston, who was the architect responsible for the General Post Office, for use as a record repository; and that these records of the Chief Secretary's Office, along with records of such other offices as the Privy Council Office and the Parliamentary Record Office, be removed to a designated apartment in the refurbished Record Tower.

Thus was the Record Tower established as a repository for state papers and it continued to receive periodic deposits of records from the Chief Secretary's Office and other Irish offices of state. Under the *Public Records (Ireland) Act* of 1867, the State Papers Department of the Record Tower was made subject to the superintendence of the Master of the Rolls. The Keeper of State Papers was required to continue to receive, arrange, classify and list all state papers and then to deliver them into the custody of the newly-established Public Record Office of Ireland at the Four Courts.

By 1919, a considerable portion of the state papers had been transferred into the custody of the Public Record Office. In his *Guide to the Records Deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland*, (HMSO, 1919), Herbert Wood, Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, describes the various series of state papers which were then in his custody with all the confidence of one who assumed their current repository was inviolable. Unfortunately, in 1922 almost all of the state papers held in the P.R.O.I. were destroyed by fire and explosion. The state papers extant are those which had not been delivered into the keeping of the P.R.O.I. by 1922, either because they were part of an accruing record series of the Chief Secretary's Office, or because they formed part of a backlog of records due for transfer to the P.R.O.I. After 1922, these records remained in the Record Tower in the custody of the Keeper of State Papers, with only a small number of state paper series being transferred to the Public Record Office. Under the *National Archives Act*, 1986, the Office of the Keeper of State Papers and the Public Record Office of Ireland were amalgamated to form a new national archival repository called *The National Archives*. The Record Tower continued in use as a repository for state papers until 1991 when its contents were transferred to the newly acquired premises of the National Archives on Bishop Street.

The Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers consist of a series of bound volumes which are used as finding aids to a series of incoming letters, reports, returns and memoranda. In all, there are 337 volumes serving as indexes to correspondence, as correspondence registers and as indexes to these correspondence registers. The incoming communications fill approximately 3,770 cartons, and are about 1,800 cubic feet in volume. The registered papers are by far the largest class of state papers. (5)

Because of the increase in the status of the Chief Secretary, the CSO was the centre of government in Ireland during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and the registered papers, spanning this period, provide a valuable insight into the administration of Ireland during some of its most turbulent years. The administrative response to cholera epidemics, cattle plagues, famine, economic depression, breaches of law and order, and rebellion and political unrest, is well documented; as are the more mundane aspects of the day-to-day government of the country, such as the preparation of Treasury estimates, the payment of gratuities and pensions to civil servants, the administration of justice and the prisons and the preparation and enactment of legislation. The incoming papers were received from a wide variety of individuals, institutions and government offices.

The title of the series derives from the fact that details of each incoming communication the CSO were entered in registers by the staff of its central registry and each paper given a unique reference number allocated consecutively from a straight numerical sequence. With some minor exceptions, the registration and numbering of papers was conducted on an annual basis, with the first paper received in a given year being allotted the number 1, the second, the number 2, and so on. The complete reference number of each individual paper was a composite of the series title, the number allotted and the year in which registered. For example, the reference number of the first paper registered in 1919 is cited as *Chief Secretary's Office Registered Paper 1/1919*, and the reference number of the *second* as *Chief Secretary's Office Registered Paper 2/1919*.

The papers for each year were filed in numerical order. If several papers on a related topic were received in a given year, or over a period of years, then they were assembled together and filed under the year and number of the latest incoming communication. There was no system of opening and registering of files on a particular subject as presently done in many modern government departments and offices. Instead, files of papers grew or evolved through the amalgamation of individual papers on a related topic, sometimes over a period as great as twenty years, but more often over two to five. It was not until the early years of the twentieth century that the practice of placing each file of accumulated documents in a file jacket was adopted. Prior to this, associated registered papers were attached to each other using straight metal pins and brass paper tacks, or tied together by means of pieces of silk or linen ribbon. Therefore the registered papers filed under a particular number may vary in content from a single document to a large mass of papers extending over a period of years. In some instances, files of papers accumulating over a lengthy period of time became extremely bulky and were split into at least two files of more manageable size.

The number of registered papers of the CSO varies from year to year, with larger numbers of papers registered in a given year indicative of times during which the business of the Dublin Castle administration was increased due to some crisis. The volume of papers increased dramatically during the Great Famine of 1845 to 1847 and during periods of political or social unrest, such as the 1860s and the 1880s.

The annual registers with their indexes maintained by the registry clerks of the CSO remain in use to day as the only finding aids to the registered papers. While the arrangement of the registered papers is quite easily understood, being simply by year and in numerical order by reference number, the arrangement of information in the annual register indexes and the methodology of their use in conjunction with the correspondence registers may not be as obvious to the untutored or inexperienced researcher. The registers and their indexes can be difficult to use, both physically, because of their size, and intellectually because of an ignorance of the procedures in practice in the registry of the Chief Secretary's Office.

