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**THE POST OFFICE IN IRELAND, 1638-1840**

by

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## Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional manuscript
B.L.	British Library
B.M.	British Museum
<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Calendar</i>
<i>Cal. Carew MSS</i>	<i>Calendar of the Carew manuscript, preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth, 1515-1624</i> , ed. J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen (6 vols, London, 1867-73)
<i>Cal. Ormond MSS</i>	<i>Calendar of the manuscripts of the marquis of Ormonde, K.P . . . preserved in Kilkenny Castle, new series</i> (H.M.C. 8 vols, London, 1902-12)
<i>Cal. S.P. dom</i>	<i>Calendar of State papers, domestic series ... 1547-</i> (London, 1856-)
<i>Cal. S.P. Ire.</i>	<i>Calendar of State papers relating to Ireland... 1509-</i> (London, 1860-)
<i>Cal. S.P. Ire., Tudor period</i>	<i>Calendar of State papers Ireland, Tudor period, 1566-1567</i> (Dublin: IMC, 2009)
<i>Cal. Stuart papers</i>	<i>Calendar of the Stuart papers belonging to His Majesty the king</i> (7 vols, London, 1902-)
<i>Cal. Treasury books</i>	<i>Cal. Treasury books, 1660-1718</i> (32 vols, London, 1904-59)
<i>Cal. Treasury papers</i>	<i>Cal. Treasury papers, 1557-1714</i> (4 vols, London, 1868-79)
<i>C.J.</i>	<i>The journals of the house of commons</i> (Westminster)

<i>C.J.I.</i>	<i>The journals of the house of commons of the kingdom of Ireland</i> (unless otherwise stated, 2nd edn., 19 vols, Dublin, 1753-76)
G.P.O.	General Post Office
H.M.C	Historical Manuscripts Commission
<i>I.H.S.</i>	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
I.M.C.	Irish Manuscripts Commission
<i>L.J.</i>	<i>Journals of the house of lords</i> (Westminster)
<i>L.J.I.</i>	<i>Journals of the house of lords [of Ireland]</i> (8 vols,) Dublin, 1779-1800)
N.A.I.	National Archives of Ireland
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
P.R.O.N.I.	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
R.M.A.	Royal Mail Archive (London)
S.P.	State Papers
<i>The parliamentary register</i>	<i>The parliamentary register or history of the proceedings and debates of the house of commons of Ireland, the first session in the reign of his present Majesty</i> (17 vols, Dublin, 1784-97)
T.C.D.	Trinity College Dublin
T.N.A.	The National Archives UK

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## Introduction

... the Department [Post Office] in all its operations is more closely connected with the interests, accommodations, and personal feelings of every class of his Majesty's subjects, than any other branch of the state.

*(Papers relating to the Post Office 1834)*<sup>1</sup>

When the postmaster-general, Charles Gordon-Lennox, fifth Duke of Richmond, made this comment in 1834, he acknowledged the extraordinary success of the Post Office which had by that time evolved into a regular, efficient, trustworthy and wide-scale service whose reach extended to the city, town and village if not the home of every individual throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and whose service was indispensable to the livelihoods and social intercourse of literate people of all ranks of society. Richmond also acknowledged that as a state Department, it surpassed any other in its service to the king's subjects. Read within the specific context of his report on the Post Office just before he stood down as postmaster-general, Richmond's omission to acknowledge the crucial role played by Post Office in the smooth running of the state undoubtedly reflects his desire to emphasise his Department's exceptional responsiveness in meeting the needs of the people. In a broader context, it may also be interpreted as reflecting a modern notion of 'state' which is understood to encompass all elements within the body politic (the monarch, Privy Council, Treasury and Exchequer, the revenue commission, the various branches of the army establishment, parliament, the civil service, and subjects) working together to achieve its primary duty, this being good governance of the people for their welfare and prosperity, and that of the state.

This thesis explores how the development of the Post Office in Ireland was, from its inception, intertwined with and profoundly impacted by the evolution of the early modern British 'composite state'<sup>2</sup> in its various iterations, highlighting how Ireland's status as a kingdom within that composite polity down to the Act of Union (1800), and thereafter as part of the United Kingdom, shaped the form and pace of development of the island's postal service down to 1840. It traces how the post in Ireland progressed from being a small scale, *ad hoc* and expensive service instigated during the Tudor military campaigns of the mid-sixteenth century and dedicated to

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<sup>1</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 9, H.C. 1834 [48] xlix, 497.

<sup>2</sup> This concept has been adopted from D. W. Hayton, James Kelly & John Bergin (ed.), *The eighteenth-century composite state: representative institutions in Ireland and Europe, 1689-1800* (Basingstoke, 2010), esp. introduction and conclusion.

serving the needs of the ruling elite within the top echelons of the Tudor state (the monarch, Privy Council, parliament, the judiciary and senior ranking army personnel) through conveyance of official correspondence and interception of intelligence to become, by 1840, three years after Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, an indispensable, benign yet silent pillar and servant of the state in the modern sense of the organised totality of British citizens. By tracing major developments (setbacks as well as advances) in the post in Ireland in tandem with changing ideologies concerning the state, this study explores how its accelerated growth and popularity both reflected and responded to broader modernising dynamics and trends within the increasingly broadly defined British state, and specifically in Ireland whose status within that state evolved significantly during this c.285-year period.

In Ireland, the Post Office or post as it was then known, played a small role in the Tudor conquest of the island.<sup>3</sup> In the seventeenth century it facilitated, in no small way, the Stuart and Cromwellian consolidations of that conquest and it proved indispensable to the eighteenth-century Hanoverian colonisation of Ireland in other words making Ireland British. During the political turbulence of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and particularly during the crisis of 1798, it played a vital role in ensuring state security. After the Act of Union, the post was crucial in effecting the assimilation of Ireland into the new and increasingly bureaucratised United Kingdom. The indispensability of the post in particular to the governance of Ireland throughout this period is evidenced by the voluminous correspondence generated by officials which has in turn been the archival foundation for much of the finest scholarship on Irish history in recent years: a cursory glance at the extensive lists of correspondence featured in monographs by R. E. Burns (1989), Patrick McNally (1997), Patrick M. Geoghegan (1999), C. I. McGrath (2000), D. W. Hayton (2004) and James Kelly (2007) to mention but a few, shows that this is the case.<sup>4</sup> And yet, explicit scholarly attention to the post hardly features in the historiography of Ireland. This thesis aims to address that

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis the terms 'Post Office' and 'post' are used. 'Post Office' refers to the formal institution that came about in 1634 what existed before then was commonly called the post. The word post also refers to what was carried by the Post Office not just letters but also letters, newspapers, pamphlets and money etc.

<sup>4</sup> R. E. Burns, *Irish parliamentary politics in the eighteenth century* (2 vols, Washington, D.C., 1989-90); Patrick McNally, *Parties, patriots and undertakers: parliamentary politics in early Hanoverian Ireland* (Dublin, 1997); Patrick M. Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union: a study in high politics, 1798-1801* (Dublin, 1999); C. I. McGrath, *The making of the eighteenth-century Irish constitution: government, parliament and the revenue, 1692-1714* (Dublin, 2000); Edith Mary Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002); D. W. Hayton, *Ruling Ireland, 1685-1742: politics, politicians and parties* (Woodbridge, 2004), and James Kelly, *Poyning's Law and the making of land in Ireland, 1660-1800* (Dublin, 2007).

historiographical lacuna by providing a comprehensive and systematic examination of the history of the Post Office in Ireland with particular emphasis on its growth, its service to the British ‘composite state’ and later to the United Kingdom, and its contribution to modernising Ireland.

First, it is important to define terminology used in relation to the Post Office throughout this study. The institution of the Post Office consisted of three elements – a network (the infrastructure of post-towns and routes along which letters travelled), a system (the means by which letters were collected, sorted, carried and delivered) and the most obvious – a service (the actual collection, distribution and delivery of letters). As this study will show, down to the early nineteenth century there were further dimensions to this third element, notably revenue generation and intelligence-gathering that made the post particularly valuable for the English Treasury and for the Dublin Castle and Westminster administrations.

In England, the original post was the state’s messenger service which only carried private letters in an unofficial capacity. When this royal post was officially opened to the general public in 1635, it became the Post Office. In Ireland, due to the political upheaval of the 1640s, it was not until the 1650s that the Post Office was permanently established. From small beginnings (in 1659 there were just twenty-four post-towns) the network grew in sporadic bursts to the point that 184 years later, in 1840, Ireland had 502 post-towns.<sup>5</sup> This thesis examines in detail what drove this expansion and explores the various services the post provided to the state. It investigates the careers of those charged with managing the Post Office, assessing the relative importance of each incumbent’s contribution to the overall development of the post in Ireland. In so doing, the study highlights the importance of the Post Office as part of the state administration in Ireland and its contribution towards modernising the country.

### **Setting the historiographical context: a select literature review**

In contrast with other countries such as France, Italy, Germany, and the United States where significant scholarly attention has been devoted to the history of their postal service, the history of the Post Office in Ireland has been neglected by scholars with

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<sup>5</sup> Thurloe’s postal accounts for the quarter ending 23 June 1659 (Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS: a. 64, f. 32); see also full list in *The inland posts, 1392-1672: a calendar of historical documents*, ed. J. W. M. Stone (London, 1987), pp 272-3; *The Post Office annual directory and calendar for 1841* (Dublin, 1841), pp 395-402.

only two scholarly books on the subject having been published in the last 100 years.<sup>6</sup> The first, Edward Watson's *The Royal Mail to Ireland*, published in 1917, deals with the postal connection between Britain and Ireland, concentrating in particular on the cross channel sea routes<sup>7</sup> while the second, Cyril Dulin's 1992 publication, *Ireland's transition: the postal history of the transitional period, 1922-1925*, clearly deals with a very short time span beyond the era covered by this thesis.<sup>8</sup> The handful of relevant non-academic books include a booklet titled *Postal history: a story of progress*, written by T.S. Smyth and published by Easons in 1941 which provides a general overview of the post in Ireland from the sixteenth to the twentieth century in Ireland runs to just twenty-one small format pages.<sup>9</sup> More recently, in 1983, historian Mairead Reynolds published *A history of the Irish Post Office*.<sup>10</sup> Aimed primarily at the philatelic market, this is not an academic study; neither is George Ayres's *History of the mail routes to Ireland until 1850* (n.p., 2011). While the information in both is accurate, neither features footnotes to the sources consulted.<sup>11</sup> Papers presented by two eminent philatelists, Dr. J. Stafford Johnson and Fred Dixon, to the Dublin Historical Society proved relevant to the present research. Stafford Johnson delivered his paper titled 'The Dublin Penny Post – 1773-1840' in 1942, while Fred Dixon's 'Irish postal history' was published in the *Dublin Historical Record* (1970).<sup>12</sup> Two other papers concerning the Post Office in Ireland and also presented to the Old Dublin Society, have been particularly relevant – B. Bayley-Butler's 'John and Edward Lees' (1952-4) and 'Anthony Trollope in Ireland' by P. F. Byrne in 1992.<sup>13</sup>

Arising from the dearth of dedicated scholarly work on the Post Office in Ireland, its importance in Irish history is afforded scant acknowledgement in major survey histories, with only passing references to it appearing in canonical texts such as

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<sup>6</sup> Eugène Vaillé, *Histoire générale des postes françaises* (Paris, 6 vols, 1945-55) is the most important work on French postal history. Another recent publication is Muriel Le Roux (ed.), *Post Offices in Europe, 18th-21st century: a comparative history* (Brussels, 2013), a collection of papers by postal historians drawn from both the academic and philatelic fields.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland or an account of the origin and development of the post between London and Ireland through Holyhead, and the use of the line of communication by travellers* (London, 1917).

<sup>8</sup> C. I. Dulin, *Ireland's transition: the postal history of the transitional period, 1922-1925* (Dublin, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> T. S. Smyth, *Postal history: a story of progress* (Dublin, 1941).

<sup>10</sup> Mairead Reynolds, *A history of the Irish Post Office* (Dublin, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> George Ayres, *History of the mail routes to Ireland until 1850* (n.p., 2011). Although this detailed study clearly draws heavily upon parliamentary reports and records of the British Post Office Museum and Archives, it fails to cite any.

<sup>12</sup> J. Stafford Johnson, 'The Dublin Penny Post, 1737-1840' in *Dublin Historical Record*, 4, no. 3 (Mar.-May 1942), pp 81-95; F. E. Dixon, 'Irish postal history' in *ibid.*, 23, no. 4 (July 1970), pp 127-36.

<sup>13</sup> B. Butler, 'John and Edward Lees, secretaries of the Irish Post Office, 1774-1831' in *ibid.*, 13, nos 3/4 (1953), pp 138-50; P. F. Byrne, 'Anthony Trollope in Ireland' in *ibid.*, 45, no. 2 (Autumn 1992), pp 126-28.

the multi-volume *New history of Ireland* (Oxford, 1976-2005). In the new six-volume New Gill history of Ireland (1990-2009)<sup>14</sup>, apart from Colm Lennon who, in volume two includes a half-page comment on the post and its slowness between London and Dublin, no author mentions the Post Office.<sup>15</sup> However, the publication of Dulin's study in 1992 and of Ben Novick's article, 'Postal censorship in Ireland, 1914-16' in *Irish Historical Studies* in 1999 signalled a growing awareness of the importance of the postal service among scholars working on Ireland.<sup>16</sup> In further recognition of its significance, during the past ten years two doctoral theses which deal with aspects of the history of the Irish Post Office have been completed – Gerry Pentiville's 'Correspondence, power and the state: an historical geography of the Irish postal service, 1784-1831' and Frank Cullen's 'Local government and the management of urban space: a comparative study of Belfast and Dublin.'<sup>17</sup> Cullen's study examines five core areas of infrastructure: port development, rail development, sanitary engineering, telegraphic and telephonic communication between 1830 and 1922, and their effect on the urban landscape in Dublin and Belfast. With the exception of sanitary engineering, the Post Office was linked to a greater or lesser degree with all of these others. Pentiville's thesis charts the growth of the Post Office in Ireland between 1784 and 1831 and its role in information circulation in Ireland. Both studies adhere to a strong historical geography approach.

Meanwhile, in the sphere of philatelic journals, much has been written about the Irish post, especially in three leading publications concerning Ireland, namely *The Reveller* (the magazine of the Éire Philatelic Association, EPA, published quarterly in the US), the *Irish Philately* (the magazine of the Irish Philatelic Circle which is based in Great Britain) and lastly, *Die Harfe* (the publication of the German FAI or Forschungs – und Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ireland e.V) and, to a lesser extent, *The London Philatelist*, published by the Royal Philatelic Society. As one might expect, most articles in these publications concentrate on stamps or postmarks whilst featuring some postal history. Their quality varies greatly but many serve as an excellent starting point

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<sup>14</sup> The original *Gill history of Ireland* (12 vols, Dublin) was published in 1971-75. The *New Gill history of Ireland* (6 vols, Dublin) was published in 1990-2009.

<sup>15</sup> Colm Lennon, *Sixteenth-century Ireland: the incomplete conquest* (Dublin, revised edn., 2005), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ben Novick, 'Postal censorship in Ireland, 1914-16' in *I.H.S.*, 31, no. 123 (May 1999), pp 343-56.

<sup>17</sup> Gerry Pentiville, 'Correspondence, power and the state: an historical geography of the Irish postal service, 1784-1831' (Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2006); Frank Cullen, 'Local government and the management of urban space: a comparative study of Belfast and Dublin' (Ph.D. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2005).

when researching specific aspects of the evolution of the post in Ireland, England and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

If charting the history of the Post Office in Ireland has been neglected until recently, the same cannot be said of the Royal Mail in Great Britain. Two or three publications on the Royal Mail or some aspect of the Post Office appear every few years in England, many written by academics: two of the latest are Susan E. Whyman's *The pen and the people: English letter writing, 1600-1800* (2009), and *Master of the Post: the authorized history of the Royal Mail* by Duncan Campbell-Smith (2011).<sup>19</sup> The latter presents both a narrative history and a reflection on the future of the institution. Several of these histories include a chapter on Ireland or references to Ireland, such as chapter fourteen in Howard Robinson's *The British Post Office a history* originally written in 1948 and republished in 1970,<sup>20</sup> which is regarded as the best narrative of the history of the post in Britain. Others offer detailed analysis of specific periods or of the careers of individual officials in the British Post Office which is pertinent to this study. Kenneth Ellis's *The Post Office in the eighteenth century* (1958)<sup>21</sup>, for example, presents a detailed survey of the British Post Office during the 1700s: his overview of the various Departments within the London Post Office (notably the Secret Office where letters were opened for intelligence-gathering), and his analysis of the life of Anthony Todd who was secretary of the Post Office for most of the later eighteenth century have been particularly useful. This thesis necessarily draws upon and complements this substantial corpus of scholarship which is directly relevant to the study of the Post Office in Ireland while the latter was a kingdom within the British 'composite state' and, after 1800, part of the United Kingdom.

For a longitudinal study such as this, the *New history of Ireland*, especially volumes III, IV and V<sup>22</sup>, provides useful material on the political, economic, financial,

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<sup>18</sup> One paper of particular interest is Gerald Sattin's 'Here, there & everywhere: the story of the ubiquitous British Army and its special soldiers' letter rates' in *The London Philatelist*, no. 1285 (May 2001), pp 114-24. This paper deals with the 1d. rate introduced by both the Westminster and Irish parliaments in 1795 which is discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Duncan Campbell-Smith, *Master of the Post: the authorized history of the Royal Mail* (London, 2011); Susan E. Whyman, *The pen and the people: English letter writing, 1600-1800* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Howard Robinson, *The British Post Office: a history* (Westport 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century: a study in administrative history* (Oxford, 1958).

<sup>22</sup> T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin, F. J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iii: Early modern Ireland, 1534-1691* (Oxford, 2009) makes no reference to the post; T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: Eighteenth-century Ireland, 1691-1800* (Oxford, 2009) remarks how the Post Office in towns was 'a mark of [administrative] centrality' of trade and mentions its function as a revenue provider – see pp 698, 704; W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the*

social and ideological contexts within which this investigation of the post is set. In addition, to reflect recent trends in scholarship, a range of survey studies have been consulted, including Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London and New York, 1989), Alvin Jackson's *Ireland, 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), David Dickson's *New foundations: Ireland 1660-1800* (Dublin, 2000) and the four volumes by Colm Lennon, Raymond Gillespie, Ian MacBride and D. George Boyce in the New Gill History of Ireland series.<sup>23</sup> Equally, works of enduring scholarly value that pre-date these and the *New history* (too numerous to list here) have been used to shed light on specific eras within the timeframe of this study. Hugh F. Kearney's *Strafford in Ireland, 1633-41: a study in absolutism* (Manchester, 1959), for example, provides an excellent overview of the context in Ireland at the time when the Post Office was established, highlighting Strafford's attempt to modernise the apparatus of government, and explaining the importance of a good communication system and network in enabling him to achieve his goals. The work of T. C. Barnard which has been invaluable in illuminating our understanding of the long period between 1641 and 1784 also features strongly in this study. Barnard's ground-breaking *Cromwellian Ireland, English government and reform in Ireland, 1649-1660* (London, 1975) explains how those who acquired land and power after the Cromwellian wars ensured that they held on to both, and explores how they functioned and evolved as a colonial society with their distinctive political, cultural and social spheres and institutions. Particularly useful for a longitudinal study such as this is Barnard's second major work, *The kingdom of Ireland, 1641-1760* (London, 2004) in which he explores these and other major developments within an extended timeframe. Two of his more recent books, *A new anatomy of Ireland: the Irish Protestants, 1649-1770* (Yale, 2003) and *Making the grand figure: lives and possessions in Ireland, 1641-1770* (Yale, 2004) are characterised by a focus on the position and concerns of the ascendancy class<sup>24</sup> who both established and made greatest use of the post in Ireland. The work of a new generation of scholars, such as D. A. Fleming's *Politics and provincial people Sligo and Limerick, 1691-1761* (Manchester, 2010), is drawn upon to complement that of Barnard and others publishing in the field.

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*Union, 1801-70* (Oxford, 2010), cites the post in examples of how much the country had advanced between 1801 and 1870 – see pp 109, 155, 205, 375, 542-3).

