

# **'The archives of the Office of Public Works and their value for local history'**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Despite a certain credibility problem, due partly to the lack of a precise definition, *local history* is fast becoming a valid and worthwhile branch of historical research. Therefore, like all other fields within the discipline, its success will be determined by the quality of analysis and interpretation of primary sources. Whether simply chronicling a series of events over time in a particular locality, or whether attempting to challenge the validity of established notions of what happened in the past by an analysis of the response of a small community to major historical events, a rich source base is essential.

The archives of the Office of Public Works serve the local historian well in this regard. Due to the organisation's responsibility in the management and disposal of public funds for local projects, ranging from large undertakings involving extensive engineering works and the employment of vast numbers, to small coastal projects provided under distress legislation, there is scarcely a townland in the country with which it has not had contact over the last 160 years. Secondly, availability of the records for public inspection is guaranteed, as they come within the terms of the National Archives Act of 1986, which provides for the transfer of all government records over thirty years old to the National Archives.

The best way to inform the reader of the value of this collection is by first of all giving a short historical background to the organisation (see section 2). This will be followed by an explanation of the way in which its records accumulated over the course of the nineteenth century. Comprising upwards of 2,000 bound volumes (such as registers, minute books and letter books), several hundred thousand manuscript and typewritten documents, and an extensive range of architectural and engineering drawings, the collection mirrors well the activities in which the organisation engaged. The way in which the documents are arranged will also be examined, and there will be a description of the finding aids necessary for their use (see section 3).

As a discussion of the surviving material relating to all the Board's activities would be impossible, what follows instead is an examination of the surviving documents relating to activities which show to greatest advantage the value of the collection for local history, namely fishery piers and harbours, national monuments, schools, labourers' housing, teachers' residences, and railways. The historical background relating to these items will precede the discussion of the documents here rather than in section 2 (see section 4). It should be remembered that the material so described does not constitute the entire

body of records relating to that particular subject, but is merely a small sample. Preference has also been given to nineteenth century material. (To avoid needless repetition of the full title of the organisation, the terms Board and Board of Works are used to denote the Office of Public Works.)

## **2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Office of Public Works, or Board of Works\*, 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 necessity for making use of a sum of £500,000 voted by Parliament for relief in the form of loans and grants as a result of the widespread famine of 1831 was a factor in this development, as was increasing governmental concern at the growing number of boards and commissions in operation, including the Directors General of Inland Navigation, the Fisheries Commissioners and the Civil Buildings Commissioners.

When the Board of Works took over the functions of these and other public bodies, it naturally became responsible for the disposal of a vast expenditure of public funds. But, unlike any other department of state, the Board also operated as a lending agency. While funding for previous public relief works legislation passed in 1817 (57 Geo. III c.34) had been made directly from the Exchequer, the new Act now placed the Board in charge of collecting repayments of sums already lent under the 1817 legislation and, under sections 30 and 31, of giving loans for the establishment, extension or improvement of any existing or proposed works capable of yielding an income sufficient to repay the amount advanced. Loans could be made to a total not exceeding £500,000 outstanding at any one time, and free grants to a total of £50,000, the Board acting also as administrator in the management of these. The first loans and grants were for the construction or improvement of roads, extending over the course of the century to inland navigation, coastal fisheries, drainage, housing and railways. As early as 1845 over a million pounds had been spent in grants and loans.

The Board took over the duties of the Postmaster General, inheriting responsibility for the maintenance of hundreds of miles of roads constructed wholly or partly at public expense, mostly in the remoter parts of Ireland. The roads and bridges for which the Board was responsible were all constructed after 1820 at the expense of local Grand Juries. Added to these were the many hundreds of miles of road, also constructed with the aid of public funds and known as grant roads, consigned to the Board's charge by the Directors General of Inland Navigation.

The early concerns of the Board with respect to inland navigation were the upper Shannon, Lough Ree and Lough Derg, along with the Tyrone, Maigne and Boyne navigations. In 1839 the care and maintenance of the entire Shannon navigation was delegated to the Shannon Commission (2 & 3 Vict. c.61). The three commissioners appointed were permitted to draw over half a million pounds, and between 1839 and 1850, when the work was considered

finished, piers, bridges and weirs were built and the river channel deepened and cleared. In 1846 the government transferred the duties of the Shannon Commission to the Board of Works. To deal with the extra responsibilities, two additional commissioners were appointed, leaving the Board with five members. Although the 1839 Act had stipulated that these duties should not be transferred until the works were complete, the action was justified at the time on the grounds that they were well advanced and nearing completion. They never received the necessary attention from the enlarged Board, however, and the amalgamation remained largely ineffective. Nevertheless the works carried out were on a large scale and employed significant numbers throughout the famine period.

In 1831 the Board took over responsibility for the completion of Dunleary harbour, then newly named Kingstown. Over £500,000 had already been spent on the project before the Board was established, and the bulk of the work of pier construction had been completed. Dunmore harbour was also taken over by the Board in 1831 and, despite early delays, work on the pier went ahead from the mid-1830s. In 1836 Howth harbour (the construction of which had been completed in the 1820s) and the road connecting it with Dublin, were transferred to the Board by the Commissioners for Woods and Forests. The other *Royal* Harbours of Donaghadee and Ardglass were taken over by the Board in 1838.

The chief activity of the Board with respect to public buildings, having taken over the responsibilities of the Commissioners of Civil Buildings, was the maintenance of the Law Courts and buildings connected with them, of the official residences of the Lord Lieutenant and the officers of Government in Dublin and of the Phoenix Park. Over the course of the following years other buildings were added, such as district lunatic asylums in 1834. In that year also it took charge of the extension to the Four Courts (4 & 5 Will. IV c.68). By 1836 the Treasury buildings at Dublin Castle were adapted for the use of the newly formed Irish Constabulary. In 1840 the extensive Law Library at the Four Courts was completed and a barrack constructed in the Phoenix Park for the reserve force of the constabulary. In 1842 the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham and the Hibernian School in the Phoenix Park had been added, along with a depot for convicts at Smithfield. By 1843 the buildings of which the Board had charge were the Four Courts, Custom House, Royal Hospital, Smithfield Prison, and in the Phoenix Park, the Vice-Regal Lodge, the residences of the Chief Secretary and under-secretary, the Constabulary Barracks and the Royal Hibernian Military School. In 1845 Maynooth College and the Queen's Colleges at Belfast, Cork and Galway were added as were custom houses and coast guard buildings.

From its early years the Board had certain responsibilities for drainage, but no significant work was accomplished until the *Drainage (Ireland) Act*, 1842 (5 & 6 Vict. c.89) was passed. Providing for the carrying out of arterial drainage work with the consent of the owners of two thirds of the lands proposed to be improved, the Board, with an additional member, was constituted a commission for the purposes of administering the Act. The stipulation in regard to assent proved very difficult to achieve in practice and the level of

drainage work proceeding under the Act was not regarded by the Board as adequate. The eventual outcome was the setting up of 140 drainage districts, with works being carried out in 121. The number of acres benefiting from the various schemes was over 250,000, with a total expenditure of almost two million pounds, of which over £200,000 was provided from private funds (initial land surveys had to be funded locally).

When more significant projects, such as famine relief, were undertaken, the Board was allowed greater discretion and more direct control over the planning and carrying out of the works. But at all times the philosophy of government was to involve local landowners in the initiating of drainage schemes, as it was they who, as well as benefiting from them, would ultimately pay for such schemes through increased rent charges.