The system of registering incoming communications altered over the period 1818 to 1924, as various methods of classifying incoming papers were experimented with in order to ensure that the registry could produce quickly a complete file of related papers on any subject matter. The various correspondence indexes and registers are set out in the appended list and a cursory glance should reveal that their format varied between 1818 and 1852, and remained constant from 1853 to 1924. From 1818 to 1839, there are indexes to correspondence, but no correspondence registers, as incoming communications were indexed rather than registered. The indexes consist of bound volumes divided into alphabetical sections, or *cuts*, and all incoming papers were alphabetically indexed under the name of the individual or organisation from which they emanated, or under the subject matter to which they related, and the papers' respective reference numbers recorded. Within each alphabetical cut, there are index sub-sections for the recording of frequently received papers from a particular official (such as a magistrate), government office or on a recurring subject matter.

For example, the alphabetical cut C tends to have index sub-sections for the recording of all communications relating to convicts and crown lands; and the alphabetical cut P, sub-sections for papers relating to public works, penitentiaries and the Paving Board. In addition to the alphabetical cuts with their respective sub-sections, each volume has separate sections or cuts under which are entered regularly received incoming communications relating to a specific topic or originating from a particular government department or office. For example, the 1821 correspondence index (CSO CR 4) has separate *cuts* in which are recorded incoming papers concerning the Stamp Office, the Post Office and the Police. All papers entered in each of these sections form individual sub-series to the main registered papers series, and, when citing the reference number of any of these papers, the sub-series title should be used in addition to the main series title, the reference number of the document and the year of the volume in which indexed.

As early as 1826, reports, returns and letters received at the Chief Secretary's Office from magistrates and police concerning the maintenance of law and order were given peculiar treatment. Such communications were indexed in separate index volumes described as *private*, and later as *first division* and the papers form a separate series of crime related papers, spanning the years 1826 to 1852. For a number of years within this period, there is also a separate short series of police reports which are again indexed separately.

Between 1832 and 1839, incoming communications relating to military, yeomanry and constabulary administration were also indexed separately and these papers also form a sub-series of registered papers.

In 1840, the Chief Secretary's Office adopted a system of registering details, in consecutive numerical order by document reference number, of all incoming communications on a yearly basis in bound volumes. The information recorded relating to each individual paper includes date of document, date of receipt, from whom received, subject matter and how disposed of. The receipt of any subsequent papers on the same or a related subject is also noted. In order to trace an individual paper entered in the register for a particular year, the index to that year's registers must be consulted to obtain the registered number allocated. Once this has been done, the register must be inspected to gather further details on the paper so as to allow a decision as to the relevance of its subject matter to the research in hand.

It is also important that a researcher using registered papers should now remember the practice of the CSO registry of associating related papers to form a file. The *subsequent communication* column should be checked to see if an additional paper was received on the same or a related topic. If this column contains a reference number for a later paper, then the register entry relating to that later document should also be inspected and the process continued until it is established that there were no additional later papers received. The very last paper on any subject matter should always be requested and this paper should have attached all earlier papers, forming a complete file. However, in some cases, files of documentation accumulating over a period of several years became too bulky and were split into we files of more manageable size. *This* fact was noted in the register by the inscription of a small circle over the reference number of the later document received in the subsequent communication column. When the existence of a split file is noted under a particular register entry, the document to which the register entry pertains should be requested, and the subsequent communication column references should also be followed through to their terminal reference number and the papers filed under this number also viewed.

The practice of separately registering reports, returns and letters from magistrates and police concerning the maintenance of law and order continued, except that such papers were then described as *first division*, while all other incoming communications were described as *second division*. Each of these two categories of papers had separate registers with indexes. Within each of these categories, the papers were further classified: crime, or first division, reports, by county and administrative, or second division, correspondence by subject matter. The reference numbers allocated to the incoming papers incorporated elements to indicate their classification: first division reports carried a reference number to indicate their county of origin, as well as their consecutive reference number, and all reference numbers allocated to administrative correspondence were alpha-numeric, with the various letter prefixes of the registered numbers denoting broad subject categories into which the papers fell.

During the years 1846 to 1847, the volume of incoming papers relating to the alleviation of distress increased dramatically due to the Great Famine and separate indexes were maintained (CSO CR 70, 71, 77 and 78).

In 1853, the registry of the CSO simplified its procedures, abandoning the classification of incoming communications and allocating all papers a reference number from a straight numerical sequence. Instead the index headings and sub-headings became more complex as the years progressed. Space does not permit the inclusion of a detailed breakdown of these headings and sub-headings. Given the inconsistencies between the various indexes, a researcher must be prepared to investigate each one individually.

Notes

1 John McColgan, *British Policy and the Irish Administration, 1920–22* (London 1983) p 146.

2 Irish Record Commission, Supplement to Eighth Report, 1819, p 218.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Breandan MacGiolla Choille, *Fenian Documents in the State Paper Office*, Irish Historical Studies, vol. xvi, no. 63 (March 1969).

Irish Archives

This article is an online version of the article ‘The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary’s Office’ by Tom Quinlan. The complete printed version with illustrative examples of the document types mentioned appears in *Irish Archives*, the [Journal of the Irish Society for Archives](#), Autumn 1994.