<sup>23</sup> Lennon, *Sixteenth-century Ireland*; Raymond Gillespie, *Seventeenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2006); Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-century Ireland: the isle of slaves* (Dublin, 2009) and D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth-century Ireland: the search for stability* (Dublin, 2nd ed., 2005).

<sup>24</sup> T. C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English government and reform in Ireland, 1649-1660* (London, 1975), p. vii.

Whereas Barnard affords brief attention to those involved in commerce, trade and business, L. M. Cullen and David Dickson in particular have shed valuable light on the Irish economy at international, national and provincial levels and on the commercial activities of merchants, retailers and various other traders during the period under review.<sup>25</sup> Dickson in *Old world colony: Cork and south Munster, 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005) reconstructs the social, economic, cultural and political order, and explores how these spheres interacted during that period.<sup>26</sup> Dickson masterfully traces and explains the commercial development of the south Munster region, carefully constructing a context in which the evolving role of the Post Office in both economic and social circles can be located and explored. He acknowledges the part played by the post in improving the roads but, in common with other similar studies, gives no attention to the part played by the Post Office in the region's commercial activity. And yet it should be borne in mind that during this period, the service improved enormously from 1663 when the post between Cork and Dublin ran once a week and took several days, to 1830 when the two cities had a twice daily connection which took just ten and a quarter hours.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore by 1840 Cork was a mail-coach hub with ten mail-coaches arriving and departing each day. Beside the two for Dublin, others arrived and departed for Bantry, Clonmel, Cashel, Killarney, Limerick Tralee and Waterford.<sup>28</sup> The development of south Munster's regional postal network alone reflects just how reliant those engaged in business, trade and commerce were on an efficient communications network, even for a relatively small geographical area: awareness of this development also points to the need for historians in general to devote more attention to the postal service in their studies.

Among the range of studies on the politics of specific periods within this 285-year period that have been most useful are Sean Connolly's *Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760* (Oxford, 1992), D. W. Hayton's *Ruling Ireland, 1685-1742: politics, politicians and parties* (Woodbridge, 2004), F. G. James's *Ireland in the empire, 1688-1770: a history of Ireland from the Williamite wars to the eve of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), R. E. Burns's *Irish parliamentary politics in the eighteenth century* (2 vols, Washington, D.C., 1989-90),

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<sup>25</sup> L. M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1972); idem, *The emergence of modern Ireland, 1600-1900* (London, 1981); idem, *Princes and pirates: history of the Dublin Chamber of commerce, 1783-1983* (Dublin, 1983); idem, *Economy, trade and Irish merchants at home and abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> David Dickson, *Old world colony: Cork and south Munster, 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), pp 329-32.

<sup>27</sup> John Watson Stewart, *Watson's or the gentleman's and citizen's almanac* (Dublin, 1832), p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> F. Jackson, *The county and city of Cork Post Office general directory, 1842-3* (Cork, 1842), p. xiii.



and Patrick McNally's *Parties, patriots and undertakers: parliamentary politics in early Hanoverian Ireland* (Dublin, 1997). Edith Mary Johnston-Liik's *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800* (6 vols, Belfast 2002) has been indispensable to this study. For constitutional history, James Kelly's *Poyning's Law and the making of law in Ireland, 1660-1800* (Dublin, 2007) and C.I. McGrath's *The making of the eighteenth-century Irish constitution: government, parliament and the revenue, 1692-1714* (Dublin, 2000) provided valuable context and explanations for complex legislative processes and procedures.

Throughout this study, a wide range of specialist studies are drawn upon to inform and contextualise the interpretation of changes in the postal service. For instance, Ayres George, *History of the mail routes to Ireland* (London, 2011), Hugh Oram's *The newspaper book: a history of the newspapers in Ireland, 1649-1983* (Dublin, 1983) and more particularly Robert Munter's *The history of the Irish newspaper, 1685-1760* (Cambridge, 1967) are informative on the link between the Post Office and Ireland's growing newspaper trade. Although Munter acknowledges the important role that the Post Office played in distributing the newspapers, he makes no reference to the role that local postmasters played in collecting the news, something which is explored in this thesis. For scholarly perspectives on Ireland's roads, David Broderick's *The first toll-roads: Ireland's turnpike roads, 1729-1858* (Cork, 2002), and Peter O'Keeffe's two works, *Ireland's principal roads AD 1608-1898* (3 vols, Dublin, 2003) and *Alexander Taylor's roadworks in Ireland, 1780-1827* (Dublin, 1996) proved invaluable while Stephen Ferguson and Dermot McGuinne's *Robbery on the road: Post Office reward notices* (Dublin, 2008) was especially pertinent. Alan Marshall's *Intelligence and espionage in the reign of Charles II, 1660-1685* (Cambridge, 2003) offered useful insights into this sphere of activity that was so important to the Post Office in Ireland, Britain and indeed all West European states throughout this period. Works such as John H. Gebbie's *An introduction to the Abercorn letters, as relating to Ireland, 1736-1816* (Omagh, 1972) provided useful insights into individual landlords' reliance on the post to run their estates while others including Raymond Gillespie and R. F. Foster's edited volume *Irish provincial cultures in the long eighteenth century, making the middle sort: essays for Toby Barnard* (Dublin, 2012) were helpful in developing an understanding of how Irish society beyond the metropolis of Dublin operated. Several other specialist works have been the source of key concepts featured in this study, one of the most useful being D. W. Hayton, James Kelly & John Bergin

(ed.), *The eighteenth-century composite state: representative institutions in Ireland and Europe, 1689-1800* (Basingstoke, 2010) from which the concept of the British ‘composite state’, which is central to the interpretative framework of this thesis, has been adopted. Reference works are used extensively throughout, in particular the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. In so far as they exist, biographies of leading personnel employed by the Post Office in Ireland have also been consulted.<sup>29</sup> Regrettably no biography exists for either John or Edward Lees, both of whom were secretaries of the Post Office in Ireland during the period 1784-1831.

### **Conceptual framework, definitions, and methodological approach**

In this study, the kingdom of Ireland is examined as a part of the British ‘composite state’ down to the passing of the Act of Union and thereafter as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This concept has been adopted as firstly it presents the kingdom of Ireland as no longer ‘a form of polity *sui generis*’<sup>30</sup> and secondly, it provides a conceptual framework of an evolving local variant (albeit an unusual one) of the more familiar entity – the composite state – within which to trace the development of a state-sponsored service, the Post Office. Throughout, reference is made to the ‘state administration’ implicitly meaning the ‘central administration’ at Westminster/Whitehall in the context of Britain and at Dublin Castle in the Irish context. In the case of the latter, this umbrella term is used to refer to the viceroy who generally held the title Lord Lieutenant, and those who substituted for him (lords justices), together with the Privy Council, and a range of officers – the council secretariat, the various branches of the army establishment, the Treasury and Exchequer, and the revenue commission (the only branch answerable to the government at Westminster/Whitehall).<sup>31</sup> The Irish parliament is referred to separately. Government is generally used when referring to specific parties’ terms in office such as the Tory Government (1710-1714) or the Whig Government (1830-34). In those instances when in the running of the Post Office there is evidence that Ireland was treated more as a colony than a kingdom, and when that exercised the attention of Protestant patriots in

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Donal F. Cregan, ‘An Irish cavalier: Daniel O’Neill in exile and Restoration, 1651-64’ in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 3 (1963), pp 60-100; Mark R. F. Williams, *The King’s Irishmen: the Irish in the exiled court of Charles II, 1649-1660* (Woodbridge, 2014), chap. 7 ‘Information, access, and court culture: Daniel O’Neill’.

<sup>30</sup> See Hayton, Kelly & Bergin (ed.), *The eighteenth-century composite state*, p.13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the Irish parliament during the latter half of the eighteenth century, the relevance of changes in the tenor of relations between Ireland and Britain is highlighted.

While the focus is primarily on tracing and explaining the form, pace and extent of Ireland's postal service, developments in the services in England and Wales, Scotland and to a lesser extent, the British states in North America, are traced with a view to providing a broad-ranging contextual framework within which to compare and contrast the Irish experience.

The concept of modernisation is used extensively throughout this study: it is understood to mean the progressive transition from a traditional to a modern society. Here, application of this concept involves exploring and explaining changes in the postal network, system and service in Ireland, with particular emphasis on identifying dynamics (both within and outside the Post Office) which drove and impeded developments in all three spheres. It also entails examining the various responses these changes elicited and assessing their impact on Irish society as a whole. By the end of the approximately 285-year period covered in this study, Ireland had gained a rapid, regular, safe, inexpensive postal service which accessed virtually every village if not every household on the island. As this thesis will demonstrate, it was thanks to the Post Office that not only were the country's main roads improved dramatically, and time standardised for the first time; Ireland's internal and external connectivity was also significantly increased, opening up communities across the country to the wider world as letters and newspapers brought news from as far away as America and Australia; catalogues and commercial directories drew merchants, traders, retailers into global commerce, and landowners and agents, soldiers, and a growing number of literate Irish people availed of the opportunity to communicate with colleagues, relatives and friends at home or abroad. However, as this author shares D. George Boyce's view that 'it would be misleading to suggest that words like modernisation, or for that matter transformation indicate some kind of linear progression', this study endeavours constantly to highlight and explain the main developments in the postal service within the context of attitudes, resources, knowledge and priorities of their time.

The focus of this thesis rests on tracing, explaining, and evaluating the development of Ireland's Post Office network, system, and service from the mid-sixteenth century to 1840. In so far as changes to the political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes of Ireland and to a lesser extent, England and Wales, and Scotland,

impacted the development of the Post Office in Ireland, these are discussed. Similarly, coverage afforded prominent individual figures such as John Thurloe, William Fortescue, first Earl of Clermont or Charles Gordon-Lennon, fifth duke of Richmond, is largely confined to assessing their contributions whilst officeholders in the Post Office.

In terms of methodology, this is a longitudinal study in which the approach is primarily chronological and, on a secondary level, thematic. The rationale for the longitudinal approach is twofold. Firstly, a study such as this has not been undertaken to date. Secondly, this timeframe makes it possible to trace the evolution of the post and Post Office in Ireland from its tentative beginnings, through various crises, changes in Government administrations, a succession of Post Office personnel (some good, others bad), and changes in prevailing political, economic, social and cultural circumstances, all the while gauging their impact on the network, system and service. Each chapter represents a distinct phase of development within the Irish Post Office, beginning with the mid-1500s and continuing through to 1840. Within each chapter, a common structure is adhered to and a set of common themes are explored in an attempt to lend coherence to the study as a whole. In each instance, the leading figures involved in running the Post Office are introduced and their contributions towards developing the service assessed before growth in all three spheres of the Post Office is traced and explained, and the impact of these developments is evaluated.

In terms of research methodology, this thesis is based upon extensive empirical research aimed at blending official and unofficial source material across the various phases within the approximately 285-year period covered. As already stated, the principal aim of the thesis is to outline and explain the broad contours of developments in the post in Ireland. Given that the state played the leading role in establishing the postal service and for most of this period, determined its development, much state documentation underpins the entire study. As the corpus of source material becomes more substantial, a wider range of relevant material is added, particularly sources relating to trade and commerce. In an attempt to lend nuance, humanity and colour to that analysis, case studies of individuals who made significant use of the postal service, such as Dean Jonathan Swift and Jacob Watson, a shopkeeper who advertised his goods in Finn's *Leinster Journal* in October 1774, are featured throughout. For these individuals, the post was an indispensable part of their daily life and business. Many travel books written by visitors have been extensively mined to gauge their impression of the state of the country's roads, which after the introduction of the mail-coaches,

were a major concern to the Post Office in Ireland. For the latter stages, many thousands of pages of parliamentary reports have been mined for relevant insights, as reflected in chapters four and five. Throughout landmark legislation such as the 1657 and 1711 Acts are analysed in detail. As already indicated, sources relating to the postal service in England, Wales, and Scotland are also used throughout to contextualise developments in Ireland.

As with all longitudinal studies, certain methodological challenges (conceptual as well as practical) presented themselves. A significant conceptual challenge (addressed above) emerged in relation to identifying an appropriate interpretative political and constitutional framework for a study spanning a 285-year period during which Ireland's complex relationship with Britain evolves very significantly, and within that context again, the Post Office in Ireland's status changes several times, including a period of independence (1784-1830). Hayton and Kelly's caution regarding 'the interpretative risk of using descriptors applied to the state at different stages in its history – terms such as 'composite state' or 'nation state' because in the nineteenth century, as before, each jurisdiction, each state, was unique, and the character of each was shaped by its internal history, its geopolitical situation, and its relationship with its neighbours', proved instructive. So too did their suggestion of the 'composite state' as a 'remarkably elastic' concept.<sup>32</sup> For that reason, it has been adopted in this study.

Another challenge related to available source material. Inevitably the primary sources for a longitudinal study such as this are varied, uneven, and wide ranging: they are also necessarily selective, skewed in favour of the political, social, economic and ecclesiastical elite, and overwhelming generated by males. For most of this period, relatively few letters written by Catholics have survived; sources generated by merchants, retailers, traders, military personnel and Irish migrants abroad are also sparse. This author has not managed to locate any Gaelic-language letters and contemporary images of Irish mail-coaches are few and far between. The researcher must also be mindful that the views of the postal service expressed in surviving sources cannot be taken as representative of all users. Furthermore, as it was clearly neither possible nor useful to consult all available correspondence for such a long period, a range of letters from diverse individuals/groups have been selected on the grounds that they offer uniquely revealing insights into the operation of the postal service.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

Further challenges stem from the fact that unlike many other countries that have a wealth of Post Office archival material, Ireland has very little for a number of reasons. Firstly, if indeed there were any records relating to the establishment and early years of the Post Office in Ireland held at the English Post Office premises prior to 1666, they, like many of the English records, were most likely destroyed in the Great Fire of London. Secondly, no official Post Office records survived the period 1784-1831; records appear to have been destroyed at the time for reasons that will become clear later in the thesis. Lastly, according to Duncan Campbell-Smith, many of those Post Office records that did survive down to the early twentieth century were destroyed when the Customs House in Dublin was burned in May 1921.<sup>33</sup> (Any records that were in the G.P.O. were removed to the Customs House prior to its renovation in 1903-16.) On a more positive note, there are over 200 volumes or 140,650 Irish minutes written in the Secretary's Office between 1831 and 1921 housed in The British Postal Museum and archive in Freeling House London gathering dust.<sup>34</sup> These minutes are catalogued as POST 36 in the *Post Office Archive catalogue* and are very extensive and detailed<sup>35</sup> though they are of limited value to this study as they relate only to the final decade of the 285-year period covered.

Despite this dearth of Post Office primary sources, because of its importance to the state administration and to a growing proportion of the public, there is a substantial corpus of material on the post in Ireland. Among the most important and revealing records are official state documents (Acts of parliament, reports commissioned by parliament, Treasury reports, and official letters). The state papers for the period 1509-1670 are therefore particularly pertinent offering a variety of official, personal and commercial perspectives on the early post in Ireland. Private letters and newspapers also provide a significant amount of primary source material. Because of the significance of the Post Office in the everyday lives of the literate for both their personal and commercial correspondences, it generated comment in both private letters and in the press.

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<sup>33</sup> Campbell-Smith, *Masters of the Post*, p. 262. In fact, few records were destroyed during the 1916 Rebellion as the G.P.O. had recently been renovated and the records had been moved to the Customs House.

<sup>34</sup> The minutes volumes are classified as Post 36/1-216 and the minute papers as Post 31/1-109. The files are housed at The British Postal Museum and Archive, Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.postalheritage.org.uk>, accessed 12 Jan. 2013.

Certain challenges also present themselves in relation to analysis of this evidence. Because the Post Office records are thought to have been deliberately destroyed at certain times such as the period of independence (1784-1830), it is difficult to ascertain how badly it was managed. Evidence for clandestine practices within the Post Office (corruption, embezzlement, illegal opening of letters, theft from the mails) is difficult to locate and often such practises can only be inferred from the available records. Gauging senior officeholders' attitudes towards their administration of the Post Office and interpreting these in the context of the norms of their day is also challenging, especially as these norms changed over time and according to the individuals concerned. Lastly, over such a lengthy period, it can be challenging to measure the gap between what legislation set down for the Post Office and what actually happened on the ground. In short, the ubiquity of the post is reflected in its discreet, often incidental appearance in an array of contemporary evidence: the challenge has been to draw out these rather shadowy appearances and in turn use these to construct a coherent analysis of the Post Office in Ireland.

### **Structure**

This study comprises five chapters. The first covers the period from the mid-sixteenth century down to 1703 and focuses primarily on the role of the state administration in founding, re-establishing and stabilising the developing Post Office in Ireland. The process by which the public Post Office in Ireland, as in England, grew out of the royal post is explained. As will become apparent, the state administration went to considerable lengths to ensure complete control over the Post Office which was intended to serve it through collecting and delivering official letters, gathering intelligence and generating revenue for the administration. Owing to the 1641 rebellion and subsequent Cromwellian war, by the mid-1650s the nascent Post Office in Ireland had collapsed completely. However, as this study shows, by the end of that decade Ireland's post-town network had expanded dramatically and despite decades of stagnation, by 1703 the Post Office was on a firm organisational footing. Given that it was the state administration that dominated the development of the Post Office throughout this initial period, the analysis draws heavily on Irish and English state papers, on Acts and ordinances of the Interregnum (1642-60), on calendars of Treasury papers, and to a lesser extent, on the collections of prominent officials such as George Carew, President of Munster and James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, who had significant

involvement with the postal service.<sup>36</sup> Particularly rare and valuable are the state papers of John Thurloe, postmaster-general (1655-60), a revealing contemporary pamphlet concerning Evan Vaughan who founded and re-established the Post Office in Ireland, and papers from the Legg family archive.<sup>37</sup>

Chapter two traces developments in the postal network, system and service from the appointment of the dynamic Isaac Manley as deputy postmaster-general of Ireland in 1703 down to 1784 when the independent Irish Post Office was established. Although expansion during much of the eighteenth century was slow, nevertheless steady progress was made: in 1784, the network spanned almost the entire country. By then, in addition to fulfilling its primary functions (carrying official administrative correspondence, intelligence-gathering, revenue generation), the post had become indispensable for the conduct of Ireland's burgeoning domestic and international commerce, and was facilitating increasing social communication through frequent exchange of personal letters between family, friends and acquaintances within Ireland and abroad. Following on from the previous chapter, this section continues to draw extensively on state papers, the Journal of the House of Commons, Treasury papers and specific legislation, notably the 1711 Post Office Act. As the growing importance of the Post Office for commerce, trade and business was reflected in the increasingly detailed information on the postal service featured in almanacs and trade directories of this era, the analysis also draws heavily on a growing range of these sources, mainly John Knapp's *Almanack*, John Watson's *Almanack*, Peter Wilson's *Dublin directory*, *The Treble Almanack*, and Lucas's *General directory of the Kingdom of Ireland*. If read in isolation, almanacs and directories can paint a rather distorted picture of an ever expanding Post Office: to nuance this, a range of other primary sources (personal letters, contemporary travel books and newspapers) have been included. The personal correspondence of four individuals – Dean Jonathan Swift, Marmaduke Coghill MP, Bishop Edward Synge, and Emily, Duchess of Leinster – has been mined for insights into users' experiences of the postal service, though there is no suggestion that these figures or their views are

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<sup>36</sup> J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen (eds), *Calendar of the Carew manuscript, preserved in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth, 1515–1624* (6 vols, London, 1867-73); *Acts and ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (London, 1911); *Calendar of the manuscripts of the marquis of Ormonde, K.P. preserved in Kilkenny Castle*, new ser. (7 vols, London, 1902-12); *Cal. Treasury papers*, 1, 1556-1696.

<sup>37</sup> *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe. Esq.; Secretary, first to the Council of State and afterwards to the two protectors, Oliver and Richard Cromwell in seven volumes*, ed. Thomas Birch (7 vols, London, 1742); *A true Breviate of the great Oppressions and Injuries done to Evan Vaughan Post-Master of Ireland by Edmond Prdeaux, Esq; Attorney General and Post-Master of England outlying his grievances* (London, 1653); Legg family archives (B.L., Add MS. 63091).



representative of more widely held opinions about the post.<sup>38</sup> As eighteenth-century travel literature offers occasional revealing insights into the Post Office, works such as Samuel Madden's *Reflections and resolutions proper for the gentlemen of Ireland ...* (Dublin, 1738) which paints a very poor picture of the service, also feature in the analysis.<sup>39</sup> Newspapers have also been useful, and although the earliest seldom comment on the Post Office, from the 1770s onwards many featured advertisements for new postal services such as the Dublin Penny Post (1773) as well as reports about post-boys being stopped and robbed.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, as this study will show, the postal service played an important role in facilitating the growth of the newspaper trade in Ireland. Lastly, a unique source from this period which provides a valuable if deeply biased glimpse into the inner workings of the Post Office in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland is a pamphlet titled *The case of Christopher Byron late an officer in his Majesty's Post-Office, Dublin submitted to the consideration of his friends and the public* (Dublin, 1762). Given Byron's intimate knowledge of the institution, this source is critically examined in some detail.

