

Edward Cooke and the Records of the Irish Chief Secretary's Office

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The Great Courtyard of Dublin Cast- James Malton (1792)

'[Cooke's] mind took a perfectly Satanic pleasure in the arts of intrigue and the darker passions of power an intellect of keen, cold, wily energy; a heart without passion, prejudice or scruple; a temperament of preternatural activity, but which loved to sit still in the shade and move men about like puppets.

— John Cashel Hoey

The above image depicts the upper courtyard of Dublin Castle as it stood in the 1790s. This print was created by James Malton, whose images are today very familiar to Dubliners, with there even being a 'Malton Trail' of markers displaying his prints throughout the city. However, historians have often pointed out that Malton's

depictions of the Georgian city are very much a rose-tinted view: the images often exaggerate the scale of public buildings, and seem to depict the streets as being solely inhabited by well-dressed ladies and gentlemen.¹ Yet, oddly, Malton did not find it necessary to embellish his depiction of Dublin Castle. Since the twelfth century, it had been the centre of executive government (and English rule) in Ireland. This executive was known variously as 'the administration', 'the government', or simply 'the Castle'. It consisted of the chief governor (known as the viceroy or lord lieutenant), his chief secretary, as well as certain legal figures (such as the lord chancellor, the attorney and solicitor generals). By the time of Malton's image, the government complex of Dublin Castle contained not only these figures, but an array of government departments and office, employing hundreds of administrators.²

All these departments were coordinated by and reported to the office of the Chief Secretary, who served as the head of the viceroy's administrative staff. The Chief Secretary oversaw the payment of the military and civil establishments, handled all correspondence with the commissioners of the Irish Revenue and the Board of Works, and was the main channel of communication between the various government departments and offices in England and their counterparts or branch offices in Ireland. In addition, the Chief Secretary's Office evolved to have a broad responsibility for the administration of justice in Ireland. For this reason, the Chief Secretary's Office has

¹ For an interesting critique of these images, see Edward McParland 'Malton's Views of Dublin: Too Good to be True?', in Raymond Gillespie and Brian Kennedy (eds) *Ireland: Art into History* (1994) pp. 15-25.

² An estimate of numbers employed by state, see S.J. Connolly *Divided Kingdom: Ireland 1630-1800* (Oxford, 2008) pp. 307-308; R.B. McDowell *The Irish Administration 1801-1914* (London, 1964) pp.3-4.

been described as 'the nerve centre of the Irish administration'.³ Aiding the Chief Secretary were two permanent under-secretaries, each responsible for a department as, since 1777, the Chief Secretary's Office had been divided into two branches, the civil and the military.⁴ The lord lieutenant and chief secretary also each had their own private secretaries (as opposed to the under-secretaries) mirroring the modern division between parliamentary private secretaries and permanent secretaries. Yet by the end of the century, the Chief Secretary's office was still staffed by less than a dozen people.⁵

The Lord Lieutenant and this secretariat constituted the executive government, but they sat uneasily alongside a legislature - the Irish Parliament, located in nearby College Green. One of the responsibilities of the Lord Lieutenant was to ensure that this parliament passed certain desired pieces of legislation, particularly those relating to the use of tax revenue ('money bills'). Crucially, however, the executive in Dublin Castle was not responsible to this parliament, with the Lord Lieutenant appointed by and reporting to the British cabinet. Nonetheless, he was responsible for ensuring that the Irish Parliament passed the legislation government required. For the bulk of the eighteenth century, the lord lieutenant had simply outsourced the management of parliament, by creating alliances with a group of elite Irish MPs, known as the 'undertakers' (since they 'undertook' to pursue the King's business). In return for

³ Thomas Bartlett (ed.) *Macartney in Ireland 1768-72* (PRONI, 1979) p. xiv.

⁴ A third department was added in the 1790s, the yeomanry department. In 1831, both the military and yeomanry sections would be merged into the civil department. Also note that in 1798 there was an additional office created, that of assistant under-secretary in the civil department, who had responsibility for legal business relating to the Office.

