

Project: Cataloguing the Gough papers

My primary task as holder of the Research Studentship in the National Library was to catalogue the Gough papers. This involved listing the contents of the collection, arranging the collection according to best archival standards, rehousing the items in suitable folders and boxes, assigning call numbers, and cataloguing them using the tool Virtua to make the collection available to readers. This task is now complete and the collection is listed on the online catalogue.

The Gough papers are primarily concerned with the military career of Field Marshall Hugh Gough (1779-1869). Gough played an important role in the British military from the Peninsular Wars (1808-1817) to the First Opium War and the Anglo-Sikh Wars in the 1840s and his papers are a very valuable source for the history of these military campaigns. They include items as diverse as field returns, military despatches, private family correspondence, drawings and paintings of scenes from India, estate accounts and deeds, and letters relating to the secret Committee of Protestant noblemen in the 1830s. Encompassing in excess of 4000 items, the collection will be of significant value to those interested in Ireland's military history and British colonial history.

Other tasks in the National Library include acting as duty archivist. This encompassed managing orders for the manuscript reading room and assisting readers with their research queries by phone and email. This proved to be an excellent way to gain a better understanding of the collections held by the National Library and the library's various catalogues. My role in providing tours for third-level groups visiting the reading room was also very useful. I gave the students a brief introduction to the library, its collections and appropriate handling of manuscript items. The tours were adapted to suit the students' particular research interests so it was interesting to source primary items to showcase on topics as diverse as 18th century material culture to 20th century Irish literature. 2016 was a particularly interesting year to work in the National Library with the centenary of the Easter Rising and Great War commemorations taking place. I assisted with the cataloguing of digitised 1916 material and provided advice to the curator of the World War I exhibition at the library, sharing my research expertise on the Irish homefront during WWI.

The studentship provided extensive training in handling arranging and cataloguing manuscripts, providing a good insight into the role of archivists and librarians which are common career paths for historians. As part of the cataloguing process I researched Hugh Gough and the various military actions he was involved in, greatly expanding my knowledge of British and Irish colonial and military history. I intend to publish an article based on the collection in the next year.

Although my PhD work had focused on a rather different topic (women in Ireland during the Great War 1914-1919), the project proved very useful in expanding my research interests and knowledge and providing an insight into a broad range of primary sources. This was further enhanced through my roles as duty archivist and leading reading room tours.

I would highly recommend the Research Studentship, it proved to be a most valuable experience for me and one that I know will be of future advantage to my career. The staff in Special Collections in the National Library were exceptionally helpful and supportive and it was a privilege to be part of the library's team and play a role in caring for its tremendous collections.