Chapter three examines the first phase of the interlude during which the Irish Post Office (as distinct from the Post Office in Ireland) operated independently of the Post Office in London and was answerable to the Irish parliament. It begins in 1784 with the establishment of the independent Irish Post Office and charts the remarkable advances in the network, system and service that took place during John Lees's tenure as secretary (1784-c.1803).<sup>41</sup> As will become apparent, throughout this period the Post Office continued to serve the Dublin Castle administration, and during the 1790s and early 1800s in particular, its intelligence-gathering function proved crucial in the administration's detection and suppression of insurrection. After decades of slow and steady development, this was an era of unprecedented expansion, innovation and modernisation of the postal infrastructure and service. By 1803 its network extended

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<sup>38</sup> *The works of Jonathan Swift, DD dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin*, ed. Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1824); *Epistolary correspondence. Letters from August 1724, to September 1724*, ed. Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1824); *Journal to Stella* (London, 1766); *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill, 1722-1238*, ed. D. W. Hayton (Dublin, 2005); *The Synge letters: Bishop Edward Synge to his daughter, Alicia, Roscommon to Dublin, 1746-1752*, ed. Marie-Louise Legg (Dublin, 1996); *The correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster (1731-1814)*, ed. Brian FitzGerald (3 vols, Dublin, 1948).

<sup>39</sup> See Samuel Madden, *Reflections and resolutions proper for the gentlemen of Ireland, as to their conduct for the service of their country* (Dublin, 1738).

<sup>40</sup> These include *Dixon's Dublin Intelligence*; *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*; *Dalton's Dublin Impartial News Letter*; *Belfast News-Letter*; *Finn's Leinster Journal*; *Freeman's Journal*, and the *Dublin Post*.

<sup>41</sup> Although John Lees retained the position of secretary down to his death in 1811, in reality his son, Edward, assumed the role in 1803.

across the whole island and a new safe, secure and increasingly speedy means of transporting mail – the mail-coach – was operating on the country’s main routes. The dearth of internal Post Office records for this period is offset to a significant degree by the wealth of other contemporary material, especially John Lees’s ‘diary’<sup>42</sup>, a selection of personal correspondence and memoirs,<sup>43</sup> increasingly voluminous state papers, the Irish House of Commons parliamentary register<sup>44</sup> and Journal, the Chief Secretary’s office registered papers, rebellion and state of the country papers<sup>45</sup>, and Home Office papers<sup>46</sup>, the latter providing useful information on John Lees’s role in the Dublin Castle administration before he became secretary of the Post Office. Since newspapers devoted increasing amounts of column space to reports and advertisements concerning the postal service towards the end of the eighteenth century, the *Freeman’s Journal, Belfast Newsletter, Finn’s Leinster Journal* in particular feature prominently in the analysis. Westminster’s heightened interest in the governance of the Irish Post Office following the Act of Union (1800) was manifest in the plethora of reports it commissioned, the most significant (for this study) being the *Ninth report* (1810) which for the first time exposed the many internal problems and irregularities that had beset the Irish Post Office during John Lees’s term as secretary.<sup>47</sup> Extensive mining of the expanding corpus of almanacs and commercial directories for this period has rendered a wealth of detailed information about improvements in the postal network, system and service as well as offering insights into the widening range of service users and how they influenced the development of the postal service in Ireland.

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<sup>42</sup> Diary of John Lees, 1777-83 (T.C.D. MS. 9875).

<sup>43</sup> These include *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801: the letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle*, ed. Thomas Bartlett (Dublin, 2004); *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-98*, ed. T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell and C. J. Woods (3 vols, Oxford, 1998-2007), and Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, from the Arrival ...* (2 vols, Dublin and London, 1802).

<sup>44</sup> *The parliamentary register or history of the proceedings and debates of the house of commons of Ireland, the first session in the reign of his present Majesty* (17 vols, Dublin, 1784-97), ii.

<sup>45</sup> Many of these are also copied into a number of copy books by a Post Office official in the 1890s. These are now preserved in the British Post Office Museum and Archives based at Freeling House London and catalogued as POST 15. On the inside cover of the first copy book is written ‘Transcript of Letter Book – Post Office – Chief Secretary’s [sic.] Dublin Castle Vol. II 1790-1808’; originals now preserved in the Public Records Office Ireland. (Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL). The National Archives of Ireland, Bishop Street, Dublin holds a microfilm copy of these copy books, catalogued as MFA-Post 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Calendar of Home Office papers of the reign of George III: 1760-1775; preserved in Her Majesty’s Public Record Office* (4 vols, London, 1878-99), i, 1760 (25 Oct.)-1765, ed. Joseph Redington; ii, 1766-1769, ed. Joseph Redington, iii, 1770-1772, ed. Richard Arthur Roberts; iv, 1773-1775, ed. Richard Arthur Roberts.

<sup>47</sup> *The ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland. General Post-Office.* (Ireland), 1810 (5).

Chapter four covers the years 1803 to 1831, beginning when John Lees's son, Edward, became *de facto* head of the Irish Post Office and ending with his enforced retirement and the reunification of the Irish and British Post Offices. During that period Westminster's *laissez-faire* attitude towards the Irish Post Office gave way to a much tighter regulatory approach. This chapter shows how the modernisation of the post during those years came about in spite of mismanagement and corruption within the Post Office. It also highlights how following the Act of Union (1800) the Post Office in Ireland served both the Dublin and Westminster administrations well in their drive to achieve more integrated, efficient and effective governance of Ireland within an evolving new institutional framework for government of the United Kingdom. This complex process was assisted by ongoing improvement of the communications infrastructure between London and Dublin, and between Dublin and the provinces. Although the Post Office continued to primarily serve the new United Kingdom administration during this period, this chapter will show that by the 1830s, commercial and trading interests were equally important to its operations and development and that it was merchants, traders and retailers who led the way in driving the modernisation of the post, that their requirements now being recognised as on a par with those of the state administration as outlined by the duke of Richmond in the opening statement above. Given that the pool of service users widened during this era, the attitudes and expectations of the Irish public in respect of the Post Office are surveyed. As in previous chapters, the forces that drove the growth of the post, specifically the extended mileage covered, the emergence of new post-towns, and accelerated speed of the service, are discussed. Lastly, the process whereby the Post Office came to be regarded as a visible and acceptable department of state is explored. Here, the symbolic significance of the new G.P.O. on Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street), Dublin in 1814 is emphasised, and the manner in which the state administration in Dublin Castle consciously capitalised on the popularity of the Post Office to present a favourable image of itself to the Irish public is assessed.

Westminster's increasingly interventionist approach to the Post Office in Ireland after the Act of Union is reflected in the 100 plus reports and papers it commissioned. Some, like the *Second report from the Select Committee on the Roads from Holyhead to London*, are very short, consisting of just two pages, while others stretch to several hundred, including the *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain*. Post-

*office revenue, United Kingdom: part II. Ireland* which runs to 551 pages.<sup>48</sup> These address every aspect of the Post Office including finance, speed, roads and corruption. In contrast with the pre-1800 era, there is an overwhelming body of evidence for the later period, much of it coming directly from Post Office personnel. Evidence from a selection of these reports forms the basis for much of the analysis featured in this chapter. In addition to the two already mentioned, the *ninth report* and its supplement (1810)<sup>49</sup>, the *sixth report of the commissioners for auditing public accounts in Ireland* (1818)<sup>50</sup>, and the *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland: with the minutes of evidence, and appendix* (1832) were particularly pertinent.<sup>51</sup> A very useful complementary source from within the Post Office is C. P. O'Neill's *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831 when Sir Edward Lees was removed from the establishment in a letter to Lord Melbourne* (Dublin?, 1831). Like Christopher Byron's pamphlet of the mid-1700s, this was the work of a disgruntled employee who used evidence contained in these parliamentary reports to support his complaints. O'Neill's insider insights offer revealing, often candid, perspectives on the goings-on within the Post Office that are generally recounted in more diplomatic and couched terms by the authors of the parliamentary reports. As in the previous chapter, newspapers and the almanacs are essential sources for tracking developments in the service; the former are particularly excellent for gauging public opinion on the Post Office. Since Ireland became part of the United Kingdom during this era, a selection of newspapers and almanacs from Scotland and England, notably the *General almanack of Scotland and British register for 1809* (Edinburgh, 1809); the *Edinburgh almanack or universal Scots and imperial register for 1828* (Edinburgh, 1827), and *The London Gazette* are used to provide an assessment of the relative pace and scale of progress in the Irish postal service.

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<sup>48</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on the roads from Holyhead to London*, 1817 (332); *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post-office revenue, United Kingdom: part II. Ireland*, 1829 (353) (hereafter referred to as *Nineteenth report*, 1829 (353) (Ireland)).

<sup>49</sup> *The ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland. General Post-Office*. 1810 (5) (Ireland.) *Supplement to Commissioners of Inquiry into Fees and Emoluments received in Public Offices in Ireland: ninth report*, 1810 (366) (Ireland).

<sup>50</sup> *The sixth report of the commissioners for auditing public accounts in Ireland*, 1818 (154) (Ireland).

<sup>51</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland: with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, H.C. 1831-32 (716), xvii, 1.

The fifth and final chapter concentrates on the period 1831 to 1840 which was characterised by profound change in the Post Office in Ireland following amalgamation of the independent Irish Post Office with its British counterpart in 1831. A suite of reforms were introduced, heralding a new phase in the expansion and modernisation of the Post Office in Ireland as the management structure was brought into line with the British Post Office. Particularly significant advances in the service are highlighted, especially the introduction of a uniform penny post in 1840, continued expansion of the network and acceleration in the speed of the mail-coach service. Within the Post Office in Ireland the reform of work practices was significant, too. This chapter shows how certain obstacles complicated the processes of integration and standardisation within this single United Kingdom Post Office system, the most problematic being the retention of Irish miles as a unit of measurement which resulted in different rates of postage having to apply in Ireland and mainland Britain. This modernization process was at the instigation of and closely monitored by Charles Gordon-Lennox, Duke of Richmond, while postmaster-general, and after his resignation in July 1834, by the House of Commons. Richmond was followed in quick succession by three postmasters-general.<sup>52</sup> In Ireland the implementation of these reforms was carried out by Augustus Godby, who in 1831, replaced Edward Lees as secretary of the Post Office and retained the position until April 1850.<sup>53</sup> This chapter shows how Godby oversaw renewed acceleration in the expansion and modernisation of the provincial postal network, which had slowed down dramatically during the last five years of Lees's term as secretary.

These measures introduced to modernise both the structure and operations of the Post Office in Ireland are charted with particular attention to those changes which were considered and introduced in the Post Office elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

This chapter and thesis as a whole ends in January 1840 when, arising from the introduction of the uniform penny post, the functions of the Post Office changed profoundly. Most significantly of all, one of the Post Office's original core function as a provider of revenue to the state was suddenly eliminated. From that point onwards, providing an efficient, regular, reliable, and safe service to both the general public and

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<sup>52</sup> Richmond was followed in quick succession by Francis Nathaniel Conyngham, Marquess Conyngham (5 July-31 Dec. 1834), William Wellesley-Pole, third Earl of Mornington (31 Dec. 1834-8 May 1835). The Marquess of Conyngham returned for a short period (8-30 May 1835). Thomas William Anson, first Earl of Lichfield, next held the position from 30 May 1835 to 15 Sept. 1841.

<sup>53</sup> Godby joined the Post Office in 1789 and rose steadily through the ranks. Aside from his career in the Post Office, little is known about him. Reference to Godby rarely appears in the newspapers except on official Post Office announcements – see, for example, *Irish Examiner*, 17 Apr. 1850.

state administration, in equal measure, became its principal function. As in the previous chapter, a selection of parliamentary reports pertaining to reform of the Post Office in Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom form the core primary source material for this section of the study. In addition, the Post Office directories (available from 1832) are especially informative. Typically these feature forty pages of relevant information including a list of the post-towns of Ireland and the main ones in Britain and Scotland, a detailed mail-coach timetable that recorded the arrival time at each stop along the way, and information on the cost of a letter to most parts of the world and how the rate should be paid. The last of the main sources used extensively in this chapter are Irish newspapers and almanacs of the time which feature reportage about the progress of developments and announcements of significant new additions and alterations to the postal service.

## Chapter one

### **The Post Office in Ireland, c.1555-1703: beginning, collapse, rebirth and stagnation**

This chapter traces the origins and expansion of the postal system in Ireland during the period c.1555-1703 when the post played an increasingly important role in facilitating the subjugation of Ireland to English governance. The study begins in the second half of the sixteenth century when the first hints of an *official* internal post in Ireland in the guise of military posts are recorded, and continues to explore the development of these early posts. It was not, however, until the late 1630s that an official public postal system was established in Ireland: in this chapter, its genesis will be traced in detail. The circumstances surrounding its foundation, the personnel involved, and the relationship between the fledgling Post Office in Ireland and its more established counterpart in England will be examined. The role of government in shaping the formation of the service, and its reliance on the Post Office in facilitating communication between Westminster and Dublin, and in turn between Dublin Castle and its satellite administrative bodies throughout Ireland, will be highlighted throughout. Its other core functions – collecting intelligence and generating revenue – are discussed, and Dublin Castle's deployment of the Post Office in Ireland to implement legislation and policies during successive decades of exceptional political, economic and social upheaval is highlighted. As will become apparent, that turmoil, together with interpersonal tensions, rivalries and conflicts, and maladministration owing to incompetence and/ or corruption, posed many serious challenges to the development (though not, significantly, the long-term survival) of the Post Office service throughout much of this initial phase.

The fledgling service suffered as a result of the 1641 rebellion and subsequent Cromwellian war (1649-53). By the early 1650s it had collapsed completely. However, it was re-established by 1655 and within three years, Ireland's post-town network had expanded dramatically. By 1703 the Post Office was on a firm organisational footing, continuing to fulfil its original core functions. As a result, during the decades that followed, it provided the increasingly confident Protestant ascendancy and the English administrations in both Ireland and England with a functioning and relatively modern postal infrastructure, thus facilitating reasonably efficient governance of the kingdom. At the same time, access to and use of the Post Office service in Ireland broadened significantly to the point that it became vital to the conduct of Irish trade and commerce

and was increasingly used (by those who could afford its high costs) to maintain social intercourse with family and friends within Ireland and overseas. This chapter explores the nature of and reasons for its early expansion, and gauges the relative importance of Dublin Castle's demand for regular and reliable lines of contact with its local representatives (sheriffs, judges and military personnel) as a driving force in that expansion.

### **The post in Ireland before the foundation of the Post Office (1638)**

There is ample evidence that letters circulated in Ireland long before the introduction of an official public post. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries letters exchanged between state officials were carried by messengers, servants, or army dispatch riders. (Indeed such arrangements continued throughout the period covered in this study.) The establishment of a public postal service in Ireland came about significantly later than in England, where one of the first references to an official 'post' or messenger occurred during the reign of King John (1199-1216) when *nuncii* were employed to carry official dispatches.<sup>1</sup> During the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) the service improved significantly owing to the establishment of fixed stations or *posts* where horses were permanently kept for use by these *nuncii* who also carried private letters for a fee. While campaigning in Scotland in 1481 Edward IV (1461-83) further developed the service when he organised post stations at twenty-mile intervals between his army camp and London.<sup>2</sup> Sir Brian Turk, the earliest recorded postmaster, received a salary £66 13s. 4d. as Henry VIII's 'Master of the Post'.<sup>3</sup> By the time Tuke was appointed, there existed a network of postal routes radiating from London along which official documents and letters were conveyed. He appointed postmen and was responsible for overseeing the performance of their duties.<sup>4</sup> These deputy postmasters carried official court letters but supplemented their income by carrying private letters for a fee. As a result, the position of deputy postmaster became a lucrative one and was farmed out to the highest bidders by the master. The service was financed and operated by and for the benefit of the state, and only carried public letters as a secondary function.<sup>5</sup> Later in the sixteenth century one route from London ran to Ireland, initially

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<sup>1</sup> William Lewis, *Her Majesty's mails: a history of the Post-office and an industrial account of its present condition* (London, 1865), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, *Her Majesty's mails*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Hemmeon, *The history of the British Post Office*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Hemmeon, *Her Majesty's mails*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> The word 'post' was in common use at this time. The term 'Post Office' did not come into use until the late 1630s. In England, following Tuke's death in 1545, two men were appointed to replace him -



via Chester and later via Holyhead. This postal system continued to operate until the 1630s when steps were taken to formalise and institutionalise the postal in England and Ireland.

As the Tudor and Stuart state became more centralised and more bureaucratised, its need for a more permanent post grew, and as its role in the governance of Ireland expanded, a postal system in Ireland became a necessity. As in England, well before the foundation of an official post, letters were carried to, from and about Ireland as evidenced by the state papers: in 1547, for instance, a William Cavendish applied to the Privy Council for payment for carrying letters out of Ireland.<sup>6</sup> The earliest documentary evidence of a nascent system within Ireland dates from 1562 when Nicholas Fitzsimon, alderman of Dublin, was commissioned to carry the city's letters for a period of twelve years on condition that it did not interfere with carriage of the queen's letters.<sup>7</sup>

It was during Sir Henry Sidney's term in office as lord justice intermittingly from 1556 and as Lord Deputy on three separate occasions (1565-66, April-October 1568 and again August-September 1575)<sup>8</sup> that the need for an improved service became particularly pressing. Sidney's first policy statement featured a comprehensive set of measures designed to transform the political and administrative infrastructure of Ireland. Provincial councils were to be established in each of the provinces; the central courts, the financial offices, and the organisation of the garrison were to be reformed in line with recommendations made by successive reports in the 1560s.<sup>9</sup> Unsurprisingly, in 1565, soon after he was appointed Lord Deputy, Sidney was writing to the Privy Council about the postal connection between Ireland and London. Consultation centred on 'whether the laid post or the through post be more convenient for the speedy conveyance of important letters'. (Laid post involved many horsemen or walkers travelling in relay from 'post to post'. Through post involved one rider travelling all the way and changing horses.)<sup>10</sup> This, however, was not a public post. Rather, it was the

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William Paget, one of the Chief Secretaries, and John Mason whose title was Master of Messengers, Runners or Post: his salary was £66 13s. 4d. When Mason died in 1566, Thomas Randolph replaced him. He in turn was replaced by John Stanhope who held the office until 1621:

<sup>6</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, 2, 1547-1550, 24 May 1547, 93.

<sup>7</sup> *Calendar of ancient records of Dublin: in the possession of the municipal corporation of that city*, ed. John Thomas Gilbert (16 vols, Dublin 1889), ii, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Sidney had plenty of experience in Ireland as he had served in Ireland since 1556; Ciaran Brady, 'Sidney, Sir Henry' in *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/home.do>, accessed 17 Oct. 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Brady, 'Sidney, Sir Henry'.

<sup>10</sup> [Lords of the Council?] to Lord Deputy Henry Sidney, 15 Nov. 1565 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1509-1573*, p. 279.

state's own post, intended to carry official letters, although as in England, it did carry a certain amount of private letters for a fee. It ran intermittently and only as the state needed it. Between November 1568 and March 1569 there were at least twelve garrisons (so central to Sidney's programme for reform) stationed around Leinster which would have been in regular contact with Dublin – hence, a postal service had to be organised.<sup>11</sup> A service was operating in the late 1560s. Sir John Pollard, a member of the Dublin Castle administration, wrote in October 1568 about the 'needs [for] messengers' and pressed for 'A post to be established from Munster to the Lord Deputy.'<sup>12</sup> When two years later, in November 1570, Sir John Perrot was appointed to the presidency of Munster, he requested post horses to bring with him to Ireland.<sup>13</sup> In 1585 Robert Harpoole, who was granted land in Laois and Offaly, was referred to as 'Commission[er] for post horses.'<sup>14</sup> Regardless of how successful or otherwise this service was, it is clear that as the sphere of influence of the Tudor administration extended beyond the Pale and into the provinces, there was a growing need for mechanisms to facilitate regular communication within Ireland.

