

INTRODUCTION

This volume makes more widely accessible a rich archive housed at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). The seventh Marquess of Londonderry (1878–1949) held government posts in Dublin, Belfast, and Westminster. He oversaw the early years of both the Royal Air Force and the devolved government of Northern Ireland, and he played a controversial part at the World Disarmament Conference held at Geneva in the early 1930s. Out of office, Londonderry had behind-the-scenes roles in the complex series of events that led to the partition of Ireland, in the upheavals that faced the British mining industry in the 1920s, and the murky world of promoting a settlement between the United Kingdom and Nazi Germany. Throughout, Londonderry and his wife, Edith (1878–1959), perpetuated nineteenth-century salon politics into the era of the universal franchise and the Great Depression. Lord Londonderry corresponded throughout with important national and international figures and others of significance, exchanging views on these matters as well as wider political questions, for example, on the future of the Conservative Party and the political role of the landowning class, and passing comments on prominent personalities, such as Benito Mussolini and Éamon de Valera. Londonderry's many correspondents include his second cousin, Winston Churchill, as well as the likes of Hermann Göring, Neville Chamberlain, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin, Andrew Bonar Law, Franz von Papen, Edward Carson, King George V, James Craig, Adolf Hitler, and Lords Halifax, Hailsham, Derby, and Salisbury. These famous personages aside, some of the most significant and poignant letters in this volume are those by and to members of the public, such as Sonia Wachstein's heartfelt plea that Londonderry use his influence with senior Nazis to secure the release of her brother from the Buchenwald concentration camp.¹

Letters constitute the bulk of the political papers in this volume. It contains other significant papers too that are of value to historians. These include the minutes of the first, and, as it turned out, the

¹ See p. 294.

last meeting of the Viceroy of Ireland's Advisory Council, held in October 1918.² There are two sets of minutes related to Londonderry's tenure as Northern Ireland's first Minister of Education, which address the backlash among Protestant critics to his secularizing Education Act (1923). The first is a meeting in April 1924 with a deputation of Protestant churchmen,³ and the second records his encounter in February 1925 with a deputation of Belfast Orangemen.⁴ Also included in the volume are Londonderry's detailed diary notes of his first visit to Nazi Germany in January and February 1936, during which he was hosted by Göring and introduced to leading Nazi figures;⁵ and, in addition, there is an abbreviated account of his interview with Hitler on 4 February 1936.⁶

Londonderry's retention of secretarial assistance and determination to keep records of his correspondence, especially after his appointment to the cabinet in 1931, means that copies of outgoing letters are often preserved in the Londonderry Papers along with those received. As Londonderry informed one of his many correspondents in 1937, 'I have innumerable letters from different celebrities during the last forty years.'⁷ Indeed, he came to rely on his archived correspondence to vindicate his controversial role at the World Disarmament Conference and in his subsequent campaign to promote what he called Anglo-German understanding. Two letters in particular, which he wrote on the 22 and 23 November 1934, to his friend and cabinet colleague, Lord Hailsham, were the subject of many more letters. These, Londonderry maintained, proved that his views on the need to reconcile Germany originated during his time in the cabinet and that he had advocated that it should be done from a position of strength.

The lengthy letters that Londonderry composed to former government colleagues in the late 1930s and into the 1940s nearly always refer to these two letters to Hailsham. Prevented by officials from making the two letters publicly available, as well as being reluctant to appear as an opponent of the government, Londonderry circulated copies to select politicians and journalists – he also did this with letters from his German contacts – and he paraphrased or published excerpts in his two books, *Ourselves and Germany* and *Wings of*

² See pp. 65–72.

³ See pp. 100–103.

⁴ See pp. 111–112.

⁵ See pp. 239–247.

⁶ See pp. 247–249.

⁷ See p. 210.