⁵ JC Sainty 'The Secretariat of the Chief Governors of Ireland, 1690-1800', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 77, Part C.1 (1977), pp. 9-10.

building the parliamentary majorities needed to ensure the passage of desired legislation, these undertakers were given a large share of government patronage, dispensing plum jobs and pensions to their supporters. Dublin Castle needed the undertakers because they provided the local knowledge and connections that government officials lacked. The Lord Lieutenant was typically an Englishman, with scant knowledge of the complex network of competing Irish political families and interests. Moreover, he ordinarily only remained in the post for a handful of years, usually five or six at most. This did not provide enough time to build a following from among the labyrinth of local political factions. The tenure of the Chief Secretary, usually appointed and dismissed alongside the lord lieutenant, was similarly limited. As a result, the early eighteenth century has sometimes been described as the 'age of the undertakers' in Ireland, as these political magnates assumed enormous power.⁶

However, due to a series of political crises that unfolded after 1750, the British government gradually began to reassess how Ireland was governed. From the 1770s on, the executive in Dublin Castle was called on to take a more hands-on approach to managing Irish parliamentary affairs, to bring government 'back to the Castle'.⁷ Yet this task would require a knowledge of local conditions that the average lord lieutenant and chief secretary still lacked and could not acquire during their relatively short stays.

⁶ For the best analysis of this, see Patrick McNally *Parties, Patriots and Undertakers: parliamentary politics in early Hanoverian Ireland* (Dublin, Four Courts, 1997); and Eoin Magennis *The Irish Political System 1740-65: The Golden Age of Undertakers?* (Dublin, Four Courts, 2000).

⁷ The classic account of this process can be found in Thomas Bartlett 'The Townshend viceroyalty, 1767-72' in Bartlett and Hayton (eds.) *Penal era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History 1690-1800* (Belfast, 1979).

Instead, the Castle's institutional knowledge rested on another source, on those officials whose time in Ireland was not decided by party politics back in London: the under-secretaries.

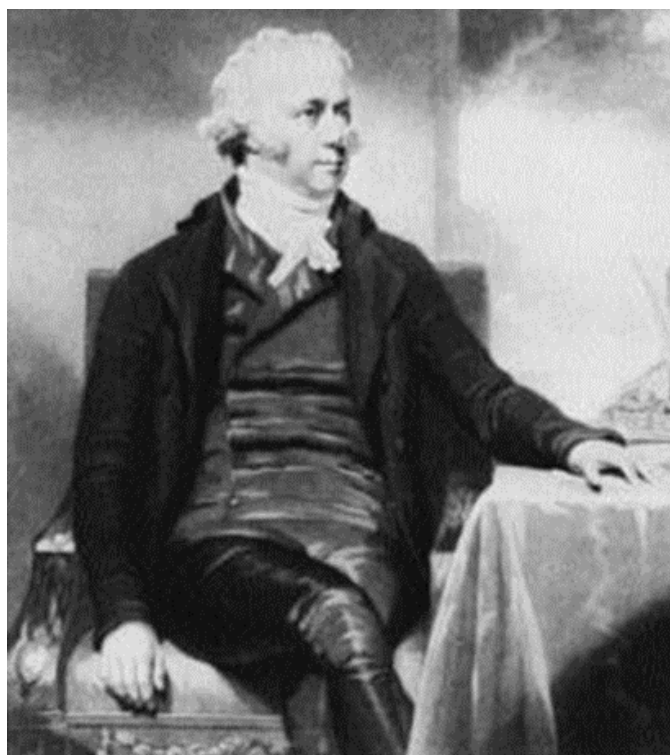
The tenure of an under-secretary was longer lasting than that of the Chief Secretary, as they were career civil servants rather than political appointees, providing some continuity of government between changes of administration. For instance, in the half century between 1746 and 1796, there were twenty-one lords lieutenant and twenty-four chief secretaries. In contrast, in that same period, there had been only two civil under-secretaries.⁸ Moreover, while the Chief Secretary was theoretically in charge of the day-to-day business of the government, in practice much of the management of business fell to these under-secretaries. It was the local knowledge the under-secretaries possessed that was vital to the Castle. For instance, John Lees, one of the under-secretaries during the 1770s, was described by the lord lieutenant as being able to provide an 'account of everything that relates to the house of commons ... many [of its members]... he knows intimately, their characters, their views, their particular merits and demerits.'⁹ Similarly, in the 1780s, the civil under-secretary Sackville Hamilton was described by his superiors as the key expert on Irish finance, with several chief