A reliable, regular connection with Westminster was also required. In an unsigned document titled a 'Book of the establishment of the Irish garrisons in November 1568 and March 1569', among the personnel listed are John Aprice of Holyhead, paid £4 19s. 6½d. and Patrick Tyrrell, paid £3 10s.; each was to provide a post boat.<sup>15</sup> It appears that a reliable and permanent land route running from London to either Chester or Holyhead had not yet been established by the early 1570s since there are many references in state correspondence to letters being carried by servants or others between the two cities.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in 1571 special allowances were set for messengers 'carrying letters to court' with the stipulation that the fee was 'not to exceed £6 13s. 4d. [and] if he waits at court for an answer, £13 6s. 4d.'<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, there is

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<sup>11</sup> *Cal. S. P. Ire., Tudor period* (Dublin: IMC, 2009), pp 182-3. These garrisons included Philipstown, Maryborough Leighlin, Dungarvan, Monasterevin, Island Sidney, Feddan, Narrow Water, Athlone, Carlow and Duluca.

<sup>12</sup> Sir John Pollard's notes on above [Instructions for a president and council of Munster], Oct. 1568 in *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Remembrances of Sir John Perrot's demands on going to Ireland, Nov. 1570 in *ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum by Henry Sidney [1 July 1568] in *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Book of the establishment of the Irish garrisons in November 1568 and on 20 March 1569 in *ibid.*, pp 182-3.

<sup>16</sup> Sir Thomas Cusack, Knight, lord chancellor, and Sir Gerald Aylmer, Knight, chief justice of the king's bench, lords justices and council to the Privy Council, 22 Dec. 1564 in *Cal. S. P. Ire. Henry VII, Edward VI, Mary & Elizabeth, 1509-1573*, p. 129; Sir Lord Robert Dudley and Sir William Cecil to the lord justice Nicholas Arnold, 16 Sept. 1565 in *ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>17</sup> Remembrances for the despatch of Thomas Jefison to Ireland, 24 Mar. 1571 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., Tudor period*, p. 268.

evidence to suggest that in its early years, the connection between London and Holyhead may only have operated for as little as five months a year.<sup>18</sup>

Ten years later, in 1579, following Sidney's return to Ireland as lord deputy, another attempt was made to stabilise the service along the London-Holyhead route. In May of that year an 'order [was] taken with Win. Meo, post at Chester, for ... posting and bringing to the Court such letters as shall arrive or be brought from Ireland directed for Her Majesty's affairs'<sup>19</sup>, implying that there was no post operated at that time. On 28 July a warrant was issued empowering 'Robert Gascoigne, Postmaster of the Court, to demand the assistance of cretin [sic.] authorities in laying through posts between London and Holyhead for messages and packers'.<sup>20</sup> Within a few weeks, on 10 August, an

Extraordinary post [was] laid by order of the Privy Council in the towns and other places towards Ireland by the ways of Holyhead, Tavistock, and Bristol, with the hire of a bark, called the *Grace of Neston*, and all other charges for the ready conveyance of letters.<sup>21</sup>

While on the English side of the Irish Sea the public post was continually improving, the same was not true of Ireland. In late 1581, soon after the suppression of the second Desmond rebellion (1570-83), the Crown's army presence was scaled down.<sup>22</sup> The overall cost of the suppression campaign (£300,000) included maintaining 6,400 troops.<sup>23</sup> When Lord Justice Robert Dillon, writing to Sir Francis Walsingham, one of Queen Elizabeth I's principal secretaries, in October 1581, recommended cuts to the army personnel in an attempt to save money, among the positions identified as involving the 'Superfluous charge of needless officers' was that of post-master.<sup>24</sup> The following January a Captain 'Nicholas Fitzsymonds postmaster of Dublin' was among the 3,296 men discharged from the army.<sup>25</sup> This was most likely the same Nicholas

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<sup>18</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, pp 9-24.

<sup>19</sup> The Order taken with Wm. Meo, post at Chester, 19? May 1579 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1547-1580*, p. 625.

<sup>20</sup> Warrant for Robert Gascoigne, postmaster of the court, 28 July 1579 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1574-1585*, p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> Extraordinary posts laid by order of the Privy Council in the towns and other places towards Ireland by the ways of Holyhead, Tavistock, and Bristol, 10 Aug. 1579 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1574-1585*, p. 180.

<sup>22</sup> Although it can be argued that the Desmond rebellion did not end until the death of the second earl of Desmond near Tralee in 1583, the war effectively ended in 1581 when most of Desmond's lands had been occupied.

<sup>23</sup> Lennon, *Sixteenth-century Ireland*, pp 228, 231.

<sup>24</sup> Justice Robert Dillon to Sir Francis Walsingham, 20 Oct. 1581 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1574-1585*, p. 325.

<sup>25</sup> Book of the discharge of soldiers in November and December 1581 and January 1582 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1574-1585*, p. 343.

Fitzsimons mentioned above who had been appointed in 1562 to carry the city's letters. The recurrence of comments such as 'were delivered here by his servant' or of complaints about 'great sums allowed to his Lordship's servants for carrying packets' point to the absence of an organised postal system within Ireland.<sup>26</sup>

Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone's rebellion changed that. Although Tyrone's war began in 1594, it was not until the appointment of Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy as Lord Deputy and his implementation of tactical changes and restructuring of the army that the war was brought to an end in 1603.<sup>27</sup> Among these structural changes was the introduction of a postal system of sorts, albeit on a temporary basis. Established by the state to meet its immediate military needs, this was the first organised postal network of any description in Ireland.

Mountjoy's post was operating around the time of the battle of Kinsale (October 1600-January 1601). The official account, written after the battle, cites a post operating between Dublin and Cork and another between Cork and Kinsale. It relates how on 22 September 'News [was conveyed] from the mayor of Cork, by post that a Spanish fleet was discovered near to the Old Head of Kinsale' and on the next day, 'Another post [arrived] from Sir Charles Willmott and from the mayor of Cork, advertising the Spanish fleet to be come into the harbour of Kinsale; whereupon Captain Roberts was despatched into England with letters to [the] Lords.'<sup>28</sup> However, this post seems to have been suspended after the battle as in August 1601 Sir George Carew, the recently appointed president of Munster, wrote at the end of a letter to the Privy Council in London: 'Sent by Christofer Birkhead to the Mayor of Bristoll, to go by the running post'.<sup>29</sup> Birkhead carried the letter from Cork to Bristol. From there, it was forwarded by the mayor to London via the queen's official post, indicating that there was no post in operation between Cork and Dublin. Very soon after this was written, by mid-August 1601 the Dublin-Cork connection had been reinstated as Carew, again writing to the Privy Council, issued instructions that his letter was to go by running post to Dublin.<sup>30</sup> The post was still operating in May 1602 as evidenced in a postscript to a letter by Carew to Lord Deputy Mountjoy urging 'your Lordship ... for a little while (until the

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<sup>26</sup> The lord deputy and council to the Privy Council, 30 Apr. 1587 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1586-1588*, p. 325; Mr Justice Gardiner to Lord Burghley, 23 Sept. 1587 in *ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>27</sup> Lennon, *Sixteenth-century Ireland*, p. 299.

<sup>28</sup> Account of the siege of Kinsale, signed by Lord Deputy Mountjoy, George Carew, R. Wingfelde, Ro. Gardner [undated] in *Cal. Carew MSS, iv, 1601-1603*, pp 179-82.

<sup>29</sup> Sir George Carew to the Privy Council, 6 Aug. 1601 in *ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>30</sup> Sir George Carew to the Privy Council, 14 Aug. 1601 in *ibid.*, p. 128.

rumour of the coming of Spaniards is forgotten or not to be feared) to continue a running post between Corke and Dublin. The charge will not be great, considering the shortness of the time.'<sup>31</sup> Notwithstanding Carew's counsel, it appears to have ceased soon after. In early August 1602 two letters (the first from Carew to Mountjoy and the other from Carew to the Privy Council) were endorsed 'the bearer, Sir Anthony Cooke' and 'Sent by Sir Anthony Cooke'.<sup>32</sup> Cooke, a cavalry officer in Carew's service, regularly carried letters for him. Indeed, Carew recommended him highly to the Privy Council, recounting how

this gentleman ... hath greatly impaired his health by the many toilsome and hard journeys which he hath undergone, yet hath not forborne or failed to attend the services with me upon all occasions.<sup>33</sup>

However, throughout July, when strong rumours were circulating about another Spanish landing that month, Carew continued to press for resumption of service.<sup>34</sup> Conscious of their need for regular intelligence updates, on 13 July Carew wrote to Mountjoy: 'I do once more humbly pray ... that a running Post between Dublyn and Corke may be erected, that a speedier means of advertisement between your Lordship and me may be established.'<sup>35</sup> Mountjoy's response was swift and positive: on the same day he answered Carew, assuring him: 'I am also well content to establish the post again (as the last time) between Corke and Dublin, and have written to the Council at Dublin to give order accordingly; so as I make account those post will be established before this letter come unto you'.<sup>36</sup> By early August he had done so. Carew wrote to him on the 7th: 'I thank you for erecting a laid post ... I will take the like care here, ... for foot messengers are slow and negligent.'<sup>37</sup> Throughout the crisis precipitated by the threat of Spanish invasion, there was a frenzy of correspondence between Cork and Dublin, Cork and London, and Dublin and London. However, once the crisis abated, the service came to a sudden end in November, to the regret of both Carew and Mountjoy. On 6 November Carew wrote to Mountjoy:

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<sup>31</sup> Sir George Carew to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, 28 May 1602 in *ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> Sir George Carew to the Privy Council, 11 Aug. 1602 in *ibid.*, pp 301-03; Sir George Carew to Sir Robert Cecil, 11 Aug. 1602 in *ibid.*, pp 304-05.

<sup>33</sup> Sir George Carew to the Privy Council, 11 Aug. 1602 in *ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>34</sup> Many of the letters recorded in *ibid.* throughout April, May, June and July reflect this fact.

<sup>35</sup> Sir George Carew to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, 13 July 1601 in *ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>36</sup> Lord Deputy Mountjoy to Sir George Carew, 29 July 1601 in *ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>37</sup> Sir George Carew to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, 7 Aug. 1602 in *ibid.*, p. 296.

On the 30th I received yours of 26th last ... I was the cause that moved your Lordship to erect laid post between this and Dublin; but now that the Spaniard comes not, I thought it my duty to put your Lordship in mind of it again, that they may be discharged; and yet I shall be exceeding sorry for it, finding great ease in their continuance.<sup>38</sup>

From this, the last of Carew's references to a post connection between the two cities, we learn that it took four days for the post to travel between Dublin and Cork. After the temporary service ended, special messengers or servants were once again deployed to carry letters: for example, in December Carew received a letter from Sir John Stanhope, a member of Elizabeth's court, by his officer, Mr. Boyle.<sup>39</sup> This letter, dated 19 December 1602, took a month to travel from London to Cork and was 'received 22 January'.

That the Cork-Dublin post was not the only route operating is evident from a communication between the Council at Dublin and Carew in December 1602 in which they signalled their intention to suspend several other posts across the country. They acknowledged

now that ... you have discharged the posts in Mounster, which we intended to have done ourselves we have likewise given order for the discharge of those in Leynster, and only in ease of her Majesty's charge allowed some posts to be between this city and Athlone, in regard the Lord Deputy is lately drawn into ... Conaght, whither now all the course of intelligence must run.<sup>40</sup>

Notwithstanding the anecdotal and fragmentary nature of this evidence, it is clear that when posts were organised, they were operated by the state and for its benefit only, though they are likely to have carried private letters, at least those of officials, and possibly others as well.

There is no evidence of an organised official post in Ireland again until the late 1630s. Inland post was almost non-existent or at best haphazard. An indication of the difficulty and suspicion associated with sending mail is conveyed in a letter dispatched in January 1605 by an unknown correspondent to Henry Percy, ninth earl of Northumberland and Privy Councillor who around that time was viewed with suspicion

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<sup>38</sup> Sir George Carew to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, 5 Nov. 1602 in *ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>39</sup> Sir John Stanhope to Lord Deputy Mountjoy, 19 Dec. 1602 in *ibid.*, p. 393.

<sup>40</sup> Council of Dublin to Sir George Carew, 12 Dec. 1602 in *ibid.*, p. 387.

by Secretary of State Sir Robert Cecil.<sup>41</sup> The writer, whose signature was ‘purposely destroyed’ and who is likely to have been a co-conspirator, complained that he could not find someone to whom he could confidently entrust his mail; nor would he have his letters carried ‘by such as the Lord Deputy employs for England, lest they should not be safely delivered to him [Northumberland].’<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding these difficulties, proof that a large amount of letters circulated on an *ad hoc* private basis can be found in the letterbook of George, sixteenth Earl of Kildare (1612-1660), recently edited by Aidan Clarke and Bríd McGrath.<sup>43</sup> This book contains 228 letters (almost three a month) written to the sixteenth earl between 1630 and 1637, just prior to the introduction of the official Post Office in Ireland. Many letters reference how they were carried. Some were delivered by a servant (‘I had answered your letter by your messenger’, wrote the Countess of Kildare to her nephew the Earl, in October 1632, or ‘I received your letter by Mr. Hooker the bearer’ wrote the London goldsmith Nathaniel Stoughton in August 1632).<sup>44</sup> Although there is no trace in the letterbook of an organised inland post operating in Ireland, the Dublin-London connection does feature from time to time in official and other letters.

It has already been noted that during the late 1560s two men on either side of the Irish Sea, John Aprice in Holyhead and Patrick Tyrrell in Clontarf, were paid by the English Exchequer to carry the mail. By the early 1600s only one man was operating the service, likely a cost-cutting measure: in 1608 a Captain Pepper was operating a single packet. However, because ‘his ordinary bark, used for transportation of letters or packets hither, is but a baggage boat ... he is now building another bark of greater burthen’ – a clear sign of the growing demand for a regular postal service.<sup>45</sup> Pepper was still operating the service ten years later: in 1617 he received compensation to the tune of £13 6s. 8d. for the loss of two anchors, cables and a cock boat and the master of the

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Nicholls, ‘Percy, Henry, ninth earl of Northumberland (1564-1632)’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008)

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21939>, accessed 17 Oct. 2015].

<sup>42</sup> Letters of advice concerning Affairs in Ireland to the Earl of Northumberland [sender unrecorded], 6 Jan. 1605 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1603-1606*, p. 245; Mark Nicholls, ‘Percy, Henry, ninth earl of Northumberland (1564-1632)’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008)

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21939>, accessed 17 Oct. 2015].

<sup>43</sup> *Letterbook of George 16th Earl of Kildare*, ed. Aidan Clarke and Bríd McGrath (Dublin: IMC, 2013). The sixteenth earl’s mother, Frances Randolph, was the daughter of Thomas Randolph, the Elizabethan diplomat who became postmaster of England in 1581 and held the office until his death in 1590.

<sup>44</sup> Countess of Kildare to the sixteenth earl, 15 Oct. 1632 in *ibid.*, p. 55; Nathaniel Stoughton to the sixteenth earl, 11 Aug. 1632 in *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> Sir Arthur Chichester to the earl of Salisbury, 4 Apr. 1608 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1606-1608*, p. 454.

boat.<sup>46</sup> By the late 1620s he had been replaced: in 1628 ‘Andrew Harper was Captain of the Post-barks between Holyhead and Dublin’.<sup>47</sup>

Henry Cray, first Viscount Falkland and Lord Deputy (1622-29), understood the need for both a reliable and regular postal connection between Dublin and London. In November 1625, against the backdrop of heightened concerns about a possible Spanish attack on Ireland, he outlined to the Privy Council some of the challenges facing vessels conveying post from England to Ireland and the resultant risks involving protection from invasion:

They must have found contrary winds or come in for the great north-east gale of the 19-21 of November, which may have scattered or wrecked them, otherwise they could not have been “unlanded” by the time.

There is only one packet boat, so that news comes slowly. Had there been two we should have heard of this Spanish invasion long ago. I hope we may have two boats, and also a settled course of posts to run between here and the three other provinces. The safety of the Kingdom depends upon the rapid transmission of news.<sup>48</sup>

The previous March he had emphasised to Viscount Killultagh (Lord Conway), an active member of the House of Lords with extensive land interests in Ireland and one of the Secretaries of State, ‘the necessity of a regular system frequent posts.’<sup>49</sup> However, his complaints fell on deaf ears and it was not until 1652 that a second boat was brought into use.<sup>50</sup>

Down to the introduction of steam-powered packets in the early 1820s, bad weather on the Irish Sea constantly caused delays in crossings between Holyhead and Dublin and disrupted communications between Dublin and Westminster. These setbacks adversely affected the conduct of government business in Ireland as Sir John Davies, solicitor general for Ireland, explained to Robert Cecil, Secretary of State, in January 1605. He could

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<sup>46</sup> List of concordatums paid out of the Treasury between 1 Oct. 1617 and 31 Mar. 1618 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1615-1625*, pp 194-5.

<sup>47</sup> Petition of Andrew Harper, 8 Dec. 1628 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1628-1629*, p. 405.

<sup>48</sup> Lord Deputy Falkland to the Privy Council, 23 Nov. 1625 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1625-1632*, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> Lord Falkland to Viscount Killultagh (Lord Conway), 14 Mar. 1627 in *ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>50</sup> Committee for the Admiralty to commissioner of the Navy, 7 Dec. 1847 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1645-1647*, p. 612.



... give no certain intelligence, because the State business depends on directions out of England and the weather has so interrupted intercourse that a packet directed to Sir Arthur Chichester, and dated the 8th October, did not arrive here till the end of December. And other letters given to the Lord Deputy and Council, by the hand of Jo. Bingley ... are yet expected, for Jo. Bingley having put to sea upon Christmas eve, was driven back by a tempest, and hath not since been heard of.<sup>51</sup>

Chichester had been appointed Lord Deputy on 15 October 1604 but could not be sworn in until certain papers arrived from London: these were held up in Holyhead by adverse winds. Clearly, letters carried on private boats were also being conveyed out of Ireland to England. Bingley was aware of mounting pressure to make the crossing to Ireland and sought to exonerate himself of any blame for the delay. From Holyhead, he wrote to Cecil in London, on 9 January, explaining that he was detained in the port 'by the ... winde at west and west-south-weste'. He has been several times aboard, and the last time the ship was driven back by a storm after he had completed a good part of the journey. He reported that there were about 400 passengers similarly detained in and about Chester. In the circumstances, he asked that the delay would not be imputed to his negligence.<sup>52</sup> It is not known precisely when Bingley succeeded in crossing but evidently it was before Chichester was sworn in as Lord Deputy on 3 February. Though seldom of such consequence, delays in the conveyance of the post, which were especially frequent during winter and often lasted several weeks, certainly impacted negatively the conduct of government business. (That this remained a challenge is evidenced by the fact that in the early 1760s the Lord Lieutenant was obliged to rely on duplicate bills prepared by the British Council in order to progress business.)<sup>53</sup>

Whereas in England by the early 1600s a postal network and system of sorts was operating, no such system or network was organised within Ireland, mainly owing to a reluctance on the part of the Elizabethan and Stuart authorities in Ireland to make the necessary investment. Evidence of this reluctance to spend money on a postal network or system in Ireland first referenced by Carew in May 1602 re-appears during Falkland's time as Lord Deputy (1622-29). According to P. R. Mahaffy, Falkland 'sought to institute a system of regular posts to Ireland. He was, however, oppressed by

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<sup>51</sup> Sir J. Davies to Viscount Cranbourne (Robert Cecil), 6 Jan. 1605 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1603-1606*, p. 245.

<sup>52</sup> Mr. [John] Bingley to Viscount Charnbourne, 9 Jan. 1605 in *ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, *Poyning's Law*, p. 265.

personal poverty at a time when only a rich man could succeed in so high a post.<sup>54</sup> This indicated the expense of sending letters where there was no organised or regular postal service. The Lord Deputies normally used their own servants to carry letters – an expensive arrangement; most could afford to do so and to await reimbursement for long periods. This may explain why the Westminster administration was slow to establish a state operated post in Ireland.

