

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

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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.