⁸ These two secretaries were Thomas Waite and Sackville Hamilton. Technically, Waite was not civil under-secretary as the role did not formally exist until 1777, but he functioned as 'second secretary' in a way that made it a near equivalent role. For the precise dates and titles of their roles, see JC Sainty 'The Secretariat of the Chief Governors of Ireland' pp. 24, 32. For a more general commentary on their importance within the Castle, see Edith Johnston *Great Britain and Ireland*, pp.47-50, 57-60

⁹ John Lees originally came as a private secretary to Lord Townshend but was retained by his successor, and later worked as a de-facto under-secretary, before being formally appointed military under-secretary in 1781-82. He would later become the secretary of the Irish post office. For full details of Lees' career, see Desmond McCabe's entry for Lees in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

secretaries giving him permission to open their letters. One of them, Thomas Pelham, described how 'without Hamilton I think no man in his senses would remain in Ireland an hour'.¹⁰ It was this sort of knowledge that allowed Dublin Castle to become the sole centre of executive government in Ireland, reclaiming power from the great political dynasties within the Irish parliament. In a sense, it was the under-secretaries, with their unrivalled knowledge of political networks and the intricacies of administration, that were the real successors to the undertakers.

Perhaps the greatest, certainly the most influential, of these under-secretaries was Edward Cooke. Cooke first came to Ireland in 1778 as the private secretary to a chief secretary, Sir Richard Heron. However, he was retained by Heron's successors,



Edward Cooke (1755 -1820), as depicted in an engraving by William Cuming (1799)
[National Gallery of Ireland, NGI.10457]

¹⁰ Pelham to Windham, 14 September 1783, (Windham Papers, British Library Add. MS 37,873 f.64) quoted in Edith Johnston *Great Britain and Ireland* p.59

holding a range of posts and sinecures before being appointed military under-secretary in 1789.¹¹ His influence within the Castle administration was such that a visiting English politician could claim that it was Cooke 'who really governs this kingdom'.¹² While an exaggeration, others commented upon Cooke's influence, as in 1783, when one chief secretary wrote that Cooke was 'too intelligent and useful to be neglected - too powerful to be made an enemy ... too ambitious to be made a friend'. Others commented upon his intelligence but also his lack of an 'accommodating temper'.¹³ The picture that emerges is that of a wily and cynical administrator, well versed in the dark arts of politics. During the twenty-three years he spent working in the Castle, Cooke helped to shape the government's approach on several key issues. In addition to providing regular reports on parliamentary gossip and intrigue, Cooke also functioned as a one-man intelligence agency, creating a network of spies and informers among subversive groups and domestic revolutionaries. In 1799-1800, Cooke was also largely responsible for the cultivation of public opinion concerning the passing of the Act of Union, including the courting (some might say the purchase) of key votes within the Irish Parliament.¹⁴

¹¹ For a list of Cooke's various roles, see J.C. Sainty 'The Secretariat of the Chief Governors of Ireland' p. 20.

¹² Lord Wycombe to Lady Holland 28 November 1797, (Holland House Papers, British Library Add. MS 51682), quoted in A.P.W. Malcomson *John Foster: The Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy* (Oxford, 1978) p.193.