As the machinery of the Stuart state became more centralised and complex during the 1620s and 30s, an economical and reliable postal system and network was urgently needed. That system was developed in England by Thomas Withering by grafting his ideas onto the already existing state service: soon after, it was extended to Ireland.

### **The beginnings of the public Post Office**

The beginning of the public Post Office in the British Isles dates to 1635 when Charles I authorized Thomas Withering by royal proclamation to reorganise the post and post roads of England and granted him a monopoly on the carriage of all private letters.<sup>55</sup> Now, instead of costing the Crown over £3,000 *per annum* to run, the post would not be a burden to the Exchequer; rather, it was expected to contribute to it.<sup>56</sup> This proclamation also called for the establishment of an office in London through which all letters were to pass; consequently, the former ‘post’ became known as the Post Office. The focus of the proclamation was almost exclusively on England. Whereas it ordered that six post roads in Britain were to be maintained, the only reference to Ireland was that one post-road should run to ‘Hollyhead and from thence to Ireland, according to the provision made by the Lord Deputy, and council there.’<sup>57</sup> Withering established and placed the English Post Office on such a firm footing that it continued operating (albeit with difficulty) throughout the English Civil Wars (1642-51). It was a different story in Ireland.

Here the development of the Post Office during the late 1630s took place during Thomas Wentworth’s term as Lord Deputy (1633-9). His reform of the English administration in Dublin Castle, especially its finances, resulted in Ireland no longer

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<sup>54</sup> P. R. Mahaffy, preface to *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1655-1632*, pp xviii-xix.

<sup>55</sup> Patent roll (Chancery), ii, Chas. I, pt. 30, no. ii in dorso reproduced in C. R. Clear, *Thomas Withering and the birth of the postal service*, Post Office green paper no. 17 (London, 1935). The formation of the Post Office in England is a complicated and interesting story. However, although it was linked to the development of the post in Ireland, it lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>56</sup> Clear, *Thomas Withering*.

<sup>57</sup> *A proclamacion for the setting of the letter Office of England and Scotland* [31 July 1635], patent roll (Chancery), ii, Chas. I, pt. 30, no. ii in dorso reproduced in Clear, *Thomas Witherings*.

being a major draw on the English Exchequer.<sup>58</sup> In order to achieve his reforms, one of Wentworth's requirements was a state communications network similar to the Post Office network recently established in England by Withering. In 1638 Evan Vaughan arrived to Ireland, most likely on the recommendation of John Coke, Charles I's Secretary of State, and was tasked with establishing such a public postal system and post road network.<sup>59</sup> (Coke had been instrumental, along with Withering, in establishing the Post Office in England.) Nothing is known about Vaughan before his arrival in Ireland and little evidence survives about his early endeavours to create a postal network other than that he appears to have been successful in fulfilling his brief and proved a very able administrator. In 1641 he was complemented by the two chief justices, Sir William Parsons and Sir John Borlase, for having 'with diligence and care done his duty in the letter office.'<sup>60</sup> Several leading merchants of Dublin also expressed satisfaction with his work.<sup>61</sup> Vaughan survived the downfall of Wentworth and in 1642 received a further grant of the Irish Post Office from the Charles I.<sup>62</sup> However, soon after in 1646, he was imprisoned for carrying out his duties: having 'spent £2,400 in settling that postage', he was sent 'by the Duke of Ormond to Newcastle, and performed that journey in the King's service at great danger. For his loyalty he was imprisoned and suffered much.'<sup>63</sup>

### **The collapse and revival of the Post Office in the mid-seventeenth-century**

Nothing is known about the Post Office in Ireland for the next ten years and anecdotal evidence suggests that in the interim the civil postal network and system collapsed completely. During this time in Ireland the army carried its own dispatches together

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<sup>58</sup> Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland*, p. 217.

<sup>59</sup> Petition of Evan Vaughan to Charles II, 23 Nov. 1661 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1660-62*, p. 472. This information was given as evidence by Vaughan when he was in dispute with Samuel Bathurst some twenty years later. Almost all known information relating to the early Post Office in Ireland comes to light as a result of this dispute. John Coke (1563-1644) was one of Charles I's principal Secretaries of State with responsibility for domestic affairs. Although Withering is credited with establishing and reforming the public post in England during the 1630s, he did so with the cooperation and help of Coke. Like Strafford, Coke was a confidant of Charles I and Strafford and Coke were also close. Stafford even arranged for Coke to receive a grant of Irish land and vowed, 'I shall honour you all the Days of my Life' (*Earl of Strafforde's Letters and Dispatches*, 1.494, quoted in Michael B. Young, 'Coke, Sir John (1563-1644)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5828>, accessed 11 Nov. 2014]. Almost all sources relating of the Irish Post Office before the late 1700s were generated in the course of disputes within the Post Office or competitions for control of it involving rival political factions. Often the documents were generated years after the events described. Since most are in the form of a single document, we only get a glimpse of the dispute, or alternatively one side of the argument.

<sup>60</sup> Petition of Evan Vaughan to Charles II, 23 Nov. 1661 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1647-60*, p. 472.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> No copy of original grant has survived; we only know about it from Vaughan's petition – see *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

with those of the civil administration. It is likely that the army dispatch riders also carried a modest amount of commercial and private letters, when convenient. However, the military were not in favour of this: as Henry Cromwell commented in 1656 ‘The horse of the army havinge bin much wearyed, and his highness affayres much prejudiced for want of a post-office to convey publique letters.’<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the service provided by the army is likely to have been irregular and run at the discretion of local military commanders. By contrast, in England a postal service continued to function during the Civil Wars as both royalists and parliamentarians organised their own systems. In 1644 parliament appointed Edmund Prideaux, who had been closely linked with the parliament’s postal service since the beginning of the split between king and parliament, to the office of ‘Master of the Posts, Couriers and Messengers’.<sup>65</sup>

Raymond Gillespie sums up the state of Ireland in the early 1650s in the following terms: ‘The wars of the 1640s left a legacy of widespread destruction. Some of this was the result of armed combat, but more important was the economic and social dislocation that accompanied the war.’<sup>66</sup> To compound those difficulties, the plague struck: first reported in Galway in 1649, by 1651 it had spread throughout almost the entire country, with devastating effect.<sup>67</sup> At this time, the country was governed by the army with Henry Ireton, Cromwell’s son-in-law, as military governor.<sup>68</sup> In 1650 parliament appointed commissioners who were in effect the civil and military governors of Ireland; they continued to govern Ireland until the appointment of Charles Fleetwood, another son-in-law of Cromwell, as Lord Deputy in 1654. In that context, the official civil postal service, like all civil government services, struggled to recover. Writing from Kilkenny in October 1652, the parliamentary commissioners echoed Falkland’s earlier concerns when they briefed the Committee for Irish and Scottish affairs at Westminster about how badly the postal service had been impaired and the negative impact that this was having on efforts to conduct routine government business:

Since coming to the nation we have found the state to be much damnified, as likewise trade much discouraged through the obstruction of letters coming out of England to us, and our return of hence to London, by reason

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<sup>64</sup> Henry Cromwell to John Thurloe, 31 Mar. 1658 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe. Esq; Secretary, first to the Council of State and Afterwards to the two Protectors, Olivet and Richard*, ed. Thomas Birch (7 vols, London, 1742), vii, 39.

<sup>65</sup> *JHC*, 3, 1642-4, 619; J. A. Hamilton, Sean Kelsey, ‘Prideaux, Edmond [created Sir Edmond Prideaux, baronet, under the protectorate] (1601–1659)’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22782>, accessed 25 Nov. 2014].

<sup>66</sup> Gillespie, *Seventeenth-century Ireland*, p. 183.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>68</sup> Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland*, p. 17.

there hath [been] no provision made for the transportation of packets, but by the way of Dublin where by all the south-west parts of this nation have been much interrupted in their weekly correspondence and our public letters much retarded, which being represented to the commander-in-Chief upon landing he gave orders to Colonel Lawrence to write to one Mr. White of Henland [?Henllan] near Milford to send over all the packets in his hands and for the future to employ two packet boats betwixt Milford and Waterford, for which he is by contract to receive £28. 10. 0 per month.<sup>69</sup>

However, as early as May 1647 steps were taken to revive the Post Office service after Evan Vaughan returned to Ireland in the entourage of Cornet John Jones, one of the parliamentary commissioners. This time Vaughan was most likely sent by Edmond Prideaux who was then managing the Post Office for parliament, his official title being ‘master of the posts, messengers, and couriers.’<sup>70</sup> By early 1650 Vaughan had re-established regular communications with England using ‘two post barks between Milford Haven and the head-quarters of the army in Ireland, for better holding correspondence between those places, which he has set up and maintained for 14 months’. In return, he was to receive an immediate payment of £132 and another £200 for the following eight months. However, he had little success with developing inland communications owing to ongoing warfare.<sup>71</sup>

In 1652, when peace was restored and the task of replacing military-style governance with civil administration got under way, Vaughan set about re-establishing the inland public postal network. He produced two reports - the first in 1656, the second in 1659.<sup>72</sup> These give an indication of the speed of this early developmental phase. His 1656 report identified three post roads in operation – the Connaught road, Munster road and the great Northern Road or Ulster road, together with twenty-four post-towns. The Connaught road served four towns (Athlone, Castlerea, Loughrea and Galway), the

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Dunlop, *Ireland under the commonwealth; being a selection of documents relating to the government of Ireland from 1651 to 1659* (Manchester, 1913), p. 289. Two commissioners, Edmund Ludlow and John Jones, were appointed by parliament in June 1649; another two, John Weaver and Richard Salwey, were added later in the year.

<sup>70</sup> In 1653 Vaughan published a pamphlet, *A true Breviate of the great Oppressions and Injuries done to Evan Vaughan Post-Master of Ireland by Edmond Prediaux, Esq; Attorney General and Post-Master of England outlying his grievances*. This indicates when Vaughan returned to the Post Office in Ireland after the English Civil War.

<sup>71</sup> Council of State to Att.-Gen. Edmund Prideaux, 21 July 1651 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1651-1651*, p. 297.

<sup>72</sup> Thurloe’s postal accounts for the quarter ended 23 June 1659 (Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS a. 64, f.32; see also full list in *The inland posts, 1392-1672*, ed. J. W. M. Stone (London, 1987), pp 272-3.

Munster road served eight (Kilkenny, Clonmel, Tallow, Youghal, Cork, Cashel, Limerick and Gowran) and the Ulster road linked nine (Belturbet, Drogheda, Dundalk, Newry, Armagh, Derry, Antrim, Coleraine and Carrickfergus). By 1659 the number of post-towns had risen to forty-five (Map 1.1).

Throughout these early decades it was the state administration that led the way in founding and developing the postal network and system in Ireland. As already noted, it is likely that Vaughan first came to Ireland at Wentworth's request, dispatched by secretary of state Coke. When he returned in 1647 it was with Colonel John Jones, one of the parliamentary commissioners that governed Ireland. During the wars of the 1640s and early 1650s the army was obliged (grudgingly) to maintain the postal service. The military arm of the state thus guaranteeing the survival of a postal service and the recovery of the Post Office in Ireland.<sup>73</sup> However, in the immediate aftermath of the Confederate and Cromwellian wars, both civil and military divisions of the Dublin Castle administration shared a pressing need to re-establish a reliable and efficient official public Post Office network, system and service.

In England, although the postal network and system survived the Civil War almost intact, there were many changes in personnel both at local level and at Post Office headquarters in London. As war ended, a special postal committee was established by the Council of State: it recommended that parliament should take complete control of the Post Office.<sup>74</sup> The committee and parliament made it clear that the primary function of the Post Office was to serve the state. In March 1650 the Council of State issued an order in parliament that

... the offices of postmasters, inland and foreign, ought to be in the sole power and disposal of the Parliament. That it be referred to the Council of State to consider of the offices of postmasters, and of all the interests of those persons who claim any, how the same may be settled for the advantage and safety of the commonwealth, and to take order for the present management thereof.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Henry Cromwell to John Thurloe, 17 May 1656 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, v, 36.

<sup>74</sup> The *Calendars of state papers domestic* series for the Commonwealth era reflect how closely parliament scrutinised the Post Office; see also James Wilson Hyde, *The Post in farm and grant* (London, 1894). Although not an academic study, and without footnotes, Wilson Hyde clearly consulted state papers in the course of his research and his observations are accurate.

<sup>75</sup> Council of State day's proceedings, 21 Mar. 1650 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1650-1650*, p. 53.

The clause concerning the advantage and safety of the Commonwealth explicitly recognised that the Post Office should serve the state first and foremost. An ordinance issued four years later, during the protectorate in September 1654, also it made clear that the state's interests were paramount.<sup>76</sup> This ordinance related to an order and contract concerning John Manley's farm of the post.<sup>77</sup> (The ordinance contains much more detail than the later Act, featuring seventeen sections as compared to ten in the Act.) The preamble stated that Manley was to manage the post 'with most security and expedition in the Carriage and return of Letters, as well of the Publique as Private concernment'.

The said John Manley, by himself and his said Deputies, Agents, and under-Officers, shall, from time to time and at all times during the continuance of this Ordinance, safely and faithfully carry all ordinary and extraordinary Letters and Dispatches to or from His Highness, and to or from his Council, or Secretary of State, or any of them; And to and from all Members of the Legislative power, and to and from the Commissioners or Committee of the Admiralty or Navy, Generals of the Fleet, General Officers of the Army, Committee of the Army, Committee for Scotch and Irish Affairs, and that by the Common, Ordinary Male or other speedy and safe passage as the urgency of the occasion shall or may require. That for all other Letters and Packets to or from private persons, and for private occasions (and not at all relating to the persons and Publique Affairs mentioned in the former Article being absolutely free from Pay and Postage) he the said John Manley shall by himself his Agents, Deputies or under-Officers receive and take for the carriage and postage thereof only according to the Rates following, and no other or higher rates...<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, there was at this stage no mention of the post serving the interests of trade or commerce. Furthermore, the 'publique' were to pay for the conveyance of their private and commercial letters. The cost of such letters was stipulated in section two:

For every Letter to or from London, if a single Letter, two-pence, and if a double Letter four-pence. And for every Letter at a farther distance than eighty miles if a single Letter, three-pence if a double Letter, six-pence. And

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<sup>76</sup> An ordinance touching the Office of Postage of letters [2 Sept. 1654] in *Acts and ordinances of the Interregnum, 1649-1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait (3 vols, London, 1911), ii, 1007-13.

<sup>77</sup> Manley had no official title; he was known as 'farmer of the post'.

<sup>78</sup> An ordinance touching the Office of Postage of letters [2 Sept. 1654] in *Acts & ordinances*, ii, p. 1009.

for every Letter to or from Scotland, if a single Letter four-pence, if a double Letter eight-pence. And to or from Ireland, for every single Letter, six-pence, and every double Letter, twelve-pence, and for treble or greater Packets of Letters proportionably [sic].<sup>79</sup>

The ordinance also set out how the post was to operate. Manley's duties are detailed, and the requirement that he pay £10,000 for the farm of the post stipulated. The only other reference to Ireland was that Manley be 'hereby obliged to maintain one or more Packet Boats to pass and repass, if not hindred by Wind and weather, weekly between Milford and Waterford, and between Chester and Dublin'.<sup>80</sup>

Three years later, in 1657, the English parliament reinforced its control by passing 'An Act for the Settling of the Postage of England Scotland and Ireland'. In the long-term development of the Post Office in Ireland, this legislation proved important, making it clear that the Post Office in Ireland was firmly under the control of the Westminster parliament and that it was primarily expected to serve the needs of the state administration.<sup>81</sup> The opening lines of the 1657 Act provide an insight into what the Westminster perceived to be the main functions of the Post Office during the Commonwealth:

Whereas it has been found by experience, that the creating and Setting up of one General Post-Office, for the speedy conveying, and re-carrying of Letters by Post, to and from all Places within England, Scotland and Ireland, and several parts beyond the Seas, hath been and is best means, not onely to maintain a certain and constant Intercourse of Trade and Commerce all said places, to the great benefit of the people of these Nations, but also to Convey the Publique Dispatches, and to discover and prevent many dangers and wicked Designes...<sup>82</sup>

Thus, the Post Office was to facilitate trade, provide the state with a communications system, and could be used to assist in ensuring the security of the state. It is worth noting that although commerce may have been the first concern listed in the Act, it was not the principal 'master' of the Post Office at this stage.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Both the Act and the ordinance include much detail in relation to the hiring of horses. Local postmasters were granted a monopoly in hiring out horses to travellers, and this was regulated by the ordinance and the Act.

<sup>81</sup> An Act for the settling of the postage of England Scotland and Ireland [9 June 1657] in *Acts & ordinances*, ii, 1110-13.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



This and all subsequent Post Office Acts passed down to 1784 by the Westminster parliament applied to Ireland. The Irish Post Office, like the parliament and Dublin Castle administration, remained firmly under the control of Westminster. The head of the Post Office in Ireland was always appointed by Westminster, and except during an interlude between 1784 and 1831, the Post Office in Ireland remained a branch of the Post Office in London. The Act was also a significant landmark since it guaranteed that from then onwards, any revenue generated by the Irish Post Office went into the English Exchequer – an arrangement that was to prove contentious in Ireland in the context of growing Protestant patriotism during the 1700s. In short, the 1657 Act signalling a determination on the part of Westminster to exercise tight control over this increasingly important and lucrative organ of the Dublin Castle administration. It set down the organisational framework and identified priorities for the future development of the Post Office in Ireland, England and Scotland. In 1660, after the Restoration, the Act was replaced. The new Act (though more detailed) was very similar, highlighting the 1657 Act's enduring influence over the evolving service. But while that may be true in relation to the framework, the task of gauging the relationship between these legislative aspirations and actual trends in the development of the service is, of course, highly complex.<sup>83</sup>

It should be noted that when the ordinance was issued in September 1654, Oliver Cromwell ruled on his own with advice from the Council of State, which consisted of thirteen members, nine of whom were army officers.<sup>84</sup> The preponderance of military men may explain why no emphasis was placed on the mercantile aspect of the post's functions in the ordinance. By contrast, three years later, the Act (9 June 1657) was passed by the second protectorate parliament (17 September 1656 - 4 February 1658) in which many of the MPs would have understood the importance of trade and commerce. Although there was a growing awareness of the significance of trade and commerce to the prosperity and strength of the state, few Acts at the time referred specifically to trade and commerce.<sup>85</sup> The 1657 Act recognised that regular communications were a necessary element of any successful trading economy, which England was fast becoming.<sup>86</sup> The Act sought to organise and manage any such system during the

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<sup>83</sup> An Act for erecting and establishing a Post-Office, 12 Chas. II, c. 55 [Eng.] (17 Jan. 1660).

<sup>84</sup> Between the collapse of the Nominated Assembly, nicknamed the "Assembly of Saints" and also known as Barebone's parliament, in December 1653 and the meeting of the first Protectorate parliament on 3 September 1654, Cromwell and the Council of State ruled by decree.

<sup>85</sup> The major exceptions were the Wool Act, 14 Chas. II, c. 18 [Eng] (1662) and the Navigation Act, 9 Oct. 1651 [Eng.].

<sup>86</sup> J. A. Sharpe, *Early modern England: a social history, 1550-1760* (London, 2003), pp 133-56.

Commonwealth/Interregnum era, and ensured (as the previous ordinance had done) that, on the back of any such scheme, the state also acquired its own communication system. It achieved this by setting high charges, listed above, for commercial and private letters while its own mails were carried at no cost. The Act also encouraged and facilitated trade by ensuring an effective and regular post network and system and in the process garnered revenue for the state through collection of more tariff and levies.

The Commonwealth administration was constantly short of money. Army pay was almost always in arrears, the conquest of Ireland had cost in excess of £3,500,000 (much of which had been lent by adventurers who had to be reimbursed).<sup>87</sup> Hence, trade and commerce needed to be encouraged and aided.<sup>88</sup> But if there was any ambiguity in England concerning whom the Post Office served first, state or public, there was none in Ireland. Writing to John Thurloe, Secretary of State, in June 1656, the Council of State for Ireland consistently ranked the state administration first among those interests served by the Post Office since it facilitated state care ‘for the affaires of Ireland’ and ‘for the better dispatch of this public service’.<sup>89</sup> A similar rank order appears in certificates that Vaughan acquired in 1659 which acknowledge the benefits associated with a good postal system: ‘The Commonwealth gains ... Public business receives better attention and merchants’ needs are considered’.<sup>90</sup> However, in England, mercantile interests were beginning to emerge as the dominate drivers behind developments within the Post Office. In Ireland, this would not happen until the last quarter of the 1700s, particularly the 1790s.