Under the *Landed Property Improvement Act*, 1847 (10 Vict. c.32) it was hoped to encourage proprietors in the west of Ireland to drain their lands. Drainage works were then introduced under the provisions of the *Poor Employment Act*, 1822 (3 Geo IV. c.34). It was believed that useful results followed under this arrangement: over 1,500 baronial drainage presentments in 29 counties, amounting to over £25,000, were granted, approved by the Board, and sanctioned between October 1846 and February 1847. The entire amount was to be subject to repayment by the proprietors on completion. All projects were conducted under the superintendence of inspectors and overseers appointed by the Board. This was seen as an important precursor to the land improvement legislation which followed and under which one and a half million pounds was to be spent.

An acceleration in the rate of progress of drainage works was made necessary by the Great Famine, requiring the government to obtain new Parliamentary powers, and to this end the *Drainage (Ireland) Act* (9 Vict. c.4) was passed in 1846. This dispensed with the private funding of preliminary expenses, which proved difficult to raise locally, and allowed the government to carry out the works on its own responsibility and under the direct supervision and control of the Board. The assent of the owners of one half in value of the district to be drained was also needed, a less onerous requirement than that under the previous Act. The expenditure on a completed scheme was not to exceed three pounds per acre improved, and where it was necessary to exceed this sum further consents would have to be obtained from the owners.

On the basis of this Act, arterial drainage works were put in hand on an almost universal basis. The scope of the works was nation-wide and far more extensive than anything which had preceded them. Arterial drainage projects seemed an ideal choice for labour schemes, given the amount of valuable work required to be done and the labour intensive nature of the activity. Such schemes also had the advantage that the cost would eventually be recoverable from the landowners benefiting from the resulting improvements. (On the completion of the various schemes in the post-famine period, however, the collection of the required charges became problematical, with

landowners complaining of the inadequacy of both the design and implementation of many schemes.)

In 1846 several new Acts of Parliament were passed to deal with the looming famine crisis. The distress caused by the potato blight required the Board 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); 9 Vict. c.4 (drainage). In August of that year, when the scale of the crisis became clearer, the government was given additional powers for the employment of the labouring poor by means of Treasury loans (9 & 10 Vict. c.107). Difficulties arose with the nature and quality of the work performed on these relief schemes and in controlling the huge numbers of labourers involved. Schemes were largely confined to local works, 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 the co-ordination required where roads in adjoining districts were to be constructed was generally not forthcoming.

The range of services continued to expand after the famine. The number of buildings for which the Board was responsible grew steadily. By 1857 it had taken over constabulary buildings and all buildings connected with the customs, the Inland Revenue, the Post Office and the National Education Board.

Engineering projects included very large civil engineering undertakings, such as the construction of the Ballinamore and Ballyconnell Canal, drainage of the Shannon, the Suck and many smaller rivers, as well as continuing efforts to improve navigation on the Shannon. A major impetus was given to the various schemes on the Shannon by the very severe flooding in 1861 of the lands bordering the river. In an effort to relieve the threat of further severe flooding the *Shannon Act, 1874* (37 & 38 Vict. c.60) was passed. This provided for a survey and valuation of the lands by the Board. It proved impossible to get the required number of assents from landowners and a reduced scheme was carried out at public expense during 1880–1884. The other major drainage project carried out in this period was that of the Suck Drainage District, which was certified as complete in 1895 at a cost of over £170,000.

Legislation under which the Board advanced money included the *Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870* (33 & 34 Vict. c.46), the *Labouring Classes Lodging Houses and Dwellings Act, (Ireland), 1866* (29 & 30 Vict. c.44; 30 Vict. c.28), the *Glebe Loans (Ireland) Acts, 1870 and 1871* (33 & 34 Vict. c.112; 34 & 35 Vict. c.100), the *National School Teachers' Residences (Ireland) Act, 1875* (38 & 39 Vict. c.82), the *Dispensary Houses (Ireland) Act, 1879* (42 & 43 Vict. c.25), the *Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890* (53 & 54 Vict. c.70), the *Tramways (Ireland) Acts, 1860 and 1861* (23 & 24 Vict. c.152; 24 & 25 Vict. c.102) and the *Tramways (Ireland) Act, 1889* (52 & 53 Vict. c.66). In 1881, the *Science and Art Museum Act* (40 & 41 Vict. c.234)

sanctioned the erection of a national museum and library at an estimated cost of £100,000. This was the first of many large building projects undertaken by the Board in the following years.

Due to the near famine conditions which again prevailed in the country at the close of 1879, and the prospect of imminent destitution, the *Relief of Distress (Ireland) Act* was passed in March 1880 (43 Vict. c.4). The passing of this Act followed a memorandum from the Board giving an outline of the type of activity within its power to promote, such as land improvement, loans to sanitary authorities, extraordinary baronial presentment sessions, as well as other miscellaneous relief measures. Under the *Arrears of Rent (Ireland) Act*, 1882 (45 & 46 Vict. c.47) the Board of Guardians of any Union was authorised to borrow money for the purpose of defraying the expenses of emigrating the poor. Advances were repayable within a period of not less than 15 or not more than 36 years. Under section 20 of the Act the Treasury obtained power to authorise the Board to make, subject to regulations, grants to Boards of Guardians or to any Union. The fund was not to exceed £100,000 and was limited to five pounds for each emigrant. Further legislation concerning the relief of distressed Unions in 1883 allowed the Board to make grants provided the total did not exceed £50,000.

### 3 USING THE ARCHIVES

For ease of reference, the bulk of the collection has been divided into sections numbered OPW 1, OPW 2, OPW 3, OPW 4, OPW 5, OPW 6, OPW 7, OPW 8 and OPW 9.

#### 3.1 OPW 1

OPW 1 contains records on all subjects emanating from what was termed the *Secretarial Branch* of the organisation for most of the nineteenth century, consisting entirely of bound volumes in the form of reports, minute books and letter books of outgoing correspondence. It has been further sub-divided into 17 sections, OPW 1/1-OPW 1/17, each of which, with the exception of OPW 1/1, relates to a specific aspect of the Board's activities. Subjects covered in OPW 1/1 include public buildings, piers and harbours, navigation, drainage, railways and the appointment of County Surveyors. The number of volumes in each section can vary from one to several hundred. Most sections include the records of bodies taken over by the Board in 1831. In many cases series of records remained unbroken despite the change in administration. The sections are as follows:

OPW 1/1	<i>General (1800–1906)</i>
OPW 1/2	<i>Coastguard Stations (1847–1873)</i>
OPW 1/3	<i>Public Works Loans (1849–1877)</i>
OPW 1/4	<i>Issue of money from Consolidated Fund (1824–827)</i>
OPW 1/5	<i>Inland Navigation (1800–1884)</i>
OPW 1/6	<i>Fisheries (1819–1873)</i>
OPW 1/7	<i>Roads and Bridges (1825–1877)</i>

- OPW 1/8 *Piers and Harbours (1807–1877)*
- OPW 1/9 *Linen and Yarn Hall Committee (1828–1887)*
- OPW 1/10 *Railways (1836–1868)*
- OPW 1/11 *Drainage (1842–1862)*
- OPW 1/12 *Lunatic Asylums (1835–1853)*
- OPW 1/13 *Queen’s Colleges (1845–1853)*
- OPW 1/14 *Maynooth College (1845–1871)*
- OPW 1/15 *National Schools (1856–1881)*
- OPW 1/16 *Labourers Dwellings (1866–1869)*
- OPW 1/17 *Glebe Loans (1870–1881)*

A full list of the above material, by volume, along with explanatory notes where appropriate, is available at the National Archives.