¹³ (Windham Papers British Library Add. MS 37,873 f.37); *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis* (London, 1859) ii p. 369; Edith Johnston *Great Britain and Ireland* pp. 63-64.

¹⁴ The most comprehensive biography of Edward Cooke is still Peter Jupp's entry for Cooke in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

For these reasons, Cooke would gain a black reputation among later Irish nationalists. One nineteenth-century biographer painted a vivid (although not necessarily accurate) picture of the man, describing how:

*'[Cooke's] mind took a perfectly Satanic pleasure in the arts of intrigue and the darker passions of power In the correspondence of that strange being, we observe an intellect of keen, cold, wily energy; a heart without passion, prejudice or scruple; a temperament of preternatural activity, but which loved to sit still in the shade and move men about like puppets. To prompt an informer; to instruct a spy; to know the precise price of every member in the House ... how to master the weak points by which the Lord Lieutenant and the Lord Chancellor, and the Lord Chief Justice, and the Attorney-General and the Secretary could all be moved so as to be of one purpose (his, Edward Cooke's purpose) - such were the arts which he loved and in which he was versed beyond any man who has filled his office before or since.'*¹⁵

Clearly, Cooke provoked strong reactions. Yet he never held a senior role as a policy maker, instead being described by one twentieth-century historian as 'one of the direct ancestors of the modern civil servant'.¹⁶ Certainly, Cooke made his opinions known to his superiors (whether they were eager to hear them or not). But his most significant function was providing information to government, whether it was the mood within the Irish house of commons, or information of a more clandestine nature. Most accounts of Cooke's career focus on his role in building the intelligence apparatus of Dublin Castle, although the idea of an information-gathering system predated Cooke's time. The Chief Secretary's Office had long been in receipt of information about

¹⁵ John Cashel Hoey *William Conyngham Plunket, Speeches at the Bar and in the Senate* (Dublin, 1859) p. xi. Ironically, Hoey, the former Young Irelander who wrote this colourful description, would himself become involved in colonial administration, acting as the agent-general for the Australian colony of Victoria in the 1870s and '80s. 'Obituary for John Cashel Hoey', *The Times* (London), 9 January, 1892.

¹⁶ Edith Johnston *Great Britain and Ireland* pp 61-2.

internal threats to the state, drawn from sources such as military personnel, county governors, sheriffs and private individuals. Between 1690 and 1790, these various letters concerning civil disturbances and seditious conspiracies were collected by Castle secretaries in a series known as *'Correspondence (Miscellaneous Civil)'*.¹⁷ Sadly, next to nothing of this series remains, most of it having perished in the fire of 1922. We only have some idea of what material was contained in these papers thanks to Victorian historians like W.E.H. Lecky and Anthony Froude, who drew on this correspondence to produce their accounts of Irish social conditions in the early eighteenth century.¹⁸ Yet, remarkably, a collection of these sorts of letters have survived from the years *after* 1790, in a collection held by the National Archive of Ireland, known as the 'Rebellion Papers'.

The Rebellion Papers are easily the largest single source for the study of Ireland during the 1790s (although their contents range as late as 1808). They illustrate the government's surveillance of the Society of United Irishmen, a revolutionary and republican movement that was the primary force behind the outbreak of rebellion in 1798, hence the name of the collection. The collection provides a rare window into the paper flow that the Chief Secretary's Office was receiving at this time. Consisting of sixty-eight cartons of material, the sheer extent of the correspondence is impressive:

¹⁷ See Herbert Woods *Guide to the Records Deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland* (1919) p. 208; *Fifth report of the deputy-keeper of the public records in Ireland* (Dublin, 1873) Appendix 2 p. 30

¹⁸ For a commentary on the use of sources by Lecky and Froude, as well as their influence on subsequent historiography, see Jacqueline Hill 'Convergence and Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.44 no. 4 (December, 2001) pp.1039-1063. For another example of a dated secondary work that contains extracts of now destroyed Irish state materials, see: William P. Burke *Irish Priests in the Penal Time (1660-1760)* (Waterford, 1914).

