

## **NLI/CHS Blog – Dr Martin O’Donoghue**

It was a great privilege for me to be awarded the National Library of Ireland Research Studentship for 2017/18. My first task as Studentship holder was to arrange and catalogue the papers of the Levinge family of High Park, later Knockdrin Castle, Co. Westmeath. Notable members of the family include Sir Richard Levinge (1656-1724), 1st Baronet, Member of Parliament and Attorney General of Ireland; Sir Richard Levinge (1685–1748), 2nd Baronet, MP for Westmeath 1723–7 and Blessington 1727–48; and Sir Richard George Augustus Levinge (1811-1884), 7th Baronet, MP for Westmeath 1857-65, and founder of the Westmeath Hunt in 1854.

The material in this collection covers a long period, stretching from the early seventeenth century to the twentieth century. The great majority of the items, however, date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like many collections of estate papers, the Levinge papers include leases and rentals ledgers (which pertain to lands in Ireland and Britain), business and financial correspondence, and personal papers. This collection also encompasses items relating to family history as well as photographs and watercolour sketches. A distinct section of the papers deals with the naval career of Commodore Reginald T.J. Levinge and contains log books from many of the ships on which he served.

During my time in the Library, I also worked on the papers of the O’Donel family of Newport House, Co. Mayo. This collection, which covered deeds, leases and rentals relating to lands around Cong, the barony of Burrishoole and Achill Island, was of particular interest to me as a native of the west of Ireland. I became more familiar with older legal documents while arranging the O’Donel papers as well as working with vellum manuscripts. As is the case with the Levinge papers, the material in the O’Donel collection chiefly dates from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries though there are items from the seventeenth century along with material from later periods including some letters from the United States in the 1930s. This collection provides a highly valuable glimpse into transactions on an estate which was heavily encumbered even prior to the Famine although the O’Donels remained one of the more significant families in the region outside of the Brown family of Westport House.<sup>1</sup>

I learned numerous new and valuable skills while completing the Research Studentship. Although the first time I was confronted with an unsorted collection was a little daunting, the staff and team in Special Collections were calm, cheerful and unfailingly generous with their time and expertise. I also got to learn about collection care and conservation as well as the chance to learn to use the Library’s Virtua cataloguing system. The possibility to learn more about meta-data and tagging was something I had been interested in prior to getting this role and I was delighted to get the opportunity.

My other duties in the NLI included providing tours of Manuscripts to groups visiting the Library. Visitors ranged from undergraduate and postgraduate classes from Ireland and further afield as well as those from adult education groups. I also gained experience working as Archivist on

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Mallowney, ‘The expansion and decline of The O’Donel Estate, Newport, County Mayo, 1785-1852’, unpublished M.A. thesis, Maynooth University (2002).

Duty, helping to manage and co-ordinate the operation of the Manuscripts Department's Reading Room as well as liaising with readers about the library's services. This work really helped me to gain a fuller understanding of the scope of the NLI's collections and the diverse range of readers which avail of the Library's services including academics, students, and professional researchers as well as those researching their local area or tracing their family tree. I look forward to bringing the knowledge and skills gained in the NLI to bear in my current role.

I would happily recommend the Research Studentship to any history postgraduate or postdoctoral student as a unique opportunity to work closely with archivists and librarians and to work with primary source documents on an almost daily basis.