### **3.2 OPW 2**

OPW 2 contains records of the Accountant's Branch, consisting entirely of bound volumes in the form of ledgers, journals and miscellaneous account books. As in OPW 1, most sections include the records of bodies taken over by the Board in 1831. OPW 2 is subdivided into 22 sections, OPW 2/1-OPW 2/22, each of which, with the exception of OPW 2/1, relates to a specific subject. The sections are as follows:

- OPW 2/1 *General (1802–1932)*
- OPW 2/2 *Public Buildings and Phoenix Park (1802–1911)*
- OPW 2/3 *Public Works Loans and Grants (1831–1934)*
- OPW 2/4 *Issue of money from Consolidated Fund (1817–1847)*
- OPW 2/5 *Inland Navigation (1730–1924)*
- OPW 2/6 *Fisheries (1820–1888)*
- OPW 2/7 *Roads and Bridges (1831–1871)*
- OPW 2/8 *Piers and Harbours (1807–1884)*
- OPW 2/9 *Linen and Yarn Hall Committee (1828–1873)*
- OPW 2/10 *Railways (1836–1895)*
- OPW 2/11 *Drainage (1842–1931)*
- OPW 2/12 *Lunatic Asylums (1835–1900)*
- OPW 2/13 *Maynooth College (1845–1847)*
- OPW 2/14 *Employment of the Labouring Poor (1846–1921)*
- OPW 2/15 *Land improvement (1847–1937)*
- OPW 2/16 *National Schools, training colleges and dispensaries (1902–1919)*
- OPW 2/17 *Land Act Loans (1874–1934)*
- OPW 2/18 *Irish Reproductive Loan Fund (1875–1890)*
- OPW 2/19 *Church Fund Loans (1880–1930)*
- OPW 2/20 *Seed Loans (1890–1919)*
- OPW 2/21 *Saorstát Local Loans (1928–1936)*
- OPW 2/22 *Commissioners for Relief of Trade (1820–1826)*

A full list of the above material, by volume, along with explanatory notes where appropriate, is available at the National Archives.

### **3.3 OPW 3**

OPW 3 contains records of the Engineer's Branch. Apart from two surveys of the Bog of Allen, one by William Larkin in 1809 and another by Richard Griffith in 1810 (OPW 3/1/1), it consists of 97 reports by engineers on proposed arterial drainage schemes between 1843 and 1880 (OPW 3/1/2) and a series of Shannon Commission engineering minute books for the period 1841–1847 (OPW 3/1/3).

### **3.4 OPW 4**

OPW 4 consists of several sets of bound volumes, including minute books, letter books, as well as site, lease and deed books, relating to the various properties held by the Board in the nineteenth century. There are also annual estimates (OPW 4/8), contracts registers (OPW 4/9), and buildings registers (OPW 4/10). The most comprehensive set is OPW 4/7 which contains minute and letter books of the Shannon Commission and Shannon navigation from 1839 to 1876.

A comprehensive list of all records in OPW 3 and OPW 4 is available at the National Archives.

### **3.5 OPW 5**

#### **3.5.1 Introduction of registration system (1848)**

Unlike OPW 1, OPW 2, OPW 3 and OPW 4, this series contains both volumes and papers or *files*. The volumes, or registers, in OPW 5 act as a catalogue or *finding aid* to the thousands of files accumulated by the Board between 1850 and 1935 when the system was modernised. In order to use these it is necessary to understand the way in which incoming correspondence was dealt with and the method of registration used. Adapted from the system used in the Treasury, registration was first introduced to the Board in 1848 and was established by 1850. Unlike modern filing systems which identify material from the reference or title, this system was based on registration. This meant the entering, in numerical order, of details of all individual items of incoming correspondence in a series of registers designed specifically for the purpose. The concept of opening and registering an original named file, in which all relevant material simply accumulated over time, was not yet envisaged. Instead each item (or *paper* as it was termed) was treated independently and number-stamped. Accumulations of papers, or files, were simply formed in the various sections or *Divisions* within the administration by connecting or *jacketing* papers relevant to the same subject.

Once established, a file travelled under the number of the latest paper attached. The earliest paper was attached to the next paper, that to the next and so on, according as they were placed on the file. The Registry did not usually see a paper, or the file to which it had been attached, until the subject to which it referred was considered closed. It was then closed and put away. The interval between registration of the first paper and the eventual closing of

a file could extend over a period of several years. When attempting to locate a file it is necessary to consult two separate sets of registers, *numerical* and *subject*.

### 3.5.2 Numerical Registers

On arrival at the offices of the Board, each piece of correspondence was allocated the next available number in the numerical register. Registers were replaced annually and a new number sequence commenced. In 1867, for instance, the total number of papers registered between 1 January and 31 December was 21,069. (This increased as the century progressed, especially following the passing of relief legislation, at times reaching up to 100,000.) Other details entered alongside the new number were the date of receipt, subject, and an abbreviation of the division to which it was assigned, such as *NS* for national schools, *PH* for piers and harbours or *CG* for coastguard. Also entered was the title of the office of the person to whom the paper was assigned, such as the Architect, Accountant or Cashier. Details entered later included the number of the next paper to which the original was subsequently added.

The researcher must then locate the new number, and continue in this way until no further follow-on number appears, indicating that the subject was considered closed and the accumulated papers filed away. The letter F usually indicated this. The researcher may then apply for the file under the number entered alongside this final entry. Before the ultimate destination of a paper was reached, several numerical registers may have been investigated.

Although registration began in 1850, there are no surviving numerical registers covering the years 1850–1866. Those for the years 1882, 1883, 1884 and 1934 are also missing. The index volumes listed below for the years 1887–1892 cover the period when an alternative method of registration was tried involving the use of single index volumes to cover all divisions of the Board's activities instead of the series of subject registers discussed below.

The increase in paperwork brought about by the *Relief of Distress (Ireland) Act*, 1880 (43 Vict. c.4) accounts for the three volumes covering that year and two covering 1881. Volumes have a prefix OPW 5/1 and are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Volume</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Volume</b>
1867	OPW5/1/1	1897–8	OPW/5/1/39
1868	OPW5/1/2	1899	OPW5/1/40
1869	OPW5/1/3	1900	OPW5/1/41
1870	OPW5/1/4	1901	OPW5/1/42
1871	OPW5/1/5	1902	OPW5/1/43
1872	OPW5/1/6	1903	OPW5/1/44
1873	OPW5/1/7	1904	OPW5/1/45
1874	OPW5/1/8	1905	OPW5/1/46
1875	OPW5/1/9	1906	OPW5/1/47

1876	OPW5/1/10	1907	OPW5/1/48
1877	OPW5/1/11	1908	OPW5/1/49
1878	OPW5/1/12	1909	OPW5/1/50
1879	OPW5/1/13	1910	OPW5/1/51
1880	OPW5/1/14 (Vol 1)	1911	OPW5/1/52
1880	OPW5/1/15 (Vol 2)	1912	OPW5/1/53
1880	OPW5/1/16 (Vol 3)	1913	OPW5/1/54
1881	OPW5/1/17 (Vol 1)	1914	OPW5/1/55
1881	OPW5/1/18 (Vol 2)	1915	OPW5/1/56
1885	OPW5/1/19 (Index volume)	1916	OPW5/1/57
1885	OPW5/1/20	1917	OPW5/1/58
1886	OPW5/1/21 (Index volume)	1918	OPW5/1/59
1886	OPW5/1/22	1919	OPW5/1/60
1887	OPW5/1/23 (Index volume)	1920	OPW5/1/61
1887	OPW5/1/24	1921	OPW5/1/62
1888	OPW5/1/25 (Index volume)	1922	OPW5/1/63
1888	OPW5/1/26	1923	OPW5/1/64
1889	OPW5/1/27 (Index volume)	1924	OPW5/1/65
1889	OPW5/1/28	1925	OPW5/1/66
1890	OPW5/1/29 (Index volume)	1926	OPW5/1/67
1890	OPW5/1/30	1927	OPW5/1/68
1891	OPW5/1/31 (Index volume)	1928	OPW5/1/69
1891	OPW5/1/32	1929	OPW5/1/70
1892	OPW5/1/33 (Index volume)	1930	OPW5/1/71
1892	OPW5/1/34	1931	OPW5/1/72
1893	OPW5/1/35	1932	OPW5/1/73
1894	OPW5/1/36	1933	OPW5/1/74
1895	OPW5/1/37	1935	OPW5/1/75
1896	OPW5/1/38		