Destiny.⁸ His extended missives to the likes of Baldwin and Halifax are admittedly repetitive in places, especially when reviewing the challenges and sleights, perceived and real, that Londonderry experienced at the hands of his former cabinet colleagues. These letters are also undeniably self-regarding, albeit couched in the language of self-effacement. Baldwin, as Prime Minister and afterwards in retirement, responded to Londonderry's lengthy complaints by, in turns, ignoring them completely or, when he did reply, ignoring the substance of Londonderry's grievances. Baldwin's successor as Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, was also outwardly friendly but more direct: 'I suppose all of us who are engaged prominently in public life have some experience of incidents when we are not allowed to defend ourselves because of our own sense of public duty. I am not without some experience of the kind myself and felt it bitterly at the time.' In striking words, given Chamberlain's subsequent reputation, he went on to reassure Londonderry that 'Somehow, however, the public does mysteriously acquire a general idea of a public man's character and I believe that, although you cannot tell the world all that you wish to do to vindicate your own position, your name will in the end not suffer when history comes to be written.'⁹

The aforementioned defects aside, Londonderry's lengthy missives to former cabinet colleagues have value in a number of ways. If read against the grain, the embittered communications of a sacked cabinet minister have utility in providing insights into the conduct of cabinet government and international relations in the 1930s. Read consecutively, it becomes clear that Londonderry tweaked and revised his understanding and rationalization of earlier political episodes in the light of immediate circumstances. What comes across, not unexpectedly, is that his tenure in the National Government and the path to the Second World War were inextricably linked. The resulting effect melds and confuses the personal with the wider forces and circumstances that drew Great Britain and Germany into conflict. The evident intensity of Londonderry's sense of hurt and his resentment of highly placed former colleagues should be understood in this light.

There is a risk, of course, that his letters convey only an unflattering impression of Londonderry's character, especially those written after his removal from the government in 1935. What they do not capture sufficiently, but which is perhaps glimpsed in the studiously polite replies of former colleagues, is that Londonderry was widely liked if not always respected politically. The political diarist,

⁸ *Ourselves and Germany* (London, 1938); *Wings of Destiny* (London, 1943).

⁹ See p. 218.

Cuthbert Headlam,¹⁰ was as likely to criticize as compliment Londonderry, including, notably, for neglecting County Durham in favour of Ulster and London.¹¹ But on hearing of Londonderry's death in 1949, following a series of strokes, Headlam confided to his journal that it was 'a merciful release, I suppose – but none the less one deeply regrets his death. I was very fond of him and looked upon him as a real friend – a man who one could have gone to in difficulties and who one knew would do all he could to help one. He was extraordinarily conscientious – modest and unassuming – and is a real loss to the community [in County Durham] – he was often misunderstood and never rightly appreciated.'¹²

Londonderry would undoubtedly have welcomed the publication of his political papers. He published excerpts of eleven letters in the appendix of *Ourselves and Germany*.¹³ Predictably, most of these correspondents praised his promotion of Anglo-German understanding. But his book also includes an anonymous letter that takes a very different view as well as Londonderry's reply. In addition, *Ourselves and Germany* reproduces – in the main body of the text – an excerpt of a letter to Ribbentrop, dated 21 February 1936, and reproduced in full in this volume, in which Londonderry tried, clumsily, to indicate his understanding of German anti-Semitism whilst acknowledging that some Jews were a force for good.¹⁴ The public criticism that greeted these comments on Jewish influence certainly gave him reason to express regret to a family friend, Anthony de Rothschild.¹⁵ But it is clear that Londonderry believed that he had nothing to lose from making public the content of his letters. Following several exchanges with Rothschild in which the two men debated the concept of Jewish influence, Londonderry even proposed, without success, that their correspondence be made public.¹⁶ As this suggests, Londonderry regarded the act of corresponding as a means of vindicating both himself and his actions. As he informed one of his more hostile correspondents, 'My only object in continuing this correspondence is to

¹⁰ Cuthbert Morley Headlam (1876–1964), parliamentary clerk and politician; Con. M.P. Barnard Castle 1924–1929, 1931–1935, Newcastle North 1940–1951; FS Admiralty 1926–1929; Parl. Sec. Pensions 1931–1932; Parl. Sec. Transport 1932–1934; chair. Northern Counties Area of National Union (Con. and Unionist Assoc.) 1936–1946; chair. National Union 1941; cr. Bart. 1935.

¹¹ Headlam diary, 7 December 1936, 15 January 1945, Stuart Ball (ed.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: The Headlam Diaries 1935–1951*, Royal Historical Society, Camden 5th ser., 14 (Cambridge, 1999), 102, 441.

¹² Headlam diary, 11 February 1949, Ball, *Parliament and Politics*, 272–273.