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<sup>87</sup> Patrick J. Corish, ‘The Cromwellian regime, 1650-60’ in Moody, Martin & Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iii; Early modern Ireland*, pp 360-1.

<sup>88</sup> Governments in the early modern period rarely enacted legislation relating directly trade and commerce, although there was an increasing awareness of its importance as evidenced by the fact that the Commonwealth had a commission for the advancement of trade; see Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, p. 144. For precise figures see Allan I. Macinnes, *British revolution, 1629-1660* (London, 2005), pp 223-4. Many Acts did make passing reference to trade; for example, in 1654, ‘An ordinance to enable the Lord High Admirall to press Marriners, Saylers, and others for the service of the Navy’ included provision ‘for Guard of the Narrow Seas, preservation of trade, and for the necessarie defence of this Kingdome.’ – see ‘An ordinance to enable the Lord High Admirall to press Marriners, Saylers, and others for the service of the Navy’, Feb. 1654 in *Acts & ordinances*, ii, 646-47. However, in 1654, the year that the ordinance concerning Post Office was issued, only one other ordinance related directly to trade; it allowed ‘such soldiers as have served the Commonwealth in the late wars to exercise any Trade’<sup>88</sup>. Two years later when the Postage Act was passed, again only Act related directly to trade was passed; it concerned improved the packing of butter (26 June 1657).

<sup>89</sup> The Council of Ireland to Secretary John Thurloe, 25 June 1656 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, v, 159-73.

<sup>90</sup> Certificate by the earl of Huntington, Sir Charles Coote, and other gentlemen of Connaught, testifying that Mr. Evan Vaughan four years ago settled a weekly correspondence from the city of Dublin to Connaught, 4 June 1659 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1647-1660*, pp 659, 686, 688.

It is worth stating that the state administration was under no obligation to organise and operate a postal network; it could easily have left this to private enterprise. For instance, the postal system of the Holy Roman Empire at this time was operated by the Taxis family.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, several individuals in England competed for and were prepared to organise and operate a private Post Office.<sup>92</sup> This was reflected in the succession of Acts concerning the Post Office, passed throughout the 1600 and 1700s, which sought to ensure the state administration's monopoly not only over the communications system but also the revenue that it generated for the English Exchequer. By doing so, it was able to exert a certain degree of privileged control over the circulation of information and to monitor people's movements and their contacts.

The September 1654 ordinance and the 1657 Act explicitly recognised the Post Office's role in conveying 'the Publique Dispatches'. Just how heavily the state administration in Ireland had come to rely on the Post Office was demonstrated some three years later when in October 1660 Charles Coote, Earl of Mountrath, and William Bury (two of the three commissioners who assumed responsibility for governing Ireland following the departure of Henry Cromwell in June 1659) informed Edward Nicholas, Charles II's Secretary of State, that

We have many communications with magistrates, commanders of garrisons, &c, through the country, ... This involves the posting of voluminous bundles of accounts, &c., and the charge for postage of these is very heavy. We trust that neither ourselves nor the officials in Ireland to whom we have referred will be required to meet these charges out of our own or their own pockets. If these charges are put on them local officers will be unwilling to receive letters from us, which would be prejudicial to his Majesty's service.<sup>93</sup>

Clearly, both military and civil arms of the state relied heavily on the Post Office to carry out routine business and hence, throughout the 1650s Dublin Castle continued to

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<sup>91</sup> See Campbell-Smith, *Master of the Post*, p. 31. In 1680 William Dockwra and Robert Murray succeeded in establishing a private penny post in London; however, it was short lived. When a penny post service proved successful, it was absorbed into the Post Office. The Taxis family operated the post for the Holy Roman Empire since the early 1500s. At this time Count Lamoral II Claudius Franz of Thurn and Taxis (1621-76) was head of the family. The family continued to organise the post in many parts of Europe until the mid-1800s.

<sup>92</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office: a history*, pp 42, 43.

<sup>93</sup> The earl of Mountrath and William Bury to Secretary Edward Nicholas, 17 Oct. 1660 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1600-62*, p. 53.

be the driving force behind its infrastructural expansion, specifically the development of post towns and post roads. Of the forty-five towns identified as post towns on Vaughan's 1655 list, twenty-seven were garrison towns (Table 1.1): the Ulster road, for example, had nine towns, and all except Armagh had a military garrison.<sup>94</sup> Of the forty-five post towns featured in Vaughan's 1659 report, twenty-seven had large garrisons. As the civilian postal network replaced the military one, the military too came to rely on it for its own internal communication between garrisons and for conduct of business with Dublin Castle.

**Table 1.1 Post towns in Ireland in 1659**

Antrim	Callan	<i>Enniscorthy</i>	Loughbrickland	Strabane
Armagh	<i>Carlow</i>	<i>Enniskillen</i>	Mullingar	Tallow
<i>Athlone</i>	<i>Carrickfergus</i>	<i>Galway</i>	Naas	<i>Waterford</i>
<i>Ballinasloe</i>	<i>Cashel</i>	<i>Kilkenny</i>	<i>Nenagh</i>	<i>Wexford</i>
Ballough	<i>Clonmel</i>	<i>Kinsale</i>	Newry	Youghal
Bandon	<i>Coleraine</i>	Loughrea	<i>New Ross</i>	
<i>Belfast</i>	<i>Cork</i>	Maynooth	Omagh	
<i>Belturbet</i>	<i>Drogheda</i>	<i>Limerick</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	
Birr	<i>Dundalk</i>	Lisburn	<i>Roscrea</i>	
Boyle	<i>Dungannon</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>	<i>Sligo</i>	

**Sources:** *Cal. S. P. Ireland, 1647-60*, pp 323, 687; Thurloe's postal accounts for the quarter ending 23 June 1659 (Bodleian Rawlinson Library MS a. 64, f.32); *The inland posts, 1392-1672*, ed. Stone, pp 272-3. Note: those italicised were also garrison towns.

As the above table illustrates, by 1659 the Irish postal network was effectively re-established.<sup>95</sup> In that year it cost £1,932 16s. 8d. to run the Post Office. The Dublin office employed ten officials at a cost of £730 of which £350 was divided between eight office workers.<sup>96</sup> These employees would have rated and sorted the letters, and collected money when the letters were called for. Vaughan and Samuel Bathurst, joint postmasters, each received £200. Vaughan continued in the employ of the Irish Post Office until 1663.

Like Withering in England, Vaughan invested much of his own money in establishing the network in Ireland, especially in hiring boats to serve as packets carrying the post across the Irish Sea 'Between Milford Haven and headquarters of the army in Ireland'.<sup>97</sup> He would have done so in anticipation of reimbursement by the Postmaster General for the initial outlay, and of making a profit through charging for

<sup>94</sup> See a list of garrisons which are thought fit to be constantly kept if any invasion into Ireland by a foreign enemy, 1655 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1647-60*, p. 687.

<sup>95</sup> Thurloe's postal accounts for the quarter ended 23 June 1659 (Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS a. 64, f.32; see also full list in *The inland posts, 1392-1672*, ed. Stone, pp 272-3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Council of State to Att.-Gen. Edmund Prideaux, 25 June 1651 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1651-1651*, p. 297.

the carriage of letters. Down to 1654 all profit went to whoever held the grant of the post from the king or whoever operated it for parliament. It must be remembered that the official public post was still a new venture, and contemporaries did not yet fully realise just how lucrative the farm of the Post Office was. Withering and Vaughan ensured that the postmen along the different roads were paid from the profits or alternatively from their own pockets if no profit was generated.

Whereas in England such initial investment soon returned a profit, surviving evidence suggests that this was not so in Ireland as the country fell into chaos following the outbreak of the 1641 rebellion. Although the post continued to function (badly) during the Civil Wars in England, its management was in a state of flux, with many individuals claiming the right to operate the post. This situation changed in 1650 when the Council of State ordered

that the offices of postmasters, inland and foreign, ought to be in the sole power and disposal of the Parliament. That it be referred to the Council of State to consider of the offices of postmasters, and of all the interests of those persons who claim any, how the same may be settled for the advantage and safety of the commonwealth, and to take order for the present management thereof.<sup>98</sup>

Two days after this order was issued on 21 March 1650, the Council ordered that ‘Mr. Prideaux, attorney-general, was to manage the business of the inland post, and be accountable to the commonwealth for the profits quarterly’<sup>99</sup>. Parliament spent the next four years debating how the Post Office should be managed and decided in 1654 to farm it out to the highest bidder.<sup>100</sup>

When Vaughan set about re-establishing a regular Irish Sea crossing in 1647 he paid for the hire of packet boats out of his own pocket and was to be reimbursed by the Postmaster General, Prideaux. Initially this arrangement worked. He received two instalments, one in April 1650 of £200, and another of £250, for supplying two post barks to ‘ply between Milford Haven and the headquarters of the Lord Lieutenant of

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<sup>98</sup> Council of State day’s proceedings, 21 Mar. 1650 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1650-1650*, p. 53.

<sup>99</sup> Council of State day’s proceedings, 23 Mar. 1650 in *ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>100</sup> The terms ‘farm’ and ‘grant’ have the same meaning. Charles I granted the post as a favour while during the Commonwealth, the parliament farmed it to the highest bidder. After the Restoration the king granted it for a fee.

Ireland.’<sup>101</sup> However, the arrangement soon run into difficulties and throughout the 1650s Vaughan was engaged in protracted wrangling over reimbursement with two Postmasters General in London, Edmund Prideaux (1645-53) and John Thurloe (1655-60). Vaughan’s being on bad terms with both Prediaux and Thurloe was not helped by his being a royalist whereas both Prideaux and Thurloe were parliamentarians. In June 1651 he petitioned the Council of State for reimbursement of his outlay on the Milford Haven route<sup>102</sup> and in July Prideaux was ordered to make payments to Vaughan. Evidently, he failed to do so as the following November Vaughan was still seeking payment.<sup>103</sup> In 1653 Vaughan went so far as to publish a pamphlet in London outlining his grievances against the English Postmaster.<sup>104</sup> In it, he alleged that Prideaux had stopped 12s. a week ‘of his Sallary; Notwithstanding, the said Prediaux commings-in then was about Four thousand pounds a year raised for him, by the industry and labour of the said Evan Vaughan’ and accused him of being greedy for money.<sup>105</sup> According to Vaughan, at the request of the Council of State, Cromwell and Lord Deputy Ireton, he ‘did settle what states he could in Munster ... settle Stages between Dublin and London-Derry, and did the same upon his own charge; as also went into Scotland with a Pacquet to the Lord General [Cromwell]’.<sup>106</sup> He claimed that on one occasion, when he was out of Dublin, Prideaux tried to replace him with a Major Swift. However, Vaughan visited Cromwell who was campaigning in Scotland, ‘Whereupon his Excellency presented him another Commission, expressing, that none should be employed in Dublin as Post Master, but the said Vaughan, or his Deputy’.<sup>107</sup>

In 1654, after much deliberation, parliament finally decided to farm out the Post Office: John Manley, a captain in the parliamentary army, paid £10,000 for the privilege.<sup>108</sup> This was the first time money was paid directly to the state for the farm of

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<sup>101</sup> Warrants from the Council of State, writ of assistances for Evan Vaughan, 20 Apr. 1650 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1650-1650, p. 536.

<sup>102</sup> Petition of Evan Vaughan, postmaster in Ireland, referred to the Irish Committee, 6 June 1651 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1651-1651, p. 239.

<sup>103</sup> Council of State to Att.-Gen. Edmund Prideaux, 25 July 1651 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1651-1651, p. 297; Council of State day’s proceedings, petition of Evan Vaughan referred to the Irish Committee, 20 Nov. 1651 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1651-1652, p. 28.

<sup>104</sup> *A true Breviate of the great Oppressions and Injuries done to Evan Vaughan Post-Master of Ireland.* This author is unsure if this is a pamphlet or an actual copy of his petition to the Council of State. In any case, it is an eight-page document outlining in detail Vaughan’s grievances with Prideaux.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 4-5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Two figures are given for Manley’s farm of the post. In June 1653 he bid £8,259 19s. 11¾d. and was one of the under bidders – see offers made to the Posts’ Committee for the farm of the Post Office, inland and foreign, 29 June 1653 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1652-1653, p. 450. From the state papers it is evident that there was some disquiet about the manner in which he acquired the farm. In September the following year he was to pay £10,000 – see an ordinance touching on the Office of Postage of letters, inland and foreign,

the Post Office in Ireland. Previously, whoever was granted the Post Office by the king or operated it for parliament kept the profits for himself. Although Manley was granted the profits, Prideaux remained Postmaster General. Manley's contract lasted only two years as parliament decided for security reasons that one of the Secretaries of State should hold the farm. In 1657 John Thurloe, Secretary of State, who had been Postmaster General since 1655, acquired the farm for £10,000, the same sum as Manley had paid.<sup>109</sup>

Thurloe, like Prideaux before him, was anxious to replace Vaughan although his motive for doing so is unknown. It is possible that Vaughan may not have wished to act as Thurloe's spy in Dublin. Thurloe may not have trusted the royalist Vaughan. But the most likely explanation is that Vaughan was still pursuing his claim for monies owed to him. There is some evidence to suggest that soon after Thurloe became Postmaster General and even before he acquired the farm, he may have already been attempting to replace Vaughan. In April 1656 Henry Cromwell and the Council of Ireland wrote to Thurloe, expressing satisfaction with Vaughan's work:

... since which the said Vaughan is returned to Dublin, and hath given us so satisfactory an account of his care and diligence exercised in settling effectually, as he hopes, the post stages in the most usual places of Ireland, much conducing to his highness service and publick advantage.<sup>110</sup>

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2 Sept. 1664 in *Acts & ordinances*, ii, 1009. Although officially Manley paid £8,259, he was said to have paid £10,000 – see Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 41.

<sup>109</sup> Timothy Venning, 'John Thurloe' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27405>, accessed 18 Oct. 2015].

<sup>110</sup> The Council of Ireland to Secretary John Thurloe, 17 Apr. 1656 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, iv, 483).





In spite of such positive endorsement, soon after Thurloe secured the farm and had complete control of the Post Office, in January 1658 he informed Henry Cromwell that he was sending over Samuel Bathurst to take up the position of Deputy Postmaster in Ireland.<sup>111</sup> Thurloe already had a man in the Dublin Post Office, Thomas Talbott, who reported directly to him.<sup>112</sup> Little is known about Talbott – he only appears in half a dozen documents concerning the Post Office. However, these indicate that he held a senior position and may have been appointed by Thurloe. Talbott apparently made accusations of misconduct against Vaughan who took him to court in a bid to defend his reputation and ensure that he retained his position.<sup>113</sup>

Two documents concerning the court case survive among Thurloe's state papers and offer insights into the workings of the Post Office in Ireland at this time.<sup>114</sup> The first, a letter from Thomas Talbott to Thurloe, sets out his accusations against Vaughan. The second, the 'Pledge of the prosecution', outlines Vaughan's case. In his letter Talbott accuses Vaughan of fraud and of unsuccessfully attempting to replace some provincial postmasters who were loyal to him with his own. (At the time Vaughan seems to have been in prison for non-payment of debts.) Talbott also stated that Vaughan and his wife lived on a farm eight miles from town and only came into the office once a week, although this is at odds with evidence given later in 1662).<sup>115</sup> Talbott revealed incidental details about the Post Office at that time. He claimed that he was in the process of establishing a post road into Mayo but evidently this came to naught since Mayo was not made accessible to the post until Newport became a post-town some seventy years later in 1729.<sup>116</sup> He also complained that many letters were carried by private ships and 'by private foot-posts which hinders the office £500 a year.'<sup>117</sup> How true these accusations were is unclear and how reliable Talbott's evidence was is open to question. Soon after, Talbott fell out of favour with Thurloe and disappeared from the record. Thurloe was intent upon replacing Vaughan with his preferred man, Samuel Bathurst, who had no experience in the Post Office but, as will soon be revealed, had previously worked for Thurloe in the espionage field.

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<sup>111</sup> John Thurloe to Henry Cromwell, 18 Jan. 1658 in *ibid.*, vii, 594.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Talbott to John Thurloe, 22 Dec. 1658 in *ibid.*, 576.

<sup>113</sup> Evan Vaughan to Secretary John Thurloe, 15 Dec. 1658 in *ibid.*, 564-5; County of the city of Dublin pledges of prosecution in *ibid.*, 577.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Talbott to John Thurloe, 22 Dec. 1658 in *ibid.*, 576-7.

<sup>115</sup> Documents relating to the management of the postal service in Ireland, affidavit of William Brand, 7 Jan. 1682 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1600-62*, pp 682-4.

<sup>116</sup> John Watson *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1729), p. 37.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Talbott to John Thurloe, 22 Dec. 1658 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, vii, 577.

Thurloe informed Henry Cromwell in January 1658 that he was sending Bathurst to Ireland.<sup>118</sup> In late 1658 and early 1659, a clearly vulnerable Vaughan rallied support on both sides of the Irish Sea, soliciting character references. At least three are recorded in the state papers, one each from the mayors of Carrickfergus and Coleraine, and another from the ‘gentlemen of Connaught’.<sup>119</sup> These references were signed by important parliamentarians and by ex-and future royalists. Signatories of the Connaught document included the earl of Huntington in England and Sir Charles Coote of Mountrath, Queen’s County, first Earl of Mountrath (1660) who at the time as president of Connaught had ‘command of all of the protestant forces in west Ulster and north Connacht’.<sup>120</sup> Coote had been elected MP for Leitrim in 1640 for the Irish parliament, was later elected to all three of the protectorate parliaments at Westminster for Galway and Mayo, and was a trusted friend of Henry Cromwell, Lord Deputy of Ireland.<sup>121</sup> John Galland, later high sheriff of Antrim, was a signatory of the Coleraine certificate.<sup>122</sup> Many other high-ranking officials also signed these references.

Vaughan made several trips to London to present his case. While there, he enlisted the help of Lord Broghill, Roger Boyle (later first Earl of Orrery) and at the time MP for Cork in the Westminster parliament, who wrote to Thurloe, expressing his satisfaction with Vaughan.<sup>123</sup> If in fact the latter was removed from the office, it was only for a very short time since a William Brand, who may have worked in the Post Office at the time, later testified in an affidavit that

Mr. Vaughan, having been put out, went to London, and agreed with Mr. Thurloe that he and Captain Bathurst should have the office in common. Vaughan then returned, and, as a result of his return, the arrangements of the post office improved. Deponent, who was in the post office, witnessed these improvements.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Secretary John Thurloe to Henry Cromwell, 18 Jan. 1658 in *ibid.*, 594.

<sup>119</sup> Certificate for Mr. Evan Vaughan, 18 Jan. 1658 in *Cal. S. P. Ire. 1647-60*, p. 659; certificate of the mayor, aldermen and burgesses of Coleraine, 22 Apr. 1658 in *ibid.*, p. 686; certificate of the earl of Huntington, Sir Charles Coote, and other gentlemen of Connaught, 4 June 1658 in *ibid.*, p. 688.

<sup>120</sup> Aidan Clarke, ‘Coote, Sir Charles’ in *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/>, accessed 18 Nov. 2013].

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Maxwell Gaven, ‘High sheriffs of the County of Antrim’ in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd ser., 11, no. 2 (Apr. 1905), pp 78-83.

<sup>123</sup> Roger Boyle, Lord Broghill to Secretary John Thurloe, 20 Nov. 1658 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, vii, 522.

<sup>124</sup> Documents relating to the management of the postal service in Ireland, affidavit of William Brand, 7 Jan. 1662 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1600-62*, pp 682-4.

Armed with such glowing character references and backed by powerful allies on both sides of the Irish Sea, it was little wonder that Vaughan held onto his job.