### 3.5.3 Subject Registers

Although the particulars of each paper were first allocated a number in the numerical register, the first set of registers to be consulted by the researcher are the indexed *subject* registers. There is a separate series for each division within the administration (see OPW 5/2–OPW 5/10 below). Details entered were date of paper, date of registration, number (from numerical register), name of writer and a short one-line synopsis of the subject matter. Registers were replaced annually and contain both a name and subject index. When details of the relevant paper have been located in the subject register and the number noted, the OPW researcher then looks for the number in the corresponding numerical register for that year. The movement of the papers can then be traced in the manner outlined above. The reference given by the researcher when applying for the file will contain a number followed by a two digit abbreviation of the relevant year, e.g. *OPW 12186/52* (for 1852). In the case of very large projects there may be several files running concurrently on a similar topic. It must be borne in mind that not all papers for which there are register entries have survived. Nonetheless the level of detail entered often proves a useful substitute for missing documents. The series are as follows:

### **OPW 5/2 – Government (1850–1884)**

These records detail official communications from Government Departments (Treasury, Admiralty, Home Office, Exchequer Office, Privy Council Office, Ordnance Office, Audit Office and War Office) on a variety of subjects. They cover in an unbroken series the years 1850–1869 with three extra registers covering 1882, 1883 and 1884.

### **OPW 5/3 – Roads and Public Buildings (1850–1935)**

This is the main set of registers dealing with public buildings. Until 1855 there are separate *Roads* registers interspersed with the series. Until the mid-1870s this series also covered *Railways* and *Miscellaneous* items. After this time both *Roads* and *Railways* were incorporated into the *Miscellaneous* series. National Monuments are covered in these.

### **OPW 5/4 – Harbours, Navigations and Fisheries (1850–1935)**

This series also covers fishery piers and harbours and arterial drainage. The subjects covered vary until 1900 when volume titles are standardised as *Piers and Harbours, Navigations and Arterial Drainage*. All navigations are included from 1855. The names of the navigations, such as Shannon, Boyne and Mague appear in the relevant index listings.

### **OPW 5/5 – Miscellaneous and Loans (1850–1935)**

To deal with the new responsibilities taken on by the Board in the 1860s and 1870s, it was decided to start a *Miscellaneous* Division. Beginning in 1872 it dealt with arterial drainage, glebe loans and land legislation (under the 1870 *Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act*). By 1877 subjects covered included railway arbitrations and public health and housing legislation. By the early 1880s it covered tramway and light railway legislation, reformatory schools and, by the mid-1890s, housing of the working classes.

### **OPW 5/6 – Land Improvement and Drainage (1850–1884)**

Information on this subject can also be found in the *Harbours, Navigations and Fisheries* registers (OPW 5/4) and *Miscellaneous and Loans* registers (OPW 5/5).

### **OPW 5/7 – National Schools (1859–1935)**

### **OPW 5/8 – Coast Guard (1865–1935)**

### **OPW 5/9 – Civic Guard and Garda Síochána Barracks (1923–1935)**

### **OPW 5/10 – Relief of Distress (1880–1882)**

This was a set of three registers opened in 1880 with the passing of the *Relief of Distress (Ireland) Act (43 Vict. c.4)*.

### **3.6 OPW 5 Database**

Despite the fact that the registers are an invaluable source for researchers, certain disadvantages attach to their use: they are heavy and cumbersome to handle, there are gaps in sequences, two separate sets must be consulted (numerical and subject) possibly extending over several years, and there is no guarantee that the files, once called up, will be there. A database has therefore been compiled of all surviving files in OPW 5 between 1850 and 1935.

### **3.7 Database of architectural drawings**

There is also a database of all buildings for which architectural drawings exist, numbering over a thousand. It covers the large public buildings in Dublin, such as the National Museum, National Library, Royal College Science, Government Buildings, Four Courts, University College, Dublin and Leinster.

### **3.8 OPW 6**

This series deals with the destruction of property and is made up of over 700 Property Compensation Files covering the period 1922–1923. The prefix is OPW 6/1 and details include name and address of claimant and date of claim. The vast bulk are Dublin claims and are in alphabetical order according to street name.

### **3.9 OPW 7**

This series is a miscellaneous collection of material with no identifiable reference. Subjects covered in the series include the Congested Districts Board (OPW 7/7/6), Curragh of Kildare (OPW 7/8), Phoenix Park (OPW 7/21), War Graves (OPW 7/33). It is worth consulting before completing research on any topic.

A full list of all records in OPW 6 and OPW 7 is available at the National Archives.

### **3.10 OPW 8**

Within the archives is a separate collection containing details of over 350 piers and harbours. This material does not form part of the main series of files covered by OPW 5. Much of the material dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when piers and harbours were under the direction of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries. Most of the files contain between two and twenty items. There are, however, considerably larger accumulations for many of the locations, such as 67 items (including plans) for Claddagh, Co. Galway and 87 for Clonakilty, Co. Cork. The collection covers the famine

years, when many applications were received for works under the *Famine Relief Acts*, making it an excellent source for the famine period. The collection also holds material for the Royal Harbours (Kingstown, Howth, Dunmore, Donaghadee and Ardglass), for which a much larger volume of material exists, including over 2,500 items for Kingstown Harbour and over 4,500 for Howth Harbour.

### **3.11 OPW 9**

An inquiry carried out in 1935 concluded that the separate numbering of each paper was unnecessary and inefficient. The large bound registers were deemed to be not only expensive but unwieldy and could only be operated by a small number of officers at one time. The entering of each letter in the service registers in the Divisions, as well as in the numerical registers in the Registry, involved duplication of work and the subsequent numerous follow-on or *chain* markings of papers from one to another involved a considerable amount of labour. In practice, papers relating to different aspects of a subject became incorporated in the one file with the result that in considering any particular point a large number of papers had to be examined.

A Central Registry was recommended, with a *one file, one number* system. The basis of numbering was to be the file. The consecutive numbering of each paper was to cease. Existing registers were to be discontinued and replaced by loose leaf index sheets which could be arranged in a variety of ways. New file covers were introduced with provision for the new referencing system and distinctive colouring for each Division. Tags were to replace the brass paper fasteners. The date fixed for the introduction of the new system was 1 January 1936. By then similar systems were already in operation in the Department of Finance and in a number of other departments. The new referencing system was alpha-numeric, containing up to four elements. The key to all the alpha-numeric codes is available at the National Archives along with listings of all files in each series on database. Maps and plans have been extracted from files and are stored and indexed separately.

## **4 THE ARCHIVES**

As stated above, space constraints do not allow for a detailed examination of the material. Instead, what follows is an account of the type of records and the information contained in selected series. Each item is preceded by the legislative background to the Board's involvement. Researchers who cite OPW references in their work must prefix each one by the initials NAI (National Archives, Ireland).

