

The Irish Exchequer Memoranda Rolls

William Lynch's Repertory

Randolph Jones

'Having been at an early period of life officially engaged under Government in a department connected with ancient records, his duties rendered him conversant with their nature and contents and brought to his knowledge many valuable materials for the present enquiry.— William Lynch



Portrait of William Betham, who bought the Lynch Repertory, lithograph after Daniel Maclise, from the Athenaeum Portraits, no. 20, 1836.

London, The British Museum, 1870,0514.1788. Creative Common

One of the 'golden seams' of substitute material which will help fill 'Beyond 2022's' virtual repository of lost records is a nine-volume repertory of the rolls once held in the Chief Remembrancer's Office of the Irish exchequer. This covers the period from the last years of Edward III's reign until the end of that of Queen Anne (1368-1714). It

was compiled under the direction of William Lynch (1798-1836), a sub-commissioner of the Irish Record Commission in the late 1820s.¹

William Chrysostom Lynch was the son of Patrick Lynch (1757-1818), who kept a classical school in Carrick-on-Suir, which moved to Dublin in 1808. Patrick was the author of several historical and grammatical works, including a life of St Patrick. He also became secretary of the Gaelic Society in Dublin.² William, a Roman Catholic, was probably born in Carrick-on-Suir in 1798, for he was listed as a one-year old in the 1799 census records of the town.³ He began his career 'engaged under government in a department connected with ancient records'. By 1824, he was employed as the 'first and reporting clerk' in the Commission of Crown Lands until it was dissolved three years later. He then joined the Irish Record Commission as a sub-commissioner, in which capacity he worked in the Chief Remembrancer's Office.⁴ His appointment there was of short duration, because the Records Commission also was terminated in November 1830. He then established himself as a record agent for peerage claims in London, where he 'opened a kind of Irish record office in Carleton [sic] Chambers, Regent Street'.⁵ Nevertheless, he still kept an office in Dublin at 50 Henry Street.⁶ During the 1830s, Lynch wrote at least three books based on his researches, which were all published in London.⁷ In 1834, he qualified as a barrister-at-law and was called to the bar in Dublin during the Michaelmas term.⁸ However, he died in Brompton, Middlesex, on 1 April 1836. In the newspaper notice in which this was announced, Lynch was described as 'one of the ablest genealogists in the

¹ COA MSS Ph 15170-8.

² John O'Donovan, *A grammar of the Irish language, published for the use of the senior classes in the college of St. Columba*, (Dublin, 1845), p. lxi; Seamus Ua Casaide, 'William Lynch', in *Irish book lover II* (1911) p. 28; Seamus Ua Casaide, 'Patrick Lynch, secretary to the Gaelic society of Dublin' in *Journal of the Waterford & south-east of Ireland archaeological society*. Vol. XV 1912. pp. 47-61; Seamus Ua Casaide, 'List of works projected or published by Patrick Lynch' in *Ibid*, pp. 107-120.

³ Ua Casaide, List of works, p. 119.

⁴ NAI Dublin, CSO/RP/1824/1961; CSO/RP/1827/1637i.

⁵ P. B. Phair, 'Sir William Betham's manuscripts' in *Analecta Hibernica* 27 (1972), p. 9.

⁶ *The Dublin almanac, and general register of Ireland, for the year of our Lord 1835*, p. 262.

⁷ *The Law of election in the cities and towns of Ireland traced from original records. With facsimile engravings and an appendix of documents* (London, 1831); *Case illustrative of the law and usage of the prescriptive baronies of Ireland; as distinguished from the law of baronies by writ, peculiar to England. Deduced from unpublished decisions, and other sources of original evidence* (London, 1835) in addition to *A view of the legal institutions* mentioned above.

⁸ *Waterford Mail*, Wednesday 5 November 1834.

kingdom'.⁹ A sale of his book collection took place in Dublin on 22 December of the same year.¹⁰

Lynch's repertory was an attempt to summarise the key contents of all the rolls then held in the Chief Remembrancer's Office, concentrating primarily on administrative, constitutional and genealogical material. The Irish Record Commission's progress in calendaring these rolls was slow, with only the surviving ones from the end of Edward I's reign to that of Edward III's being comprehensively examined, plus a representative sample from subsequent reigns.¹¹ Lynch's repertory seems to have been an attempt to follow on from where his predecessors' efforts terminated, but there was a significant change in the methodology of compilation.¹² Rather than selecting and abbreviating the more interesting entries in their original Latin or Norman French, Lynch's repertory summarised these into English, with only occasional passages and phrases of interest or obscurity retained in their original languages. From the several hands evident, Lynch was helped in this enterprise, particularly with the earlier rolls. In 1824 he admitted to Henry Goulburn, the chief commissioner for Crown Lands in Ireland, that to do his job properly in the Crown Lands Office, he required "a knowledge of ... the Black Letter Character and languages in which the ancient Public Records of the Kingdom are written."¹³ He seems to have acquired this ability subsequently.¹⁴