there are some 4,000 letters from January 1796 through December 1798.¹⁹ Yet despite how rich they are as a source, the exact story of how the Rebellion Papers were formed as a collection remains murky. The earliest report of the Rebellion Papers is from 1890, when Sir Bernard Burke, Keeper of the Irish State Papers, described the collection as having been organised in the 1850s and put into 'two very large chests carefully fastened down with the government seal and with these words written on them: 'secret and confidential; not to be opened'.²⁰

The survival of the Rebellion Papers also raises the question of how they escaped destruction in 1922. Admittedly, a lot of Chief Secretary's Office material for the nineteenth century was never sent to the Four Courts. For instance, the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers (CSORP) have survived, consisting of two main series which run from 1818 to 1924. These were never delivered to the PROI, either because they were part of an accruing record series, or because they formed part of a backlog of records due for transfer to the Four Courts.²¹ The Rebellion Papers were not part of an accruing series, although they may well have been part of the backlog of material to be sent to the PROI. However, given the nature of the collection, how it illustrates the way Dublin Castle used informers to dismantle an Irish nationalist

¹⁹ Deirdre Lindsay 'The Rebellion Papers', *History Ireland*, 6/2 (Summer, 1998) pp.18-22.

²⁰ This description of the Rebellion Papers is not derived from PROI Deputy Keeper's Reports, but is instead contained in an Irish State Paper Office Search Book, currently held by the National Archives (NAI, SPO, Search Book no. 2, 1889-1890 pp.4-5). The note by Bernard Burke was apparently written at the request of W.E.H. Lecky. The current author has not been able to consult this search book, but is merely relaying the investigations of Louis Cullen in his 'Politics and Rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan (eds.) *Wicklow: History and Society* (Wicklow, 1994) pp.416, 492.

²¹ Tom Quinlan 'The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office' in *Journal of the Irish Society for Archives* (Autumn, 1994)

movement, it may well have been considered too politically sensitive for transfer. Certainly, the fact that the Papers were stored in a chest with the words 'secret and confidential; not to be opened' must have given archivists pause.

The Rebellion Papers are not a 'naturally occurring' archive, in the sense that the material is not all derived from a single source and does not constitute a coherent series in itself. While the backbone of the collection is undoubtedly the private letters sent to the Castle and collected by Cooke, this is augmented by records of courts martial, lists of suspects, state prisoner papers, and seized or intercepted letters. Conversely, there are glaring gaps in the collection where material has clearly been extracted. Some of the material that found its way into Cooke's office was subsequently passed onto the chief secretary or lord lieutenant, and can be found in the archives of those who held these posts, such as the Camden Papers in the Kent County Archive and the Pelham Papers in the British Library. Similarly, certain important documents were forwarded from Dublin Castle to London, and now are preserved in the Home Office papers in The National Archives (UK). Another explanation for the gaps in the Rebellion Papers is that, when they were first sorted by the State Paper Office, certain sections were detached and put into separate collections. These are also held by The National Archives of Ireland (NAI), and are known as the State of the Country Papers, series one and two.²²

²² Louis Cullen 'Politics and Rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s' pp 416-417; Deirdre Lindsay 'The Rebellion Papers', *History Ireland*, 6/2 (Summer, 1998) pp.18-22.