### **4.1 Fishery Piers and Harbours**

After it took over the functions of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries in 1831, the Board's only responsibilities were the collection of outstanding debts

from an existing fishery loans fund and the completion of unfinished piers along the coast. In 1834, a commission was set up to look into the state of the fisheries, culminating in 1842 in the passing of a regulatory Act, under which the Board was given considerable powers in the development and organisation of fisheries (5 & 6 Vict. c.106). Several Acts followed between 1842 and 1847 with the object of establishing a regular fishing trade (5 & 6 Vict. c.106; 7 & 8 Vict. c.108; 8 & 9 Vict. c.108; 9 & 10 Vict. c.114). The *Fisheries (Ireland) Act, 1846* (9 & 10 Vict. c.3) allocated £50,000 for the encouragement and promotion of deep sea fisheries as a source of employment and food to be spent, partly by way of loan and partly by grant, in the construction of piers, harbours, quays, landing slips and approach roads. No grant was to exceed £5,000 or be greater than three-quarters of the estimated cost. The following year a further £40,000 was devoted to the same purpose on the same conditions (10 & 11 Vict. c.75). The total expenditure between 1846 and 1877 was over £175,000, with just over £50,000 of this sum advanced on loan.

Under the *Grand Jury (Ireland) Act, 1853* (16 & 17 Vict. c.136) the Board could transfer to Grand Juries any harbour, pier, quay, landing place, or other work mentioned in the schedule to the Act, to be held and maintained as county property, the Board retaining the power to fix tolls and make bye-laws. Under the *Relief of Distress (Ireland) Amendment Act, 1880* (43 & 44 Vict. c.14), £45,000 was voted by Parliament to enable the Board of Works to make loans to public companies, to the trustees of canal and river navigations and to harbour commissioners on the same terms and conditions as applied under the original Act establishing the Board in 1831 and the amending Acts. The distribution of the money was made by a special committee, on which both the Inspectors of Irish Fisheries and the Board of Works were represented.

Under the *Sea Fisheries (Ireland) Act, 1883* (46 & 47 Vict. c.26) the Board had power to make, with the approval of the Treasury, a free grant of all or part of the cost of the construction or improvement of fishery piers and harbours, or to advance a loan for the same purpose. Under this Act the Fishery Piers and Harbours Commission was constituted, to give the same type of assistance as the Inspectors of Irish Fisheries had given in the execution of the Fishery Piers and Harbours Acts and generally to aid in putting the Act into effect. Under section 1 of the *Marine Works (Ireland) Act, 1902* (2 Edw. VII c.24) the Board of Works could make grants for the improvement of necessary marine works in Congested Districts Counties.

The initiative in making application for assistance was left to those locally interested. On receipt of an application from any interested district or party, an examination of the immediate neighbourhood was made for the purpose of selecting the site best suited. The district involved had to guarantee the expense of the preliminary survey. The Board then considered the proportions which the loan, the grant, and the contribution to be raised locally should bear to each other. A plan and estimate of the proposed work was then put together and whichever scheme was considered most suitable was adopted. The necessary sanction was then requested from the Treasury and the

Admiralty. The works were carried out either by contract or on a day-work basis. When completed, they remained vested in the Board, to be maintained out of the rates and tolls collected for their use.

## **OPW 1**

Secretarial Branch records relating to piers, harbours and fisheries have a prefix OPW 1/6 and OPW 1/8. The volumes in OPW 1/6 include minute and letter books of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries from 1819 to 1831. The volumes in OPW 1/8 contain letter books relating to piers and harbours from 1844 to 1877.

## **OPW 2**

Accountant's Branch records relating to fisheries have the prefix OPW 2/6. They include ledgers, journals, cash books and other general account books of the Commissioners of Irish Fisheries and the Irish Fishery Loan Fund from 1820 to 1831, and ledgers and account books of the Board of Works from 1831 to 1888.

## **OPW 5**

Material relating to piers, harbours and fisheries in OPW 5 can be traced through the set of subject registers, OPW 5/4, entitled *Piers, Harbours, Navigations and Fisheries (1855–1935)*.

## **OPW 8**

As stated above, there is also within the archives a separate collection containing details of over 350 piers and harbours (OPW 8), the vast majority situated along the western seaboard. The files contain a wide variety of material, all of which is concerned with applications for loans and grants under the various Acts mentioned above. This material can be accessed by using the prefix OPW 8 followed by the name of the pier or harbour. A full list of piers and harbours in the series is available at the National Archives.

Documents in both series (OPW 5 and OPW 8) include memorials, estimates, public notices (such as those calling meetings of ratepayers to discuss financial outlay), reports of investigations by the Board's engineers and the fishery inspectors into the overall feasibility of projects, 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, labour returns (including names, rates of pay and amounts earned by individuals), progress reports and details of expenditure. Documents relating to a project carried at Passage East, Co Waterford in the 1880s includes a harbour engineer's report, specification, public notice calling for

objections, plans and section of a proposed stone and timber jetty, accounts of meetings of ratepayers, detailed estimate, schedule of tenders and applications for the appointment of a *clerk-of-works* (OPW 51827/80).

Engineers' reports generally involved a personal inspection of the district, a precise description of its location, an account of expenses by government to date, a plan and description of the proposed structure, and sometimes a short history of the commercial activity of the region, such as that at Slade, Co Wexford (OPW 8/Slade, Co Wexford). But possibly the most interesting and useful document for the local historian is the application for funds, known as the memorial. Usually composed by a literate member of the community, such as a clergyman, the memorial will primarily set out to illustrate the distress caused to the fishing and other local trades by the lack of facilities. It will also indicate the extent of local commerce and the efforts being made locally to foster commercial growth. A memorial, dated 3 January 1848, from the occupiers of the lands of Annagh, Achill Island, asked that the large stones be removed and a bank cut so as to allow the tideway into a small lake which would enable boats to land with fish *'and be the means of enabling our humble memorialists to subsist, without being, obliged to go to the Poorhouse.* As was very often the case with memorials, the majority of the signatories signed an 'X', with the names entered alongside by another (OPW 8/Annagh Harbour, Archill, Co Mayo).

Files naturally contain a great deal of material on employment. There are applications for posts, such as that of pay-clerk and clerk-of-works at the piers in Co Mayo, including Roonagh, Lecanvy and Mulrany, giving details of previous occupations and names of referees. In 1880, those employed on the construction of the pier at Mulrany included a superintendent at 50s. a week and a ganger at 25s. (OPW 4263/80). Material on the building of a pier and boatslip at Seafield, Co Clare gives the names of labourers, their rates of pay and amounts earned during 1885 (OPW 16173/88). The rate of pay to gangers at the works at Achill Sound in 1886 was between 15s. and 30s. a week. It was stipulated that the rate of pay for labourers was not to exceed 1s.4d, a day and that the working day was to be not less than ten hours exclusive of breakfast and dinner (OPW 8/Achill Island, Co. Mayo).

## **4.2 National Monuments**

The *Irish Church Act*, 1869 (32 & 33 Vict. c.42) disestablished the Church of Ireland by withdrawing state recognition and support. It became instead a voluntary body with its property entrusted to the Church Temporalities Commission, one of whose main functions was the management of all ecclesiastical property given over to the state. The Church Temporalities Commissioners were authorised, under section 25 of the Act, to place under the protection of the Board of Works any church or ecclesiastical ruin deemed to be of historical or antiquarian interest and in need of conservation, but no longer used for public worship. The monuments were handed over to the protection of the Board in groups under three vesting orders, the first of which became effective on 27 October 1874. With locations in every county, the

monuments vested (either singly or in groups) numbered over 100, and included, as well as the Rock of Cashel, Glendalough and Monasterboice, many cathedrals, abbeys, friaries, oratories, round towers, as well as stone crosses, ogham stones and stone roofed cells. Further legislation included the *Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882* (45 & 46 Vict. c.73) which gave further power to the Board to accept the ownership or guardianship of 18 non-ecclesiastical Irish monuments (named and described in the schedule to the Act) or, by order-in-council any others of similar character, and the *Ancient Monuments Protection (Ireland) Act, 1892* (55 & 56 Vict. c.46) which extended the provisions of the 1882 Act to any ancient or medieval structure of historic or architectural interest, as it was realised that not every worthwhile monument of this kind had been vested by the Church Act.