However, he did have to work with Bathurst who arrived in Ireland in February 1659. Soon, Bathurst had fallen out with both Vaughan and Talbott. Writing to Thurloe within weeks of his arrival, Bathurst explained: 'I thought fit to suspend my resolutions as to Mr. Vaughan and captain Talbot (they being either most obnoxious, or least use full, and under the greatest sallerys) until I do understand the further pleasure of your lordship or your deputy general in England.'<sup>125</sup> Vaughan and Bathurst continued to quarrel. On one occasion, in February 1660, when Vaughan was in London on official government business, Bathurst took advantage of his absence; he 'put his brother-in-law into the post office, and, for this purpose only, moved out an experienced man.'<sup>126</sup> Another clash arose over occupancy of the living quarters attached to the Post Office where Vaughan and his family resided. Initially Bathurst had occupied these rooms so that his wife could store her possessions there but gradually he took over more and more of the premises. He was also said to have 'detained from Mrs. Vaughan the letters her husband sent her.'<sup>127</sup> Even after the Restoration in 1660, the quarrel dragged on, at least until 1663. However, Vaughan ensured that he had supportive allies in influential positions and on this occasion, it was Bathurst who found himself out of favour. Sometime in 1663, Vaughan petitioned the king regarding his predicament. The Duke of Ormonde, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, was instructed by Charles II to give Vaughan 'just relief'.<sup>128</sup> Thereafter, he disappears from the historical record.

What information we have about Evan Vaughan was largely generated in the course of the disputes between him and his masters in London. The character references gathered in his defence, signed by men of importance within the English civil and military administration in Dublin Castle, and from all sides of the English political divide (royalist and parliamentarian) in Ireland at the time (1658-61) testify to his ability. Furthermore, the fact that several merchants signed these testimonies strongly suggests that Vaughan was an able administrator whose stewardship of the post evidently enhanced their capacity to conduct business. Twice he successfully established a postal system and network in Ireland. Rather unusually for the holder of an

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<sup>125</sup> Samuel Bathurst to John Thurloe, 22 Feb. 1659 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, vii, 640.

<sup>126</sup> Documents relating to the management of the postal service in Ireland, affidavit of William Brand, 7 Jan. 1662 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1600-62*, pp 682-4.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Petition to Charles II of Evan Vaughan, c. 30 Dec. 1663 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1663-65*, p. 327.

important and politically sensitive position such as that of postmaster, and in the face of strong challenges from opponents within the Post Office, he retained that position and worked with whichever faction was in power in Dublin Castle – first Wentworth, later the Cromwellian administration and finally, the royalist Restoration administration – a compelling testament to his ability. The Post Office that he established and re-established in Ireland grew steadily from the 1650s to the point that when he left office c.1663 it had become indispensable to the workings of the Dublin Castle administration. Vaughan, therefore, can rightfully be regarded as the founding father of the Post Office in Ireland.

### **Bathurst, bickering and intelligence-gathering**

Whereas Vaughan appears to have been widely regarded, few had anything good to say about Bathurst. Having been dispatched to Ireland in 1659 by John Thurloe, Oliver Cromwell's Secretary of State and spy master, Bathurst quickly proved his capabilities and loyalty by opening letters and keeping Thurloe informed of events in Ireland.<sup>129</sup> Thurloe as postmaster general had unlimited access to all inland mail that passed through London and, most importantly, all foreign letters. His spying activities within the Post Office have been well documented.<sup>130</sup> In 1658 Henry Cromwell, Lord Deputy of Ireland (1675-59), in admiration and gratitude, wrote to Thurloe: 'Really it is a wonder you can pick so many locks leading into the hearts of wicked men as you do; and it is a mercy we ought to owe that God has made your labours therein so successful.'<sup>131</sup> One of Thurloe's chief means of gathering intelligence was opening private letters sent through the official post. Of course, such interception and opening of letters by the authorities was not new. As early as 1321, during the reign of Edward II (1307-27), writs were issued allowing the interception and examination of letters. The constable of Dover and warden of the Cinque Ports, the mayor and bailiffs of Lincoln, and nine other towns were authorised to 'stop all letters concerning which sinister

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<sup>129</sup> Secretary John Thurloe to Henry Cromwell, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 18 Jan. 1658 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, vii, 594); for a detailed study of Thurloe's life and career see Philip Aubrey, *Mr Secretary Thurloe: Cromwell's Secretary of State, 1652-1660* (London, 1990).

<sup>130</sup> On spying and the Post Office see *Report from the Secret Committee on the Post Office, together with the appendix ... 1844*, p. 95, H.C. 1844 (582) xiv; C. H. Firth, 'Thurloe and the Post Office' in *English Historical Review*, 13, no. 51 (July 1898), pp 527-33; Susan E. Whyman, 'Postal censorship in England' (paper presented at a conference on the history of censorship hosted by the Centre for the Study of Books and Media, Princeton University – available at the Centre's website [<http://web.princeton.edu/sites/english/csbn/>], accessed 18 Oct. 2015).

<sup>131</sup> Henry Cromwell to John Thurloe, 31 Mar. 1658 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, vii, 39.

suspicious might arise' and to intercept and open letters.<sup>132</sup> In 1641, while Thomas Withering had the grant of the Post Office, he was instructed by a committee of the House of Lords that all letters to and from abroad were to be viewed by them before dispatch.<sup>133</sup> During the Civil Wars in England and the immediate aftermath, it was common practice to open letters for intelligence-gathering purposes. The 1657 Post Office Act acknowledged the reality of (and indeed justified) the interception which had gone on since the beginnings of the post in both England and Ireland, the aim of which was '... to discover and prevent many dangers and wicked Designes, which has been and are daily contrived against the Peace and Welfare of this Commonwealth.....'. The Act, therefore, gave official recognition to a longstanding practice.

In 1660 on the Restoration Charles II a new Act (12 Ch II c. 35) which was binding for Ireland was passed, replacing Cromwell's legislation.<sup>134</sup> Although this Act was much more detailed than its 1657 predecessor, unlike the latter, it featured no mention of the Post Office being used for intelligence-gathering purposes. Yet the patent issued to Henry Bishop of Henfield, Sussex, who after the Restoration acquired the farm of the post for £21,500, included an undertaking that he 'shall permit and suffer the said Secretaries of State .... to have the survey and inspecon [inspection] of all letters w<sup>th</sup>in y<sup>e</sup> said office.'<sup>135</sup> While Bishop had the farm, there were many complaints about the slow rate of delivery and about letters being opened in England.<sup>136</sup> Hence, three years after Bishop acquired the farm and before his term expired, he was replaced by Daniel O'Neill whose patent included a similar clause, with the added phrase 'except by immediate Warrant of our Principal Secretaries of state'. In practice, however, that regulation appears not to have been observed and throughout the 1660s the Post Office continued to fulfil the vitally important role of gathering intelligence.<sup>137</sup> This clandestine aspect of Post Office operations was not to be reviewed again until 1844 when a Secret Committee report acknowledged that 'no reasonable doubt can be entertained that the Governments of the different Monarchs who reigned between 1660

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<sup>132</sup> *Report from the Secret Committee on the Post Office, together with the appendix ... 1844*, p. 95, H.C. 1844 (582) xiv, 505.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101, H.C. 1844 (582) xiv, 505, app., xiv; Hemmeon, *The history of the British Post Office*, p. 18.

<sup>134</sup> Post Office Act, 12 Chas II, c. 35 [Eng.] (17 Jan. 1660).

<sup>135</sup> Both Bishop's and O'Neill's patents were reproduced in the *Report from the Secret Committee on the Post Office, together with the appendix ... 1844*, pp 76-8, 81-5, 85-9, H. C. 1844 (582) xiv, 505.

<sup>136</sup> Campbell-Smith, *Master of the Post*, pp 37-9.

<sup>137</sup> Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and espionage in the reign of Charles II, 1660-1685* (Cambridge, 2002) – see especially chapter two which focuses on the Post Office.

and 1711, had frequently recourse to the practise of opening Letters.’<sup>138</sup> Undoubtedly when Bathurst was appointed as deputy postmaster to Ireland in 1659, his instructions from Thurloe included using the Post Office for surveillance and intelligence-gathering.

As noted above, Bathurst had already served Thurloe in the espionage field. He was a cousin of the English parliamentary politician and soldier, William Jephson, who had very close ties with Ireland. Jephson had inherited Mallow Castle and estate in County Cork from his mother. He took a keen interest in Irish affairs at Westminster and was a close friend and confidant of Lord Inchiquin.<sup>139</sup> While serving as Henry Cromwell’s ambassador to Sweden, he used Bathurst’s London address in ‘Rope-maker’s alley, *neare* Moore-fields’ to send his intelligence reports to Thurloe, as indeed did others.<sup>140</sup>

Bathurst began intercepting letters almost immediately after he took up his position in Ireland. William Brand, an employee of the Post Office in Dublin, in an affidavit taken in 1662 by Nathaniel Hobart Master of Chancery, stated: ‘Mr. Bathurst used to get the English mail contrary to Mr. Vaughan’s wish, when he could and used to have the letters opened.’<sup>141</sup> A similar complaint was made on behalf of the merchants of Ireland by Edward Griffith, John Cooke and Robert Trueman. They too were critical of the poor service provided by Bathurst. Yet, this was all to no avail. Despite being unpopular with supporters of both parliamentarians and royalists, Bathurst retained his position even after the Restoration, indicating that he must have been regarded as efficient in supplying useful information to the Dublin Castle. However, Bathurst’s stay in Ireland was short, lasting only six years. Just as his predecessor, Vaughan, was unpopular with his political masters in London, soon after the change of regime that came with the Restoration in 1660, Bathurst found himself out of favour.

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<sup>138</sup> *Report from the Secret Committee on the Post Office together with the appendix ... 1844*, p. 7 (582), H.C. 1844, xiv, 505.

<sup>139</sup> William Jephson (1609/10-1658), politician and soldier, was the son and heir of Sir John Jephson of Froyle, Hampshire, and Elizabeth Norreys, daughter and heir of Sir Thomas Norreys of Mallow Castle, County Cork. Raised in Hampshire, but with estates in County Cork, Jephson became closely associated with Lord Inchiquin, though he failed to persuade him to return to the parliamentary side after he defected to the royalists in 1648. He was a conscientious member of the committee of Irish affairs founded in July 1645. Jephson was elected for County Cork and Youghal in the parliaments of 1654 and 1656. His activities in parliament encouraged Cromwell to appoint him envoy to Karl X of Sweden, whose war with Denmark threatened English trade. Patrick Little, ‘Jephson, William (1609/10–1658)’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14769>, 28 Nov. 2014].

<sup>140</sup> Major-general William Jephson to Secretary John Thurloe, 6 Oct 1657 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, vi, 550-1; a letter of intelligence, Edw. Halford to Samuel Bathurst, 23 Feb. 1658 in *ibid.*, 815-6.

<sup>141</sup> Documents relating to the management of the postal service in Ireland, affidavit of William Brand, 7 Jan. 1662.

In 1663, before Bishop's contract had expired, Daniel O'Neill acquired the farm or grant of the Post Office, the first and only Irishman to do so, and replaced Bishop as postmaster-General. O'Neill was a favourite of Charles II and obtained the farm for £21,500, the same amount as Bishop had paid.<sup>142</sup> A nephew of Owen Roe O'Neill (c.1558-1649) and relative of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone (c.1550-1616), he was a prominent royalist, who fought alongside Charles II during the Civil War and followed him into exile. While in exile, O'Neill undertook many dangerous missions on behalf of the king.<sup>143</sup> Charles commented on O'Neill's death in 1664 in a letter to his sister, Minette (Duchess of Orleans): 'Poor Oneale died this afternoon of an ulser in his gutts; he was as honest a man as ever lived; I am sure I have lost a very good servant by it.'<sup>144</sup>

One of O'Neill's first actions as postmaster-general was to attempt to replace Bathurst with his preferred man, Robert Ward. However, Bathurst claimed to have had an agreement with Bishop concerning the Post Office in Ireland; he was, he asserted, 'not merely a deputy but a partner with Colonel Bishop in the letters patents for the postage of Ireland, by a grant comprised in articles of agreement between himself and Bishop'.<sup>145</sup> The king was soon involved in the proceedings. In April 1663, only weeks after O'Neill was appointed, Charles II wrote to the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Ormonde, in a show of support for Ward and O'Neill. He issued an instruction that Ward, 'known by us to be loyal', was to replace Bathurst who had been appointed by Thurloe.<sup>146</sup> Many letters were exchanged between Charles II's Secretary of State, Henry Bennet, the future Lord Arlington, and the Lord Lieutenant, concerning this matter. In one communication addressed to the duke of Ormonde in August 1663, the king repeated the reasons for Bathurst's removal:

When Colonel Henry Bishop gave up what interest he had in the post office of Ireland we by letters patents dated 19 April, 1663, appointed Daniel O'Neale, a Groom of our Bedchamber, to succeed him for a certain time, who, by our instructions, is to settle "it" on such persons as have been constantly loyal to us and our father. Samuel Bathurst, who was appointed postmaster by Thurloe, under the late usurpers, and who served

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<sup>142</sup> Indenture of lease to Dan O'Neale, 29 Apr. 1663 in *Cal. S. P., dom., 1663-1664*, p. 122.

<sup>143</sup> Donal F. Cregan, 'An Irish cavalier: Daniel O'Neill in exile and Restoration, 1651-64' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 5 (1965), pp 42-77.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>145</sup> Lord Lieutenant, James Butler, Duke of Ormonde to Daniel O'Neale, 9 Sept. 1663 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1663-65*, p. 232.

<sup>146</sup> Draft of Charles II's letter to Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, for Robert Ward, Apr. 1663 in *ibid.*, p. 70.

under Scot, Secretary to the remnant of the pretended Long Parliament after the deposing of the usurper Richard Cromwell, is now controlling the post office and pretends that he has a contract with Colonel Bishop for three years yet to come; but the Attorney-General, who has perused the contract, says that it is only a deputation and ends with Bishop's resignation. You shall command Bathurst not to obstruct Ward.<sup>147</sup>

Nonetheless, the Duke of Ormonde, the Lord Lieutenant, was in favour of retaining Bathurst who was summoned to London by Secretary of State Bennet at the king's request: he resisted doing so.<sup>148</sup> Then in February 1664 Ormonde informed Bennet that 'Bathurst has not for some time had anything to do with the postage'.<sup>149</sup> Bathurst did subsequently comply with the summons to London: in March 1664 he was listed as missing from the Irish parliament but present in England.<sup>150</sup> However, no further details of this dispute are recorded; nor is it known if in fact Robert Ward became deputy postmaster for Ireland.

During his time in Ireland Bathurst was embroiled in disputes with many officials. On one occasion he attempted to impose a tax (charge) on all official letters, except those of six named 'officials', one being the king.<sup>151</sup> Yet, in spite of his unpopularity, he possessed skills that were clearly regarded as vital to the Dublin Castle administration. In a letter to Secretary Bennet in London in December 1662, the Duke of Ormonde remarked that 'Mr. Bathurst, the Postmaster, has a good reputation and I should like to see him rewarded.'<sup>152</sup> Indeed he sat as MP for Sligo in the 1661 parliament.<sup>153</sup> It is striking that notwithstanding these internal disputes, by the early 1660s the Post Office in Ireland was running a regular service which was, by and large, to the satisfaction of both government administrators and private users.

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<sup>147</sup> King Charles II to Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, 21 Aug. 1663 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1600-62*, p. 207.

<sup>148</sup> Secretary Henry Bennet to Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, 1 Dec. 1663 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1663-65*, p. 308; Henry Bennet, Lord Arlington, later served as Postmaster General (1667-85).

<sup>149</sup> Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde to Secretary Henry Bennet, 13 Feb. 1664 in *ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>150</sup> Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde to Secretary Henry Bennet, 30 Mar. 1664 in *ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>151</sup> Earl of Mountrath and William Bury to Secretary Edward Nicholas, 17 Oct. 1660 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1660-62*, p. 58.

<sup>152</sup> Lord Lieutenant [James Butler, Duke of Ormonde] to Secretary Henry Bennet, 10 Dec. 1662 in *ibid.*, p. 664.

<sup>153</sup> *JHC*, 1, 382.



## Stagnation and neglect in Post Office management during the Restoration era

Who replaced Bathurst is not known. By 1667 George Warburton, the son of a wealthy Dublin merchant, was working in the Post Office.<sup>154</sup> Little is recorded concerning Warburton during his early years in the Post Office, and what has survived does not paint him in a good light. In 1673 the Duke of Ormonde, writing to the Earl of Arlington, commented that ‘The Post-office here is very ill-ordered by one Warburton.’<sup>155</sup> However, Warburton did serve his political master in London well. There was a constant flow of intelligence and news from him to Joseph Williamson, Under-Secretary to Sir Edward Nicholas, one of Charles II’s Secretaries of State.<sup>156</sup> Unusually, Williamson managed to retain that position after Nicholas was replaced, in October 1662, by Sir Henry Bennet (from 1663, Lord Arlington). Williamson’s retention testified to his appetite for political power, his ability and in particular his track record for gathering intelligence.<sup>157</sup> According to historian Alan Marshall

[His] eagerness to control administrative activities also led Williamson into other areas, among them the gathering of intelligence to counter the innumerable plots of the early 1660s and to supply information for the foreign policy decisions of the 1670s. This activity included intercepting the mail at the Post Office, as well as examining and interrogating suspects, and employing spies and informers. Williamson was in effect the *de facto* head of the Restoration government’s intelligence system. In

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<sup>154</sup> Sir John Stephens to Sir Joseph Williamson, 6 Mar. 1667 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1666-69*, pp 313-4; P. F. Fallon, *The members of parliament for Queen’s Co. and its boroughs, 1585-1800* (Laois, 2001), p. 337; Johnston-Liik (ed.), *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 490.

<sup>155</sup> Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde to Lord Arlington, 22 Jan. 1673 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1672-1673*, p. 481.

<sup>156</sup> Joseph Williamson (1633-1701), the second son of a parish vicar in Cumberland, went to the local grammar school and, through patronage and ability, entered Queen’s College, Oxford. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes him up thus: ‘The life of Williamson from 1660 onwards was largely public. He was a man of business and affairs who served the Restoration and post-1688 government well. His reputation as an administrator has recently been revised and he was possibly more influential in this area than was once thought. He was also active in the world of intelligence and espionage in an era of plotting and conspiracy, and appears to have had a shrewd eye for intelligence-gathering activities. As a man Williamson gained the reputation for dryness and formality in his public dealings, albeit he was capable of enormous flattery to those he wished to impress. There was equally an unofficial, sociable, side that cared for music and dancing. Williamson was never slow in taking any financial opportunities that presented themselves, and by 1668 he was rumoured to have an estate of some £40,000 in ready money. His legacies were extensive: £5000 was bequeathed for the building a free school at Rochester for educating boys in mathematics for use in naval service, and Thetford was given £2000. Queen’s College received £6000 and his library, and the Royal Society £200. He remained throughout a shrewd and ambitious man, eager, if not greedy, for wealth and public status.’ See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2104>, accessed 11 Dec. 2014].

<sup>157</sup> In fact, when Bennet took over from Nicholas, he dismissed Williamson but soon reinstated him when it was discovered how indispensable Williamson had made himself in his position.

this work too he applied his usual thoroughness, following in the footsteps of earlier intelligence chiefs such as Sir Francis Walsingham, Thomas Scot, and John Thurloe.<sup>158</sup>

In England local postmasters were expected to keep the clerks of the road informed of local events.<sup>159</sup> The clerk of the Chester road was James Hicks, Joseph Williamson's most important contact in the Post Office.<sup>160</sup> All letters from Ireland to England travelled on the Chester road and as a result passed through Hicks's hands. Warburton too was in direct contact with Williamson. The latter received reports from local postmasters throughout England, and from Warburton in Ireland, and thus had access to up to date political and commercial information. These reports could be used in various ways by various parties. They were consulted by the state's intelligence organisation (there was no official name for it at this time) with a view to gathering local or provincial political knowledge. (The king had only been restored a few years and there were concerns about the security of his position.) The news, in particular shipping information, was often brought to a wider audience in *The London Gazette*, the official government 'newspaper'. Commercial intelligence concerning the coming and goings of ships from various colonies and countries trading with Britain could be sensitive, and those with access to that privileged information were in a position to use it to their commercial advantage, as Williamson is most likely to have done.<sup>161</sup> In short, the news received from local postmasters was valuable for a variety of reasons.

Immediately after the Restoration in England, many former deputy postmasters who had been replaced during and after the Civil Wars by parliamentary sympathizers were reinstated.<sup>162</sup> In Ireland, apart from Bathurst, it is not known if any were replaced. (It has already been noted that so important was the office of post master, even the king

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<sup>158</sup> Alan Marshall, 'Williamson Sir Joseph (1633-1701)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2104>, accessed 11 Dec. 2014].