¹³ *Ourselves and Germany*, 165–183.

¹⁴ See pp. 249–251.

¹⁵ See pp. 320–322, 325–326.

¹⁶ See p. 334.

have on record amongst my papers the replies to those half-truths which may create so many misunderstandings if not explained.¹⁷

The bulk of Londonderry's papers are housed at PRONI. Durham County Record Office also holds a significant amount of material and there are, of course, the original copies of his letters scattered throughout the public and private archives of the United Kingdom and beyond. Londonderry's official ministerial papers are held at the National Archive, Kew, except those relating to his five years as Northern Ireland's Minister of Education, which are held at PRONI. This volume reproduces a select number of Londonderry's personal political papers held at PRONI (catalogued as D3099). These are the most significant of the aforementioned holdings, in the volume of material, in the array of correspondents, and in the range of subjects covered. The papers of the seventh Marquess form one part of a much larger archive at PRONI known collectively as the Londonderry Papers. These are the family, estate, and political papers of the Stewart family, later known as Vane-Tempest-Stewart, including those of the second Marquess, more commonly referred to as Viscount Castlereagh (1769–1822). The Londonderry Papers were deposited at PRONI at various times between 1950 and 1989, part of a wider push to house the landed estate records of Northern Ireland that has not escaped criticism in the years since.¹⁸ Originally, the Londonderry Papers were held at PRONI on indefinite loan from Lady Mairi Bury, the youngest daughter of the seventh Marquess, and the inheritor of the family's Irish estate, Mount Stewart, in County Down. Lady Mairi retained the copyright for the remainder of her life. In 2009 the trustees of her estate agreed to sell the Londonderry Papers to PRONI with the result that these were brought into public ownership. The purchase of the archive was completed in 2013.

The seventh Marquess of Londonderry and his wife have been the subject of almost a dozen studies.¹⁹ It is these works that should be

¹⁷ See p. 455. See also pp. 205, 280; Londonderry to Lord Beaverbrook, 26 June 1941, Parliamentary Archive BBK C/224.

¹⁸ Timothy Bowman, *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910–22* (Manchester, 2007), 4.

¹⁹ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Londonderrys: A Family Portrait* (London, 1979); Anne de Courcy, *Circe: The Life of Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry* (London, 1993); J.A. Pauley, 'The Social and Political Roles of Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry, 1878–1959', PhD thesis, University of Ulster, 1994; A. Susan Williams, *Ladies of Influence: Women of the Elite in Interwar Britain* (London, 2000), 13–38; N.C. Fleming, 'Lord Londonderry and Ulster Politics, 1921–6', in Joost Augusteijn, Mary Ann Lyons, and Dierdre McMahon (eds), *Irish History: A Research Yearbook*, 2 (Dublin, 2003), 72–80; N.C. Fleming, 'Old and New Unionism: The Seventh Marquess of Londonderry, 1905–1921', in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Ireland in Transition, 1867–1921* (London, 2004), 223–240;

consulted for a more comprehensive biography. What follows is a brief sketch for the purpose of placing the political papers reproduced in this volume in an appropriate context. Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart was born on 13 May 1878 to the sixth Marquess of Londonderry (1852–1915)²⁰ and his wife, Theresa (1856–1919), daughter of the nineteenth earl of Shrewsbury. Following the death of the fifth Marquess in 1884, Charles, or Charlie as he was known to friends, held the courtesy title of Viscount Castlereagh until he inherited the marquessate from his father in 1915. Educated at Eton and Sandhurst, Castlereagh afterwards served in the cavalry, though the early death of his younger brother, Reginald (1879–1899), led the Londonderrys to make sure that their only son and heir did not serve in the South African War. Family pressure also lay behind his marriage in 1899 to Edith Chaplin, daughter of the Conservative MP and landowner, Henry Chaplin, later first Viscount Chaplin, and Lady Florence Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, the eldest daughter of the third Duke of Sutherland. The Castlereaghs would go on to have five children: Robert, known as Robin (1902–1955), Maureen (1900–1942), Margaret (1910–1966), Helen (1911–1986), and Mairi (1921–2009). Castlereagh's decision to stand as the Conservative candidate for Maidstone at the 1906 general election was also the result of family pressure. Returned on that occasion, and at the two general elections held in 1910, he was never fully reconciled to a career in the House of Commons, and he failed to capitalize on the depleted opposition benches to make his mark in the Conservative Party. The outbreak of war in 1914 appeared at first to supply a legitimate route back to the soldiering life, but the influence of his family had him largely confined to the ancillary duties of a staff officer.