Despite these gaps, the Rebellion Papers reveal much about the nature of the Dublin Castle administration, including the role of Cooke in forming its security policy in the 1790s. What stands out is how many of the letters are personally addressed to Cooke, who also generated a lot of these letters through his enquiries, as the contents of the letters make clear. Yet despite the wealth of material addressed to him, very few letters written by Cooke exist. There was no practice of registering or copying non-official letters coming into the Castle, and letter-books of outgoing letters existed for official correspondence, not letters to private individuals. It seems that Cooke considered these letters as private business, not strictly part of his official duties, and hence did not copy his replies. As a result, Cooke's views must be inferred from the words of others.²³

While many of his correspondents were the type of officials who had long been a source of information, Cooke also sought out a more diverse set of sources: newspaper editors, surveyors, barristers, as well as professional informers and spies. A frequent correspondent was John Lees, a former under-secretary and now head of the Irish postal service, who was more than willing to monitor, intercept and transcribe the mail of those the government suspected of disaffection.²⁴ Another one of Cooke's more useful sources was Francis Higgins, the editor of the pro-government *Freeman's Journal*, who in turn had recruited an unofficial network of paid informants in Dublin.

²³ A rare and useful set of letters written by Cooke can be found in his correspondence to Sir George Hill of Brook Hall, Co. Londonderry. These can be found in PRONI D642/A/9.

²⁴ For a description of Lees' energetic supervision of the post, particularly in Ulster, see Lees to Cooke, 4 September 1796 (NAI RP 620/25/15). Lees also ran his own agent, Samuel Sproule, whose information was in turn passed onto Cooke. For examples, see: NAI RP 620/51/14, 22, 38, 40,41

Moreover, despite his reputation as a government supporter, Higgins had a diverse social circle, regularly dining with leading radicals. Through these personal contacts, Higgins was sought out by those within the United Irish organization who had decided to betray their compatriots, relaying his findings onto Cooke.²⁵



Some of Cooke's sources: Francis Higgins (*left*); and Edward John Newell (*right*)
Left: *Belphegor or the Devil turn'd Esq* (Dublin, c.1802-1810) print held by National Library of Ireland
Right: A self portrait by Newell, reproduced by F.W. Huffam in R.R. Madden's *United Irishmen The United Irishmen, their lives and times* (1842-1860, 11 Vols.)

In addition to letter writing, Edward Cooke was an effective inquisitor in person, screening and interviewing disgruntled radicals who approached the Castle to offer their services. For instance, Edward John Newell, a young painter who had decided to betray his former friends within Belfast's United Irish movement, was carefully examined and debriefed by Cooke - to great effect.²⁶ Newell was then used to identify key United Irishmen in a series of raids that helped to dismantle their organisation in

²⁵ For the best discussion of Francis Higgins, as well as the rest of Cooke's informants, see Thomas Bartlett (ed.) *Revolutionary Dublin 1795-1801: The Letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle* (Four Courts, 2004) pp. 13-63.

²⁶ Newell's *Narrative*, in R.R. Madden *United Irishmen*, 1st series, pp. 540-1.

Ulster. However, Newell soon grew discontented with his life as an informer, turning on government and writing a book in which he denounced Cooke as 'that arch betrayer of every honest heart'.²⁷ Shortly after this, Newell disappeared, with rumours that he was assassinated by some of his former colleagues in the United Irishmen.

However, the real challenge facing government was not getting more information but sorting out what information was accurate, as they risked being drowned in material provided by less reliable sources: unsolicited letters from frightened local magistrates, minor gentry denouncing their neighbours, and a litany of correspondents who could be politely classified as 'cranks'. While Dublin Castle was receiving a flood of *information*, what it lacked was *intelligence* - data that been collated, evaluated and interpreted.²⁸ As haphazard and under-staffed as the Castle's intelligence operation may have been, by 1798 it had nonetheless built some rudimentary intelligence processing structures, with an improved cross-referencing of the names of alleged subversives.²⁹

Admittedly, what existed fell far short of the idea of a modern secret service. Yet for all its shortcomings, the Castle's intelligence system scored some considerable victories against the United Irishmen. In March 1798, the Castle was alerted to a secret meeting of the United Irish leadership, allowing them to raid the meeting and arrest

²⁷ Edward John Newell *The Apostacy of Newell* (London, 1798) pp.9-10.