#### **OPW 4**

OPW 4 is the first series containing material on national monuments. It is a single volume, OPW 4/17/1, entitled *Ancient and National Monuments-Register of Inspections 1911/12 to 1917/18*. These dates are inaccurate, as the volume covers the additional period 1927–1937. Monuments were listed by province, and within this there are details as to classification, location and description of monument. Because of the multiplicity of statutes involved in 1911, it was necessary to classify, all monuments A, B, C, D or E according to the relevant legislation under which they were vested.

This classification scheme was explained at the front of the volume: A denoted those monuments vested under section 25 of the *Irish Church Act, 1869*; B those scheduled under the *Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882*; C those of which the Board had consented to become guardians under section 2 of the *Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882*; D those of which the Board had consented to become guardians under section I of the *Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1892*; E those vested under section 14 of the *Irish Land Act, 1903* or section 47 of the *Land Act, 1923*. The next entry was the precise location of the monument (barony, parish and townland) and finally a description of the monument. Opposite this, the various annual inspections carried out from 1911 to 1918 were recorded. Each entry was initialled and accompanied by the date of inspection. Monuments deemed not to require annual inspection were marked with a red cross. Entries for the period 1927–1937 follow the same scheme.

#### **OPW 5**

National monument material in OPW 5 can be traced through the set of registers, OPW 5/3, entitled *Roads and Public Buildings, 1850–1935*. Although this series starts in 1850, it only becomes applicable to national monuments after the passing of the first piece of national monument legislation in 1869. As a category with index listing, national monuments first appear in 1874. From 1870 to 1873 they appear under the index heading *Church Temporalities Commissioners*.

Most of the documentation is contained within printed jackets or file covers entitled *Ancient and National Monuments*. Included on the cover is the name of the monument with a short description, its location (townland, barony, county), date when vested and by whom, and name of caretaker if applicable. Many covers also detail amounts of expenditure with dates. Previous and subsequent file references are sometimes included. Important documents inside the file include the original surveys in the 1870s and early 1880s, the earliest of which were on the Rock of Cashel (OPW 11338/75), the buildings at Glendalough (OPW 11337/75), Ardmore Church, Co Waterford (OPW 23535/82) and Monasterboice (OPW 31421/82). There are also numerous shorter and less formal reports and recommendations usually in the form of memoranda. These include the churches at Clonmacnoise (OPW 4265/00), the abbey, church, round tower and cross at Kilcullen, Co Kildare (OPW 40762/80), the ruins of the church and round tower at Meelick, Co Mayo (OPW 13009/15), and the leaguans and stone circles at Carigalla Fort, Gallauns and Giant's Grave at Lough Gur (OPW 14041/31).

There are on file numerous plans and tracings of buildings and crosses, maps of sites, estimates for works and the results of investigations carried out prior to vesting. These often resulted in the compilation, sometimes by historians or antiquarians, of potted histories of monuments, along with precise details of location and architectural features, such as the report on Creevelea Abbey, Co Leitrim (OPW 33446/80) and French Church, Co Waterford (OPW 10634/07). Otherwise the documentation is concerned chiefly with lobbying to have monuments vested, such as at the church of Rathmore and Moymet, near Trim, Co Meath (OPW 12098/88), reluctance or refusal of owners to vest, such as was the case with respect to Kilmallock Abbey, Co Limerick (OPW 30791/80), the abbey of Ballindoon, Co Sligo (OPW 51820/80) and Newgrange and Knowth (OPW 8643/85).

When refusing to vest Trim Castle in the Board in 1893, Lord Dunsany said he was '*no more disposed than my father to let Trim Castle pass into the hands of any Board*' (OPW 5303/94). Other matters discussed on file include disputes with tenants over access and rights of way, and the payment of compensation to tenants for damage to land during the progress of the works (OPW 16730/96), burial rights at the sites of monuments (OPW 7705/97), and the difficulties of defining the extent and boundaries of monuments vested by the Land Commission after the passing of the 1903 Land Act. Other problems concerned interference with monuments such as the illegal excavations at Tara (OPW 16792/96; OPW 10124/06; OPW 11713/12), and complaints about caretakers, such as at Glendalough (OPW 13307/08). Many of the files contain material on the recruitment, pay and working conditions of caretakers, especially at the more prominent locations.

### **4.3 Schools**

Until 1856, the design of schools was undertaken by the architectural department of the National Education Board. It was at that stage decided to transfer responsibility for national education buildings to the Board of Works.

The model schools, the first of which were constructed in the 1840s, enabled junior teachers to carry out the first part of their training before continuing their studies at the Central Model School in Dublin. After the transfer of responsibility to the Board of Works in 1856, the Board's architects designed the remaining district model schools.

## **OPW 1**

Records in OPW 1 relating to national schools have a prefix OPW 1/15 and consist of a series of 27 letter books from July 1856 to 30 July 1881 (OPW 1/15/1/1–27).

## **OPW 5**

The series reference for national school registers in OPW 5 is OPW 5/7. Material on the district model schools includes a set of eight working drawings for Enniscorthy District Model School showing the layout of buildings, floor plans, elevations and sections. The sections include structural details of masonry and timberwork and give sizes for all roof and floor timbers. The site drawings are signed by Frederick Franklin and are dated January 1859 (OPW 4973/61). There are similar details for Monaghan Model School, Carrickfergus Minor Model School (OPW 3912/60), Galway District Model School (OPW 20753/60), Limerick Model Agricultural School (OPW 19889/60) and Kyle Park Agricultural School, Co Tipperary (OPW 2088/61).

The vast majority of files, however, deal with *specific* national school buildings. As well as the name and location of the school, file covers, where they survive, provide useful information difficult to assemble from a bulky file. This includes amount of estimate, amount and object of grant, date of grant, name and address of school manager and number of pupils. Subjects covered in files generally concern the construction of buildings, repairs and additions. Documentation can also include correspondence on the availability and suitability of proposed sites, site reports, specifications, estimates, correspondence with contractors, progress reports and certificates of completion. Drawings on file include elevations, sections, details of features such as entrance doors, window details, finishing to gables and eaves, ventilation, chimney caps, fireplaces, furniture and fittings.

## **4.4 Housing**

Loan facilities provided by land improvement legislation between 1847 and 1867, enabling landowners to improve their properties through drainage, irrigation, fencing and the extension of farm buildings, were extended in 1860 to the erection of dwellings for agricultural labourers (23 Vict. c.19). Loans were not granted for sums less than £100 and had to be repaid by a rent-charge of six and a half per cent which paid off both principal and interest in 22 years. Following the passing of the *Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act*,

1870 (33 & 34 Vict. c.46), there had been a marked increase in the number of landowners availing of the provision for the erection of farm buildings and labourers' cottages, the cost of which ranged from £60 to £100 each. A further Act was passed in 1866 (29 & 30 Vict. c.44) along with an amending Act in the next session (30 Vict. c.28), collectively entitled the *Labouring Classes Lodging Houses and Dwellings Act, (Ireland)*. Under this legislation the Board could make loans for purchasing sites and for erecting or adapting dwellings for the labouring classes to a variety of bodies including town councils, railway companies and harbour commissioners. Repayment of the sum advanced was to be made within 40 years in annual instalments, with interest charged at not less than four per cent. The loan was not to exceed one half the cost of the property, including that of the site. The *Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890* (53 & 54 c.70) allowed housing loans to be given to individuals or local authorities if it could be proved that the houses were required in the district for accommodation of the working classes. The Board was not permitted to lend more than half the value of the security offered. It also had to regulate the rent to be charged and to ensure that the balance between the amount given on loan and the amount necessary to complete the buildings was spent correctly.