Castlereagh's life changed dramatically when he inherited the marquessate in 1915. Despite hankering after a command at the Western Front, the seventh Marquess was drawn into the whirlpool

Ian Kershaw, *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry and Britain's Road to War* (London, 2004); Alvin Jackson, 'Stewart, Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-, seventh Marquess of Londonderry (1878–1949)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); Diane Urquhart, 'Peeresses, Patronage and Power: The Politics of Ladies Frances Anne, Theresa and Edith Londonderry, 1800–1959', in Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart (eds), *Irish Women's History* (Dublin, 2004), 43–59; N.C. Fleming, *The Marquess of Londonderry: Aristocracy, Power and Politics in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2005); Diane Urquhart, *The Ladies of Londonderry: Women and Political Patronage* (London, 2007), 136–210.

²⁰ Charles Stewart Vane-Tempest-Stewart (1852–1915), Con. MP Co. Down 1878–1884; Lord Lt of Ire. 1886–1889; Postmaster-Gen. 1900–1902; Pres. Bd. Educ. 1902–1905; Lord Pres. 1903–1905; KG 1888, styled Viscount Castlereagh 1872–1884, suc. 6th Marquess of Londonderry 1884.

of wartime Irish politics. This began with the campaign to promote recruitment to the army, then from 1916, as an increasingly prominent figure in Ulster unionism. He was one of the Ulster Unionists' delegates to the ill-fated Irish Convention that met from 1917 to 1918. His moderation was widely noted including at Westminster. In 1919 he was appointed to the Air Council and made a Knight of the Garter, and the following year he was promoted to Under-Secretary of State for Air. Overlooked in 1921 when the office of Secretary of State for Air became vacant, Londonderry was able to capitalize on his ties to Ulster by accepting an invitation to join the first government of Northern Ireland as its Minister of Education and Leader of the Senate. In the former post Londonderry took steps to place the largely church-controlled sector under secular control, but the rejection of his efforts by Catholic and Protestant opponents alike undermined an important element of his reforms and contributed to his decision to resign in January 1926. Londonderry thereafter turned his attention to the crisis brewing in the mining industry – the Durham coalfield being the source of his family's enormous wealth, and Wynyard Park their seat in the county – and went on to take a prominent role as a relatively moderate owner during the General Strike of May 1926 and the miners' strike that continued until the end of the year. His good reputation among Conservatives as a mine owner, and he and his wife's willingness to host Conservative Party functions at their Park Lane property, Londonderry House, contributed to Baldwin's decision to appoint Londonderry in October 1928 to the very junior cabinet post of First Commissioner of Works.

Outwardly loyal to Baldwin during the party leader's troubled spell on the opposition benches, between 1929 and 1931, Londonderry was reappointed First Commissioner in the Emergency National Government formed in August 1931. Following the general election held in October that year, he was promoted to Secretary of State for Air. Regardless of his other 'claims' on office, his inclusion in the National Government was widely reputed to be the result of Lady Londonderry's close relationship with the Prime Minister and erstwhile leader of the Labour Party, Ramsay MacDonald. Lord Londonderry's tenure at the Air Ministry coincided with concerted attempts by fellow cabinet ministers to disarm the Royal Air Force (RAF), as part of a wider initiative at the World Disarmament Conference of 1932–1934, and then, following its breakdown, demands to rearm rapidly. The latter acquired a new sense of urgency following Hitler's misleading claim in March 1935 that the Luftwaffe had reached parity with the RAF. Londonderry's resistance to those earlier pressures within his government to disarm, and his

disinclination to meet the clamour to rearm, stacked the odds against his remaining in government following Baldwin's succession as Prime Minister in June 1935. To the surprise of many, Londonderry was retained but demoted to Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords. He could not, however, fully accept his removal from the affairs of the Air Ministry, nor were the Labour opposition willing, during the 1935 general election campaign, to forget his role at the World Disarmament Conference in preserving the practice of aerial bombing. Following that November poll, Baldwin took the opportunity to remove Londonderry altogether from the government.

