

### *The importance of primary sources*

Sir,—Having read Peter Hart's interview (*HI* 13.2, March/April 2005) I am heartened to see his robust defence of primary source research. The value of primary sources cannot be underestimated, but there is a tendency to follow well-trodden paths. A case in point is the oft-cited Home Office class 100, without which no history of the 1790s is complete. Organised with regard to the needs of the bureaucracy that created it, these bound volumes begin in 1782 and track through much of the nineteenth century. Devoting two volumes per year to military matters and three to civil issues, it is possible to track issues from there to other surviving document classes held at Kew (Public Records Office, London). However, since few have strayed beyond the half-dozen most cited volumes relating to 1798 no recent work has been done.

Working towards a basic outline of the contents of the military and civil/secret volumes from 1782 to the Act of Union, I would be happy to share my findings. A promising lead being pursued with researchers into loyalist corps in the American War of Independence is the transfer from the American establishment to the Irish army of two prominent units. Oft mentioned, but never checked for in HO 100 or WO 8, these exiled American Loyalists may yet exist in Irish records in unexpected detail.

I would suggest that if you want to augment *History Ireland's* accessibility it would be useful to find contributors conversant with websites. I would recommend the Access to Archives (A2A) site, which enables you to search English and Welsh county record office online catalogues. Certainly reviews of Irish heritage/record office sites would do no harm to the magazine's coverage of heritage issues.

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