It appears that all the rolls then held in the Chief Remembrancer's Office, which also included several stray close, patent or plea rolls from chancery, plus the occasional issue roll from the lower exchequer, were divided into blocks of consecutive reigns and allocated to individual clerks to summarise. Indeed, as one goes through the repertory roll by roll, the order of entry mirrors exactly the inventory published by

⁹ *Bury and Norwich Post*, Wednesday 6 April 1836; Ua Casaide, List of works, p. 120.

¹⁰ *Saunders's News-Letter* Thursday 22 December 1836.

¹¹ NAI Dublin, RC 8/1-43; Herbert Wood, *A guide to the records deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland* (Dublin, 1919), p. 121; Margaret Griffiths, 'The Irish record commission, 1810-30' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 7:25 (1950), pp 33-4.

¹² The Record Commissioners' consecutive calendaring ended with the memoranda roll for 50/51 Edward III – no. 84 in their catalogue of the memoranda rolls held in the Chief Remembrancers' Office. Lynch's repertory commences from 42/43 Edward III – no. 80 in the Record Commissioners' catalogue.

¹³ NAI Dublin, CSO/RP/1824/1961.

¹⁴ William Lynch, *A Letter addressed to the secretary to the commissioners of public records, on certain works published by authority of the commissioners*, (London, 1832), p. 15.

the Irish Record Commissioners in 1819 as a supplement to their eighth report.¹⁵ As a result of this division, the quality and quantity of the entries varies. Those taken from the rolls from the end of Edward III's reign to that of Henry IV were recorded in some detail by a single clerk. However, from the reign of Henry V to the middle of that of Henry VIII a different hand takes over and the entries become less informative, some merely reduced to a name and little else. Indeed, this section appears to have been done in a hurry perhaps as the demise of the Irish Record Commission loomed. From the regnal year of 28 Henry VIII, yet another hand takes over, with the quality of the entries improving. This third hand seems to have been responsible for the rolls up until the end of Elizabeth's reign. Unfortunately, when recording these entries, all the clerks failed to mention the relevant sections of the memoranda rolls in which they fell (e.g. proffers and amercements, 'communia', fines, etc), nor in which exchequer terms the business was conducted, but this can sometimes be deduced from the nature and content of the entry itself. Nevertheless, the contents of the section 'status and views of account' were rarely recorded, being usually referred to as just 'audito compoto'. Nevertheless, each clerk worked through every roll systematically from beginning to end, as evidenced by the membrane numbers recorded in the margins on each repertory page.¹⁶

After the Irish Record Commission was terminated, Lynch retained the repertory. Indeed, it is possible that Lynch had it compiled for his own private use in mind. After Lynch's death it was purchased from his executors by Sir William Betham (1779-1853), Ulster King of Arms, together with twelve other manuscript volumes, for £200. Betham was attempting to recover all the papers of the former commission, many of which were still in the hands of individual commissioners and sub-commissioners.¹⁷ Although some of Betham's manuscripts were auctioned by Messrs. Sotheby and Wilkinson on 1 June 1854, Lynch's repertory was not among them.¹⁸ It was later sold

¹⁵ House of Commons, *The sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth reports from the commissioners appointed by his Majesty to execute the measures recommended in an address to the House of Commons respecting the public records of Ireland. With supplements and appendixes*. 1816-1820, pp 528-553.

¹⁶ For an explanation of how the contents of the memoranda rolls were organised, see James F. Lydon, 'Survey of the memoranda rolls of the Irish exchequer, 1294-1509', in *Analecta Hibernica* 23 (1966), pp 53-67.

¹⁷ Phair, Betham's manuscripts, p. 9.

¹⁸ The Gentleman's Magazine, August 1854, p. 147.

in 1860 to the English manuscript collector Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872). When a portion of Phillipps' own collection was sold in 1895, it was purchased by the London bookseller Sotherans. From them, it passed to the College of Arms in London, where it remains today.¹⁹

It is probably during Betham's period of possession that the repertory was bound or rebound with blank folios inserted between each written one, some of them having watermarks with dates after Lynch's death. A basic index was also added at the end of each volume. Some of the folios also seem to have been redistributed, for the pagination numbers at the top of each folio indicates that the entries from the reign of Henry V, were originally held with those of Henry IV, but were now bound with those of Henry VI. The same indicator also shows that the pages from the reign of 28 Henry VII, were originally separate from those for the earlier years of that reign. It also appears that in the volume covering the second half of Richard II's reign some of the pages have been bound out of order. Indeed, some pages covering the first 20 membranes of an unspecified roll seem to have been lost. To fit the new bindings, the folios were also trimmed, with the text at the bottom of some folios being lost. Fortunately, there are not many examples of this.