Under the *National School Teachers' Residences (Ireland) Act, 1875* (38 & 39 Vict. c.82) the Board, with the recommendation of the National Education Board, could make loans not exceeding £250 towards assisting in the erection, enlargement, improvement or purchase of dwelling-houses for the principal teachers of national schools not vested in the National Education Board or in trustees. The site could not be more than one statute mile from the school. Loans were repayable at five per cent over a period of 35 years and the repayments were to be charged on the site and building, towards which the National Education Board could contribute half.

## **OPW 1**

Secretarial Branch records relating to labourers and working class housing concerns proceedings with regard to dwellings under the 1866 and 1867 Act mentioned above. The prefix is OPW 1/16 and comprises a single letter book from October 1866 to September 1869 (OPW 1/16/1).

## **OPW 5**

Material on dwellings in this series appears in the *Miscellaneous and Loans* series (OPW 5/5). Surviving documentation under the 1860 Act mentioned above includes a schedule of loans made by the Board for labourers' dwellings, arranged according to county, showing the amount sanctioned in each case and the amount of the instalments issued for the years 1861, 1862 and 1863. Applicants included Arthur Kavanagh in Carlow, the Marquess of Londonderry in Down, the Earl of Howth in Dublin and the Earl of Longford in Westmeath (OPW 6033/63). A much more substantial amount of material survives for proposed housing under the 1866 Act, the application procedure

being similar to the previous Acts. Details required included the area and extent of the proposals and the nature of the applicant's ownership. Applicants also had to state their reasons for applying. The memorial of Thomas James of Gore Co Wexford, dated March 1878, stated that the fifty houses he proposed to build '*as an investment*' were required to accommodate the families of those engaged in coach building and other trades (OPW 16065/78). William McIlrath of Banbridge, Co Down, wanted to build two houses for those engaged in linen weaving. As well as the growing need for such housing in the area, he also applied in his capacity as an employer of labour (OPW 42765/80).

Several sets of plans had to be submitted to the Board before a loan application could be considered, as well as estimates, specifications and Bills of Quantities. Where applications were proceeded with there are on file surveyors' site reports, architects' reports, Ordnance maps marking the site of proposed dwellings, and site and boundary maps. Naturally, larger cities and industrial centres are well represented in the surviving material, indicating a growing urbanisation caused by industrialisation. A typical example is an application in March 1873 from Hugh Fitzgerald of Fairview, Dublin, to build 23 houses on his property at the North Strand. His stated reason was the growing need for housing for the increasing numbers employed on railway works, docks and in factories in the locality. He promised that the houses would have every comfort '*as will conduce to the comfort of the very respectable class of artisans employed in the immediate neighbourhood, at present the greater number of this class are obliged to occupy rooms which are situate in the back lanes and courts of the city*' (OPW 669277).

Material in OPW 5 relating to teachers' residences can be located through the series *Miscellaneous and Loans* (OPW 5/5). Files generally contain memorials, giving details of title, names of sureties, their addresses and particulars of their estate and property. They were often accompanied by a further questionnaire which included the name of the teacher for whom the residence was required, the extent of the site, amount of rent and by whom it should be paid and the estimated cost of the building. Many files contain plans of proposed dwellings, specifications and estimates. Plans, specifications and estimates for proposed residences had to be forwarded with the application for a grant to the National Education Board, which, if it approved of the plans, forwarded them with its approval to the Board of Works. The Board was required to use its professional expertise to point out any bad construction, unnecessary cost, or insufficient light, drainage or ventilation. Applicants could adopt suitable existing plans which had already been prepared by the Board of Works and approved by the National Education Board, or they could submit their own designs.

Where difficulties arose, they generally related to title. In the application for a loan of £250 in 1880 to purchase a dwelling house for Ballymacricket National School, Glenavy, Co Antrim, situated on part of the grounds occupied by the Roman Catholic Church, the applicant described the title as *prescription*, claiming that no rent had ever been requested or paid by him or anyone else and that he had been in occupation there for 30 years (OPW 58083180).

## 4.5 Railways

The Board had responsibilities under the *Drainage (Ireland) Act*, 1842 (5 & 6 Vict. c.89) where it was required to investigate the adequacy of bridges, tunnels, culverts etc. required for the passage of water under or across railway lines. Under the *Railway Clauses and Land Clauses Consolidation Acts* of 1845, 1851, 1860 and 1864 (8 Vict. c.18 & 20; 14 & 15 Vict. c.70; 23 & 24 Vict. c.97; 27 & 28 Vict. c.71) the Board had to examine the plans, section and schedules of the waterways, bridges and culverts of every proposed railway line with a view to deciding whether the line interfered with the adequate drainage and improvement of the surrounding area. It also had to appoint an arbitrator on the application of any corporation or company (railway or otherwise) requiring to purchase land. With the aid of maps, plans and estimates of the proposed works, and after personal inspection of the lands, the arbitrator had to adjudicate on the amount of purchase money and compensation to be paid to owners and occupiers. Under the provisions of the 1850 *Midland Great Western Railway Act* (12 & 13 Vict. c.62) the Board had to examine, determine, and approve of the valuations for the purchase of property for this railway from Mullingar to Galway. The Board's role was to guard the expenditure of the large amount of public funds advanced for the project which had been financed partly on the security of county rates.

The *Tramways (Ireland) Acts*, 1860 and 1861 (23 & 24 Vict. c.152 and 24 & 25 Vict. c.102) allowed individuals or corporate bodies to borrow from the Government for the purpose of building and maintaining tramways in Ireland. Section 9 of the Act directed that the Board of Works appoint an individual to carry out a public inquiry on the merits of the project. The Board was to pay special attention to the financial arrangements made by the promoters where a company was formed specially for the purposes of the undertaking, the number of shares subscribed, the amount of share capital and loans proposed, the accuracy of the estimate, the merits of the undertaking from an engineering point of view and the degree of local support for the project. The *Tramways and Public Companies (Ireland) Act*, 1883 (47 & 47 Vict. c.43) provided for local guarantees which could be recouped from the Government. Surplus receipts were to be apportioned between the Treasury and the guaranteeing baronies and paid over to the Board of Works for the use of the Exchequer. The Board was required to inform the Lord Lieutenant of the amount of paid up capital necessary for the undertaking and the Treasury could authorise the commissioners to pay to the local authority the Government contribution to the guaranteed dividend, only so long as the line was maintained in working order and carried traffic.

The *Tramways (Ireland) Act*, 1889 (52 & 53 Vict. c.66) provided for Government assistance by grant, loan or annual payment where the promoters were an existing railway company with a line open for traffic or where they had an agreement approved by the Treasury for the maintenance, management and working of a light railway or tramway by such a company. The Board was to make advances out of money at its disposal for local loans. It was also given the extra responsibility at the enquiry stage of evaluating the amount of the proposed nominal capital. The Treasury could enter into

agreements for the maintenance, management and working of the lines. The Board was made party to all such agreements, and in practice was charged with the duty of seeing that they were carried out.

Further Acts were passed in 1895 (58 & 59 Vict. c.20) and 1896 (59 & 60 Vict. c.34), the latter allowing that where the making of a railway, was necessary for the development of a district, and could not be constructed without special assistance from the Government, the Treasury could enter into agreement with a railway company and agree to aid the undertaking out of public money. If the railway was wholly or partly in a Congested District County (i.e. Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, or Kerry, or certain parts of Clare and Cork) the Board of Works could, with the sanction of the Treasury, construct or contract for the construction of a railway.