²⁸ This point is made emphatically by Bartlett *Revolutionary Dublin* p.66

²⁹ Tony Gaynor 'The politics of law and order in Ireland, 1794-8' (PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1999) pp.167-176, 189-197; Deirdre Lindsay 'The Rebellion Papers' in *Ulster Local Studies* vol. 18 no. 2 p.29. See also, Cooke's memorandum on his career, dated 1801 (Pelham Correspondence, British Library Add, MS 33107, f. 165).

the executive committee of the organization. Any leader of any stature who remained at large, such as Lord Edward Fitzgerald, was in government custody by early May, again thanks to the information provided to Cooke by informers. When the Rebellion did eventually break out on May 23, it was an uncoordinated and haphazard affair. Despite the large loss of life (a minimum of 10,000 dead), the government was confident in its ability to suppress the uprising. Throughout the summer of 1798, Cooke had remained active within the Castle, overseeing the imprisonment and interrogation of captured rebels. We have an account from one former rebel prisoner, who was interviewed by Cooke and described 'the extraordinary appearance of Mr Cooke's office in the Castle. It was full of those arms which had been at different time and in various parts of the country, wrested from the hands of the unfortunate peasants. They were chiefly pikes of a most rude workmanship ... Never did human eyes behold so curious an armoury as this secretary's office'.³⁰ Others would recall how prisoners were brought to the upper-yard and tied to boards and flogged, allegedly just outside the offices of Cooke and the chief secretary, Lord Castlereagh.³¹

The bloodiness of the rebellion, and the viciousness of its suppression, would not soon be forgotten by those in Dublin Castle, or the Irish elite more generally. For government politicians on both sides of the Irish Sea, the final suppression of the rebellion in September 1798 was only the start of a new problem: how to ensure that

³⁰ *Memoirs of William Sampson: An Irish Exile* (London, 1832) p.8

³¹ R.R. Madden *The United Irishmen, their lives and times* (First Series, 2nd Edition, Dublin, 1858) pp. 331-332. For an objection to this version of events, see John Bew *Castlereagh: A Life* (London, 2011) p. 120-121.

something like this did not occur again? The solution put forward was that of a legislative union between Britain and Ireland. While such a measure had been toyed with in the past, it was only in the wake of the rebellion that the London government invested real political will and energy into a union project.³²

The debate over the Union would rage throughout 1799-1800, with Cooke being one of the key figures. While it is often Lord Castlereagh, the chief secretary, who is portrayed as the mastermind behind passing the Union, it was actually Cooke who handled most of the logistics of building support for the measure. As Cooke himself put it, the idea of the Union 'must be written up, spoken up, intrigued up, drunk up, sung up, and bribed up'.³³ Several accounts of the Union debates describe how Cooke was tasked with holding regular dinner parties where Irish MPs were wined and dined. As one MP recalled, Cooke 'with significant nods and smirking innuendos, began to circulate his official rewards to the company. The hints and the claret united to raise visions of the most gratifying nature - every man became in a prosperous state of official pregnancy: embryo judges - counsels to boards - envoys to foreign courts ... all revelled in the anticipation of something substantial'.³⁴

³² James Kelly *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish politics in the 1780* (Cork, 1992) *passim*; James Quinn 'Dublin Castle in the Act of Union' in Brown, Geoghegan, Kelly (eds.) *The Irish Act of Union, 1800: bicentennial essays* (Dublin, 2003) pp. 95-107.

³³ Edward Cooke to Auckland, 27 October 1798 (PRONI T3229/2/37).

³⁴ Sir Jonah Barrington *Historic Memoirs of Ireland: Comprising Secret Records of the National Convention, the Rebellion, and the Union* (London, 2 vols, 1833) ii, pp.335-336.