Chafing at the Labour party's depiction of him as a warmonger and alarmed by his government's failure to treat Germany fairly, Londonderry thereafter embarked on a self-funded campaign to promote Anglo-German understanding. His commitment to peace between Great Britain and Germany was undoubtedly sincere. But he evidently calculated that his activities might also restore his reputation and even make him a useful intermediary to the British and German governments, for the failure to realize these hopes became the subject of considerable hurt and resentment. Londonderry gave speeches, wrote letters to newspapers, and published a Penguin special, *Ourselves and Germany*, in which he stressed the importance of trying to understand the Germans, but which had the cumulative effect of marking him out as an appeaser of Nazism. As war appeared increasingly unavoidable Londonderry's political stock declined further. The outbreak of the conflict in September 1939 saw him retreat to his Ulster estate, though he and Lady Londonderry continued to spend time in the north-east of England and in London. He died in 1949 following a gliding accident several years earlier.

The selection of material for this volume is guided by a number of considerations not the least of which is the inevitable limitation of space. As the above biographical sketch suggests, Londonderry's political career only acquired significance after he inherited the marquessate. The book is therefore divided into four chapters that broadly map the most significant stages in the course of that career. As a result, the most obvious omission is Londonderry's long-standing connection with the industrial and political landscape of County Durham. Important though it was to his political experience and outlook, there is no discrete period of heightened and significant engagement with its affairs that can be compared in quality, intensity, and duration to the subjects of the four chapters into which this volume is divided. Londonderry's connections with County Durham are not, of course, altogether absent, but those seeking to explore these in greater detail should consult the

substantial deposit of his papers at the Durham County Record Office.²¹

As with chapters, so too with individual documents. Each one is reproduced here in its entirety (see Editorial Practices below), and in deciding what is included consideration has been given to significance and utility. It has not been possible, therefore, to reproduce many short letters and exchanges of notes. This applies especially to Chapter 4, the largest chapter in the volume. Reproducing the entirety of letters also means that it is not possible to include the decades-long exchanges between Londonderry and his confidant, Lady Desborough.²² For one thing, the content of the correspondence is largely personal and non-political; when it does address politics, it is often in passing, and, in Desborough's case, intended to soothe, reassure, and boost Londonderry. These omissions aside, the volume contains several near complete runs of correspondence that chart a number of political crises, from the wartime row among Conservatives and Irish Unionists in 1916 about partitioning Ireland and granting the southern portion home rule, to the backlash against Londonderry's secularizing reforms of Northern Ireland's education system, and the internal tensions and recriminations that marked the National Government's handling of disarmament and rearmament in the early 1930s.

Last but not least, the complex dynamics of Great Britain's relations with Nazi Germany are charted in Londonderry's exchange of letters with a number of key personalities in the years immediately before the Second World War. His lengthy correspondence with former cabinet colleagues is addressed above. His exchanges with Churchill, in contrast, are more personal, and demonstrate the obvious strains in their relationship but also the cousins' determined if unconvincing attempts to claim that they were essentially in agreement. Correspondence with senior figures in the German government is of particular value. Göring and Hitler's letters are translations commissioned by Londonderry, and, in several cases, noted where pertinent, by the Foreign Office. Ribbentrop and Papen's letters are written in English, the former to a higher standard than the latter. Collectively, these missives demonstrate the ideas and attitudes that the Nazi government sought to encourage among those in Great Britain already sympathetic to Germany's grievances with the Treaty of Versailles. They are especially noteworthy when

²¹ Correspondence of Charles, 7th Marquess of Londonderry, D/Lo/C 236–250. See also Ball, *Parliament and Politics*.

²² Ethel (Ettie) Anne Priscilla Grenfell née Fane (1867–1952), courtier and socialite; married William Grenfell (cr. Baron Desborough 1905) 1887.

responding to Londonderry's concerns and criticisms of the harm being done to Anglo-German understanding by Nazi policies, in particular, the treatment of Jews and other religious groups, and the preference for sudden and dramatic *démarches* in Germany's treatment of neighbouring states. The cumulative effect chronicles how Londonderry's vague and often delusional idealism was both encouraged yet incrementally crushed by the regime's relentless commitment to the full realization of its far-reaching and ultimately destructive objectives.