Thus, for many years, Lynch's repertory was not available to the historians of medieval and early modern Ireland, although this would not have been a problem before 1922, when the original rolls could still be examined. Indeed, its value was belittled by James Morrin, the clerk of enrolments in Chancery during the 1860s, who described Lynch's repertory as 'an incomplete index' and went on to mention that he had compiled his own four-volume index of the exchequer memoranda rolls.²⁰ Surprisingly, Lynch's repertory was not mentioned in James Lydon's useful survey of the memoranda rolls published in 1966, nor in Philomena Connelly's excellent 'Medieval Record Sources'. However, it was included in a finding guide on Sir William

¹⁹ Phair, Betham's manuscripts, p. 21. The date on which the College of Arms purchased the repertory is as yet unknown, but on 1 June 1899, the treasurer was given permission by the chapter to purchase some other Betham manuscripts from a Phillipps sale. These had been acquired by the time the chapter next met on 6 July. The items purchased were: *Abstracts from Irish Plea and Memoranda Rolls, Irish Court of Exchequer, 1298-1307* (lot no. 188) and *Index of Wills, Cashel and Emly* (lot no. 762). My thanks to Dr Lynsey Darby, archivist at the College of Arms for this information.

²⁰ James Morrin (ed.), *Calendar of the patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland, of the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth*, (Dublin, 1861), Vol. I, p. xxx. I have not been able to examine Morrin's index. Could this be NAI M. 7084 – 'Index to memoranda rolls of the exchequer, Richard II - Henry VIII, Communia Rolls 1611-1696, and Inquisitions (Exchequer)'?

Betham's manuscripts published in 1972.²¹ Despite this publicity, the only historians to have used it in recent times are Kenneth Nicholls and Brendan Smith.²²

Until now, Irish historians have relied on the well-known repertory compiled by Lynch's former assistant James Frederick Ferguson (1806-1855).²³ This was compiled for Ferguson's own use and was purchased by the government after his death together with a random collection of working notes and certified copies, some of which had previously belonged to Lynch. Both Ferguson's repertory and his miscellaneous collection of notes are now held by the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin.²⁴ Ferguson's repertory covers the virtually the same period as Lynch's, although it does include some entries taken from earlier Edward III rolls not covered by the latter. It was also organised differently, being divided into individual reigns, with the entries listed alphabetically according to the principal subject. This was followed by a reference to the regnal year of the roll from which it was taken, together with a membrane number. Its entries are not as comprehensive as those in Lynch's repertory.

Therefore, with the destruction of the original exchequer memoranda rolls in 1922, except where there is still a Record Commissioners' or Irish Public Record Office calendar extant, Lynch's repertory is now our most important substitute for this class of record. It contains much information that cannot be found elsewhere and is the appropriate framework upon which any reconstruction should be made.

Contents of Lynch's repertory by monarch

Ph 15170 – Edward III

Ph 15171 – Richard II

Ph 15172 – Richard II

Ph 15173 – Henry IV

²¹ Lydon, Survey of the memoranda rolls, pp 49-134.

²² K.W. Nicholls, 'Anglo-French Ireland and after', in *Peritia: Journal of the medieval academy of Ireland*, I (1982), pp 387-388; Brendan Smith, *Crisis and survival in late medieval Ireland, The English of Louth and their neighbours, 1330-1450* (Oxford, 2013). Valentine Hussey-Walsh (1862-1925) also made extracts from Lynch's repertory in the early twentieth century: Irish Genealogical Research Society, London, *Hussey-Walsh MSS*, Vol. 6, pp. 1477-1490 – 'Repertory to Records of Exchequer'.

²³ Charles Haliday, *The Scandinavian kingdom of Dublin. By Charles Haliday, late of the city of Dublin, merchant. Edited, with some notice of the author's life by John P. Prendergast, barrister-at-law* (Dublin, 1881), pp xxvi-xxxi; *The third report of the deputy keeper of the public records in Ireland* (Dublin, 1871), appendix, pp 49-50

²⁴ NAI Dublin, 1A/49/146-153;

Ph 15174 – Henry V, Henry VI

Ph 15175 – Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI

Ph 15176 – Mary, Philip & Mary, Elizabeth

Ph 15177 - James I, Charles I, Commonwealth

Ph 15178 – Charles II, James II, William & Mary, Anne