The Union Club, satirical print by James Gillray (1801)
National Portrait Gallery, London. [NPG D12754]

While sometimes exaggerated, it was undeniable that the Castle administration used the promise of rewards, such as money or elevations to the peerage, to convince Irish MPs to support the Union. Cooke's knowledge of the members of the Irish house of commons, including the potential 'price' of their vote, was crucial to these negotiations.³⁵ The Union would ultimately pass during the summer of 1800, extinguishing the Irish Parliament and creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However, the Union had not been accompanied by a measure of Catholic Emancipation or an act that would grant Irish Catholics full political equality with Protestants. While Emancipation had never been explicitly promised by any of the

³⁵ For the debate over the use of 'bribery' vs 'patronage' in passing the Union, see Patrick Geoghegan *The Irish Act of Union: A Study in High Politics, 1798-1801* (London, 1999) pp.85-86 and *passim*.

architects of the Union, the refusal of the King to even consider the measure was considered to be enough of an embarrassment to the government that the Prime Minister William Pitt resigned, followed by the Irish Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary, General Cornwallis and Lord Castlereagh. While Cooke was also ready to resign, he was encouraged to remain in his post, to provide some continuity within Dublin Castle, all the more important in this new post-Union dispensation.³⁶

Yet Cooke quickly fell afoul of his new bosses, particularly the new chief secretary, Charles Abbot, who had little tolerance for Cooke's 'ministerial' pretensions. As Abbot saw it, the purpose of the Union was to do away with the old 'Castle junto' that Cooke had been part of. Abbot was incensed by Cooke's meddling in policy matters, describing his 'most monstrous and inadmissible presumption ... to govern and dispose of lord lieutenants and secretaries of state'.³⁷ Cooke in turn objected to being asked to 'sit a quiet, useless clerk at a desk, going through mere common drudgery'. In another letter, he pleaded 'I do not deserve this after 23 years' service here and my labours in the Rebellion and Union'.³⁸ After a series of escalating arguments with his superiors during the summer of 1801, Cooke ultimately resigned and returned to England. He would return to office in 1804, serving as under-secretary in the department of War and the Colonies, first under Lord Camden and then under

³⁶ K.T. Hoppen *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland 1800–1921* (Oxford, 2016) pp. 18–23; Sean O'Reilly 'Completing the Union: The Politics of Implementation in Ireland, 1801–1815' (PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2013) pp.80–85.

³⁷ Abbot to Hardwicke, 1 and 6 July 1801, (Hardwicke Papers, British Library, Add. MS 35711, ff. 67, 76).

³⁸ Cooke to Castlereagh, 9 February 1801, *Memoirs and correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh* (London, 1849) iv, p.28; Cooke to Auckland, 6 Aug 1801 (Auckland Papers, British Library Add. MS 34,455, f. 425).

his old colleague Lord Castlereagh. He would follow Castlereagh to the Foreign Office in 1807 and would work underneath him in various capacities until Cooke's retirement in 1817. Only three years later, in 1820, Cooke passed away, leaving behind a wife but no children.

To the considerable regret of historians, Cooke also left behind no papers. There had undoubtedly *been* a collection of Cooke's papers, both private and official, which he had taken away from his various roles over the years. However, these were seemingly either lost or destroyed. Instead, Cooke's letters must be searched for in the various archives of the men he served, as well as the departments in which he worked or corresponded with, such as the Home Office. The scattered and fragmentary nature of Cooke's letters from the years 1790-1801 illustrates the shortcomings of Dublin Castle's record keeping at this time, only exacerbated by the destruction of materials in the Four Courts in 1922. This further highlights a difficulty facing historians interested in understanding the inner-workings of Dublin Castle. Namely, the difficulty in finding details about the day-to-day business of the government. Those interested in top-level policy can find plenty of material in the archives of those who served as viceroy or chief secretary, and whose papers were dutifully preserved by their descendants. But once you push down to the next level of bureaucracy, to under-secretaries and clerks, the exercise become exponentially harder. The task is not impossible, but represents a serious challenge to those seeking to reconstruct the records of the Irish Chief Secretary's Office in the early modern period.