### **OPW 1**

Secretarial Branch records relating to railways have a prefix OPW 1/10, consisting mainly of letter books, minute books and reports of the Irish Railway Commission from 1836 to 1839.

### **OPW 2**

Accountant's Branch records have a prefix OPW 2/10 and consist of a Railway Commission ledger from 1836–1839 and other account books from the 1870s and 1880s.

### **OPW 5**

In the series entitled *Roads and Public Buildings* (OPW 5/3), railways first appear in 1854 and continue until 1875. In the set of registers entitled *Miscellaneous and Loans* (OPW 5/5), railways first appear in 1873. Between 1873 and 1876, however, these registers only cover the *Railway Clauses Consolidation Acts*, all other aspects being covered by the *Roads and Public Buildings* registers. After that date all correspondence with respect to railways was entered in the *Miscellaneous and Loans* series.

Railway files reflect the very detailed preliminary inquiries carried out by the Board before loans were approved or granted. Matters investigated included the amount of subscribed capital held by the company, the title to the acquired lands and the estimated cost of construction. If all proved satisfactory the Board, on receiving sanction from the Treasury, made the loan and charged interest at five per cent per annum. The time allowed for repayment was 25 years, although instalments of principal were generally not required until after the works were completed. Files are mostly concerned with land acquisition for railway construction and with the establishment and management of the lines (OPW 229705/82; 32262/90). Details include the appointment of arbitrators, arbitrators' expenses, notices to landowners of compulsory

purchase intentions, estate papers, County Surveyors' reports, copies of Railway Bills allowing railway construction, extensions, deviations, alterations, letters objecting to provisions in Bills and copies of Acts enabling purchases to be made.

On the railway companies themselves, there are memoranda and articles of association, working agreements, details of negotiations and agreements between companies, audits of company accounts, appointment of receivers, appointment of directors, complaints concerning the working and maintenance of lines, timetables, Parliamentary Questions about the mismanagement of lines and numerous complaints from the public as regards the working of the lines. Material relating directly to arbitration awards includes valuation schedules and estimates, lists of landowners and tenants, as well as awards of compensation to landowners and occupiers. Plans and drawings on file include engineers' drawings, plans for bridges and culverts where required in the construction of the lines and full longitudinal sections, together with transverse sections through embankments and culverts.

As regards the actual construction of the lines, there are numerous files on the hiring of equipment, details of the materials used in railway construction, supply of ballast, purchase of land for quarrying and comments on the quality of the stone fill used in embankment construction. On the management of the lines, there are proposals and tenders for the purchase of rolling stock, railway sleepers, fencing posts and signalling equipment, as well as information on the recruitment of staff. Most files relate to specific projects, and because of the nature of the Board's involvement, and the size and range of the documentation, files are bulky. As well as correspondence, a typical file could include ground plans, schedules of lands and valuation, estimates, details of arbitration awards, details of any drainage works as required under the *Railway Clauses Consolidation Acts* mentioned above, detailed drawings, often coloured, and Ordnance sheets marking the routes of the lines. Early railway material held in the archives includes papers relating to the *Dublin and Belfast Junction Railway- Drogheda to Portadown* (OPW 17792/50), the *Waterford and Kilkenny Railway – Knockwilliam to Waterford* (OPW 35690/51) and the *Dublin and Wicklow Railway – Wicklow to Bray Head* (OPW 27978/52).

Unusual items include reports of labour unrest on the construction of the *West Donegal Railway*, in particular the *Donegal to Killybegs* extension (OPW 16904/94), similar problems at the *Arigna Extension Railway* (OPW 1205/19) and a strike of platelayers at the *Burtonport and Carndonagh Railway* (OPW 12877/15). Reports of excessive speed of trains include that on the *Owencarrow Viaduct* and other portions of the line of the *Burtonport Railway* (OPW 1946/15). Parliamentary Questions and newspaper cuttings about a proposal to construct an *All-Red Route*, refer to a proposal for a rail-steamer linkage between Canada, the British Isles, Australia and New Zealand (OPW 1191/26).

Sometimes the Board's property interests coincided or conflicted with those of the railway companies, such as the leasing of an old mill at Lanesborough to the *Midland and Great Western Railway Co.* (OPW 3874/58) and the proposed purchase by the *Clara and Banagher Railway Co.* of some of the Board's land (OPW 28812/84).

Typical material under the *Railway Clauses Consolidation Acts*, mentioned above, includes a *Drainage Sheet*, compiled by Thomas J. Mulvany, Civil Engineer, for *Waterford and Kilkenny Railway*, with accompanying letter from Mulvany, dated 27 February 1846 (OPW 1421/46). Other documents include a report, dated 13 May 1846; on the proposed *Newry, Warrenpoint and Rostrevor Railway* (OPW 5621/46). Similar material on the *Belfast and Ballymena Railway* includes the list of bridges, culverts and other works required for the passage of water under or across the railway line. Information given includes names of the various townlands, area of proposed waterway and proposed levels and description of local bench marks. There are also three Field Books, each covering a different stretch of the line, and indicating that the investigation had been carried out by Charles S. Ottley, Engineer (OPW 1182/46).

Material on the *Waterford and Limerick Railway* includes a Prospectus, dated 1844, a report on the first division of the railway, dated 12 February 1846, and a Deed of Grant to protect the baronies, dated 5 February 1847. Other material on the railway includes the Drainage Sheet and Field Book compiled by Thomas J. Mulvany, some tracings and details of financial arrangements including the amount granted. There is a letter, dated 16 October 1847, from Board Commissioner, Richard Griffith, to George Trevelyan, secretary of the Treasury, stating that he had met a deputation from the company who were anxious to make an arrangement by which they would receive about £15,000 to enable them at once to complete the railway from Limerick to Tipperary: '*in the present state of the country it would be most desirable to complete the railway as far as Tipperary and open a safe mode of internal traffic for corn and flour from the mills and district to Tipperary and Cahir for Limerick, Clare and Kerry. Hitherto the transport of provisions through the counties of Tipperary and Limerick has been guarded by the Military, a considerable force of horse and foot on each occasion. This would be saved if the railway were in operation*' (OPW 24329/47).

On the section of the *Great Southern and Western Railway* passing through King's and Queen's Counties there is an arbitrator's award, giving name of townland, description of land or buildings, measurements, county and barony names, union, electoral division and parish where situated, name of owners, lessees and occupiers, quantity and kind of interest, prices to be paid for the purchase of interest, amount of compensation for severance or other injury and total to be paid by the company (OPW 13963/53). There is similar material for the *Bagenalstown and Wexford Railway* (OPW 5628/56), the Longford Extension and Cavan Branch of the *Midland and Great Western Railway* (OPW 8673/56), the *Castleconnell Railway Co.* (OPW 12002/56) and the *Roscrea and Parsonstown Junction Railway Co.* (OPW 13142/56).

Files on the subject of tramways and light railways include proposals to construct such railways, reports of the Board on the proposals, engineers' and surveyors' reports and requests for financial contributions from the Treasury following arbitrators' awards. The vast majority of files relate to specific schemes. For instance, on the subject of Crettyard Bridge and Athy Light Railway, in Queen's Co. and Co. Kildare there are two estimates of expenses signed by the engineers for the promoters, giving the length of the proposed railway, width of gauge, estimated cost of construction and cost of equipment to include engines and carriages (OPW 13651/86).

\*The exact original title of the office of Public Works is obscure. It has been known as the Office of Public Works, the Board of Works and the Board of Public Works. All of these titles have appeared on letter-heads and registration stamps from 1830.

### ***Irish Archives***

This article is an online version of the article 'The archives of the Office of Public Works and their value for local history' 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](#), Autumn 1994.