<sup>159</sup> In England and Ireland almost all the post-roads radiated from London and Dublin respectively. In the Post Office in both, each of these roads had staff rating and sorting the letters that travelled to the two cities. These individuals were known as the clerks of the road (each named after the road to which he was assigned). Unlike the case of London, the names of clerks in Dublin down to the mid-1700s are not known. In England, James Hicks was clerk of the important Chester road which carried the mail between Dublin and London.

<sup>160</sup> Campbell-Smith, *Master of the Post*, pp 44-7.

<sup>161</sup> How much of this fortune was generated owing to information acquired through the Post Office is open to speculation and the matter lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>162</sup> List of the Posts containing names of the stages or posts towns on the Northern, Chester, Plymouth, and Bristol Roads; of the Postmasters in each town and of several persons by whom or grounds on which, each is recommended for continuance, ? June 1660 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1660-1*, p. 82; officers connected with the Post, ? June 1660 in *ibid.*, pp 93-100; Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 51.

endeavoured to have Bathurst removed.) Undoubtedly local deputy postmasters in Ireland kept Warburton informed about local political events. Having access to political information from Ireland was particularly important since many Cromwellian government officials still held office in the Restoration era.

From the time that Lord Arlington acquired the farm of the Post Office (1667-85) Williamson enjoyed complete, unhindered access to the post.<sup>163</sup> Despite the fact that since 1663, letters were only to be opened under a warrant, the practice continued unabated in both Ireland and England as testified in March 1670 by the Earl of Orrery writing to Viscount Conway (an English politician who was a confidant of the Lord Lieutenant and who had a keen interest in Ireland where he had a large estate at Lisburn, County Antrim). Orrery divulged that ‘not only have my letters been intercepted, but copies taken of them. That is why I sent you by the common post only common stuff.’<sup>164</sup>

In addition to being *de facto* head of the Restoration government’s intelligence network, Williamson was in partnership with Henry Muddiman, publisher of *The London Gazette*, which for several years during the reign of King Charles II enjoyed a virtual monopoly on news publishing. The network of local deputy postmasters in Ireland and England provided Williamson with a steady stream of political and commercial intelligence, some of which (as noted above) featured as news in *The London Gazette*.

While political intelligence was vital to the stability of the state, privileged access to commercial intelligence had the potential to make canny entrepreneurs very wealthy and local deputy postmasters’ reports on shipments of goods were indispensable in alerting merchants and traders in both Ireland and England to developments and opportunities. Until the mid-1670s Kinsale, Cork and Youghal were the major commercial and military ports in the south west and particularly useful information could be accessed at Kinsale which was often the first or last port of call for many ships en route from or to the Americas and West Indies.<sup>165</sup> Not surprisingly this region and the seas around it were occasionally targeted by both pirates and European powers at war with Britain. Thomas Burrows, a local wealthy merchant, was also deputy postmaster in Kinsale. Like many deputy postmasters in England, Burrows was

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<sup>163</sup> Herbert Joyce, *The history of the Post Office from its establishment down to 1836* (London, 1893), p. 429.

<sup>164</sup> The earl of Orrery to Viscount Conway, 15 Mar.1670 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1669-70*, p. 86.

<sup>165</sup> It was not until the mid-1660s that Cork city began to outgrow Kinsale; see Dickson, *Old world colony*, pp 113-4.

in weekly contact with James Hicks in the Post Office in London, supplying him with both military and commercial intelligence and much of the information concerning Kinsale supplied by him appeared in *The London Gazette*. For example, when in June 1666 a valuable convoy worth in excess of £3,000,000 put into Kinsale, Hicks was informed and the news featured in the next issue of *The London Gazette*. Later, on 1 September, Burrows notified Hicks about the arrival of the Straits fleet consisting of twenty-two sail ‘... laden with oil, currants and hemp’.<sup>166</sup> Within a fortnight, on 13 September, news of this fleet’s arrival in Kinsale appeared in *The London Gazette*.<sup>167</sup> In May 1672 Burrows informed Williamson that ‘Last Sunday two ships from Virginia came in here being chased by two capers [privateers / pirates]’.<sup>168</sup> Clearly then, Williamson was particularly well informed, receiving regular intelligence from Ireland from two sources within the Post Office – Burrows, who was writing weekly reports to Hicks and to George Warburton, his boss in Dublin, and Warburton himself who, from as early as October 1666, was also in weekly contact with Williamson.<sup>169</sup>

However, during the mid-1660s the Post Office in Ireland fell foul of the prevailing unstable financial conditions in the country. After the Restoration the cost of governing Ireland was high, budgets deficits were the norm, and regular subventions from England were necessary.<sup>170</sup> In an effort to improve matters, the practice of farming tax collection was revived, though ultimately it proved unsuccessful. Included in this practice was the farming out of the Irish Post Office. It is not clear whether it was farmed during the mid-1660s, or in 1671 when Charles II ‘resigned all rights to his own exchequer and left the entire disposal of the revenue to [lord] Ranelagh and his partners.’<sup>171</sup> Previously the Post Office in Ireland had been part of the farm of the English Post Office, but by 1670 it appears to have been farmed separately, although it continued to operate under the control of the Westminster parliament. In any case, Charles’s agreement with Ranelagh and his partners lasted only five years. Evidence suggests that the Irish Post Office continued to be farmed, most likely until the English Treasury took control of the finances of the Post Office in England, c. 1685.

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<sup>166</sup> Thomas Burrows to James Hicks, Sept. 1666 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1666-1669*, p. 204.

<sup>167</sup> *The London Gazette*, 13 Sept. 1666.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas Burrows to James Hicks, 21 May 1672 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1672-1672*, p. 33: ‘capers’ is likely a version of ‘kaper’, a Dutch word for privateer.

<sup>169</sup> The earliest letter from George Warburton to Joseph Williamson is dated 13 Oct. 1666 – see *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1666-69*, pp 223-4; the earliest from Thomas Burrows to James Hicks is dated 22 June 1666 – see *ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>170</sup> Dickson, *New foundations*, p. 10.

<sup>171</sup> J. M. Simms, ‘The Restoration, 1600-1685’ in Moody, Martin & Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iii; Early modern Ireland*, pp 442-1.

The first person to hold this new farm was Joseph Deane, one of Lord Ranelagh's partners.<sup>172</sup> His earliest recorded connection with the Post Office was in 1670 when he was referred to as 'the chief undertaker for the packet boats.'<sup>173</sup> The following year he was styled deputy postmaster-general of Ireland; that was the first time this particular title was used, the previous one being deputy postmaster for Ireland.<sup>174</sup> Warburton may have had a share in the farm as he continued to be associated with the Post Office, even though he did not work directly for it. (His name does not appear on the 1677 or 1682 that lists all the Post Office personnel in Ireland.<sup>175</sup>) There was some unease concerning the farm among the various Lord Lieutenants, their Under secretaries and the Secretaries of State in London, as letters were unofficially intercepted and read, others went astray, and the service was slow, resulting in many complaints. In April 1670 Sir Ellis Leighton, then Chief Secretary, in a letter to Joseph Williamson, commented: 'The delay in the posts greatly affects mercantile as well as State correspondence. I have spoken about it to Major Deane, who is the chief undertaker for the packet boats'.<sup>176</sup> Ten years later the service had not improved significantly as evidenced by the duke of Ormonde's complaint in February 1681 that 'so many other things being out of order it is not strange the post office should be so too.'<sup>177</sup> When sending letters between London and Dublin, state officials regularly used code, and particularly important or sensitive state letters continued to be dispatched by private courier owing to mistrust of the public post.<sup>178</sup> For example, of sixty-seven

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<sup>172</sup> Joseph Deane (1624-99), army officer and revenue farmer, came to Ireland in 1650 with the regiment of horse commanded by Henry Cromwell. On the latter's departure from Ireland in 1659, Deane was promoted major, and played an active role in maintaining security during the volatile final months of the Commonwealth regime. Following the Restoration he rapidly gained royal favour as well as the patronage of James Butler, first Duke of Ormonde, in 1661. He was returned to parliament for Inistioge in County Kilkenny, and in 1666 and 1670, he received land grants amounting to over 9,000 statute acres in counties Dublin, Meath, Kilkenny and Down. In 1666 the government granted him, together with Sir Peter Pett, the farm of the hearth tax for £30,000 *per annum*. By 1668 he was the dominant partner in this farm, as well as in the farms of the customs and excise and of the inland excise. In 1670 he was appointed to the Irish Council of Trade and, as compensation for the loss of his farms, was made one of the commissioners of such revenue as was not in the hands of the new farmers. In 1671 he entered as a partner, for a one-twelfth share, in the undertaking of Richard Jones, Earl of Ranelagh. See an extract from John Bergin 'Deane, Joseph' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org>, accessed 19 Oct. 2015].

<sup>173</sup> Sir Ellis Leighton to Joseph Williamson, 30 Apr. 1670 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1669-70*, p. 118; Leighton was Chief Secretary for Ireland under John Berkeley from 21 April 1670 until 5 August 1672.

<sup>174</sup> See *Cal. S. P. dom., 1671-1671*, pp 5, 38, 595.

<sup>175</sup> *A general survey of the Post Office, 1677-1682* by Thomas Gardiner, ed. Foster W. Bond (London?, 1958), pp 69-70.

<sup>176</sup> Sir Ellis Leighton to Joseph Williamson, 30 Apr. 1670 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1669-70*, p. 118.

<sup>177</sup> James Butler, Duke of Ormonde to John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, 19 Feb. 1681 in *Cal. Ormonde MSS*, v, 586.

<sup>178</sup> Earl of Orrery to Viscount Conway, 15 Mar. 1670 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1669-70*, p. 86.

letters between Francis Aungier (c.1632-1700), first Earl of Longford,<sup>179</sup> a prominent member of the Dublin Castle administration and commissioner of revenue (1682-87) and the duke of Ormonde, eighteen were encoded.<sup>180</sup>

Thomas Gardiner, controller in London Post Office, wrote in 1677 and 1682 two detailed reports on the Post Office titled 'A general survey of the Post Office'<sup>181</sup> (see Appendix 2). In his 1682 account he stated that the Post Office in Ireland, which was farmed for £3,500, was 'ill mannered in comparison with ours in London'. Thus, during the early 1680s when the farm was up for renewal, there was a lively exchange of correspondence between Post Office officials in London and Lord Lieutenants – first James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, then Richard Butler, Earl of Arran, and then Ormonde again.<sup>182</sup> Dowling, a business partner of Deane, was anxious to renew their contract whereas Ormonde and many of the officials in London opposed this move. Secretary of State, Sir Leoline Jenkins, wrote to Ormonde in 1681 as the farm was about to be renewed:

Since my last I have laid before his Majesty the great offence that Dowling, the master of the Post-office of Dublin, doth in a manner continually give your Grace, and how unsafe you do conceive it to be to the public, I mean to the Government, to have his Majesty's business pass through the hands of that man. His Majesty resented the thing very heartily and promised effectual redress; so did my Lord Hyde say the Farmers must and would turn out and charged himself to speak to the Farmers of the Irish revenue, for they hold the Post-office from the Duke. If the new contract do hold, it will be the best way of proceeding for your Grace's satisfaction, to have a clause in the contract between the King and them that shall be very penal if your Grace's despatches going or coming be not duly converted and delivered, and so for the great man's letters of that kingdom, for I suppose they will give any rate for the Post-office since they chose to hold

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<sup>179</sup> C. J. Woods, 'Aungier, Francis' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015]; the cipher used between Longford and Ormond is decoded in the introduction to *Cal. Ormonde MSS*, vi, xix-xxii.

<sup>180</sup> See *Cal. Ormonde MSS*, vii.

<sup>181</sup> *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, pp 69-70.

<sup>182</sup> James Butler, Duke of Ormonde was Lord Lieutenant from 1677 until 1682 when he was replaced by his son, Richard, Earl of Arran. The duke returned to the position in 1684.

it, though they are losers 400*l.* or 500*l.* a year by their present contract with his Royal Highness.<sup>183</sup>

Whether Dowling succeeded in having the farm renewed is not known but within two years, there was another round of lobbying. In January 1683 the earl of Arran recommended to Ormonde a Mr. Harberton who ‘under stands the managing such a matter, and I believe your Grace has a kindness for him upon his discharging his trust so skilfully and honestly heretofore’.<sup>184</sup> It is not known if Harberton was appointed but by July 1683 Arran was clearly pleased with whoever was, as he informed Ormonde that: ‘The Post Office is in so secure hands now that I think you need not be put to the trouble of writing in cipher.’<sup>185</sup> However, political developments once again impacted the operations of the Post Office in Ireland.

In 1685, following the death of Charles II and his brother, James’s succession to the English throne, the new king was intent upon restoring Catholic rights and repealing the English Penal Laws and Test Acts. He appointed Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnell to Ireland, first as commander of the army, and from 1687 as Lord Deputy. John Miller succinctly summarises Tyrconnell’s objectives:

The first was to disarm the ... The second was to remove ‘disaffected’ officers and soldiers from the army and replace them with Catholics. The third was to give Catholics a monopoly of places in the civil administration and in municipal corporations. The fourth was to break or greatly modify the Restoration land settlement.<sup>186</sup>

The third objective had implications for the Post Office. At the start of James’s reign Warburton was still deputy postmaster for Ireland and enjoy the king’s support. In May 1687 the earl of Sunderland, one of James’s Secretaries of State, writing to Lord Deputy Tyrconnell, stated: ‘The King thinks Warburton the postmaster an honest man and he does not open any letters, but that both he and Mr. Frowd may be trusted, and therefore does not think fit to remove Warburton.’<sup>187</sup> By November 1688 the central administration in Dublin Castle, together with the judiciary, the army, county

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<sup>183</sup> Sir L. Jenkins to James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, 8 Dec. 1681 in *Cal. Ormonde MSS*, vi, 268-9.

<sup>184</sup> Earl of Arran to James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, 1 Jan. 1683 in *ibid.*, 502.

<sup>185</sup> Earl of Arran to James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, 6 July 1683 in *ibid.*, vii, 64.

<sup>186</sup> John Miller, ‘The earl of Tyrconnell and James II’s Irish policy, 1685-1688’ in *Historical Journal*, 20, no. 4 (Dec. 1977), pp 803-23.

<sup>187</sup> The earl of Sunderland [Secretary of State] to Lord Deputy [the earl of Tyrconnell], 7 May 1687 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1686-67*, p. 441. Frowd’s identity is not known but he is likely to have been one of the Post Office staff, probably a clerk of the road.

commissioners of the peace and the borough corporations, had all been brought under Catholic control. It seemed a matter of time before the same would happen to the Post Office.<sup>188</sup> By the time James arrived in Ireland in March 1689 and took control of the Post Office, Warburton seems to have been replaced. According to himself, ‘from 1683 until James II visited Ireland on his accession to the throne’, Warburton had been ‘manager of the Irish Office’ but because he was a ‘strict Protestant’, James replaced him with a ‘Papist’, as he did several other Protestant postmasters. However, Warburton was not long out of office, being reinstated by William III after the battle of the Boyne.<sup>189</sup>

The Williamite War (1688-91) brought disruption within the Post Office in Ireland. Both principal combatants were acutely aware of the importance of the post to the success of their campaigns. On his arrival in Ireland, James immediately took control of the Post Office. On 15 June 1690, the day after he landed, William III (of Orange) appointed Robert Mason as his postmaster.<sup>190</sup> Mason left a very revealing description of William’s rival postal service in a letter to Sir Robert Southwell, principal Secretary of State to King William.<sup>191</sup> The office was initially set up at Lisburne,

[it] being the Head Quarters, from whence the Post went every Munday and Thursday for England by way of Portpatrick thro’ Scotland. And from Lisburne to severall places following onely once a week viz. every Thursday to Antrim, Colerain, Londonderry, Lurgan, Belturbett, Enniskelling, Loughbrickland, Newry and Carrickfergus and come from those places every Wednesday.<sup>192</sup>

Mason also planned for a post run from his ‘Majestie’s Court or camp’ every Tuesday and Saturday. In his view, there was no point in keeping horses at the camp. It was anticipated that the postmaster from the nearest town would ride to camp to collect the mail, or alternatively ‘two or three footman [were] to be always ready to run to the next post town.’ This seems to suggest that as William’s army advanced southwards, it took control of the existing post network. The Post Office horses were therefore constantly at

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<sup>188</sup> Hayton, *Ruling Ireland*, p. 15.

<sup>189</sup> Treasury reference to the Postmasters General, petition of George Warburton, 7 June 1694 in *Cal. Treasury books*, x, 1693-1696, book vii, 54 – see British History online [<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>, accessed 20 Oct. 2015].

<sup>190</sup> Robert Mason does not appear anywhere else in the records except in this one isolated document in *National Manuscripts of Ireland: account of facsimiles of national manuscripts of Ireland, from the earliest extant specimens to A.D. 1719*, ed. John T. Gilbert (London, 1884), p. 343.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 342-3.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.



risk of being stolen or commandeered. Indeed, concern at the vulnerability of Post Office horses was reflected in proclamations issued by both James (30 November 1669) and William (28 February 1690).<sup>193</sup> Both forbade looting of horses used by the post. William ordered that neither military personnel nor civilians were to take away ‘hay and oats or other forrage’ and instructed local commanders, military and civilians, to ensure that postmasters in their area had six horses available ‘for the dispatch of their majesties service.’ Both proclamations also declared the local post masters exempt from the obligation of quartering soldiers. In addition, James’s proclamation forbade the opening of letters. Clearly then both placed a high premium on having a reliable postal service and importantly, unlike during previous wars (1641-52) the Post Office in Ireland survived the Williamite War relatively unscathed. By 1691 it had become deeply and permanently embedded in the political and social structures of English civil and military administration of Ireland.

Although the Post Office in Ireland throughout the 1670s and 1680s suffered from neglect and evidence strongly suggests that it was badly managed, nevertheless it continued to grow. The second of two reports<sup>194</sup> produced by Thomas Gardiner, Controller of the Inland Office in Post Office in London reveals that by the early 1680s there were fifty-seven post-towns in Ireland – an increase of twelve since Vaughan’s 1659 list (Map 1.2). After the upheaval of the late 1680s and early 1690s the post soon resumed collecting and distributing letters. It rarely made the ‘headlines’; even then, it was only when the packet boat was late or held up by bad weather. Meanwhile George Warburton was reinstated as deputy postmaster general for Ireland, most likely when William entered Dublin in July 1690. He continued in that position until 1703 when he was replaced due to financial irregularities.

Meanwhile, sometime during the reign of James II (probably c.1685-6), monitoring Post Office revenue in Ireland and England became the responsibility of the English Treasury.<sup>195</sup> Warburton was slow in making payments to the Treasury and the sums submitted were not as expected. In an effort to take this problem in hand, in 1694 the two postmasters-general, Sir Robert Cotton and Thomas Frankland, recommended

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<sup>193</sup> *The proclamations of Ireland, 1660-1820*, ed. James Kelly and Mary Ann Lyons (5 vols, Dublin, 2014), ii, 127, 237.

<sup>194</sup> Legg family archives (B.L., Add MS. 63091). The first report (1678) was written for James, Duke of York, later James II, who had been granted the profits of the Post Office in 1663. The second was written for Colonel George Legge, Lieutenant general of ordinance, and confidant of Charles II. The two surveys were reproduced and published by the Postal History as special series no. 5 *A general survey of the Post Office, 1677-1682* by Thomas Gardiner, ed. Bond, pp 69-70.

<sup>195</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office: a history*, p. 78; see also Campbell-Smith, *Master of the Post*, p. 62.

that the auditor-general of the revenue of the Post Office should depute some person to go over and state the accounts there, and make an exact report thereon, &c. Since they came into office they found him very careful and industrious to improve the revenue and exact and punctual in his payments.<sup>196</sup>

Warburton blamed the arrears on the recent war and the political upheaval that preceded it.<sup>197</sup> On this occasion, the revenue commissioners apparently accepted his explanation and Warburton's position seemed secure. Around this time, he was elected as an MP to the Irish parliament, first for Gowran (1692-3) and later for Portarlington (1695-99).<sup>198</sup> He also held the position of Muster Master General from 1702.<sup>199</sup> However, unlike in England where after the Glorious Revolution both the volume of letters – and more important to the state, the associated income – rose dramatically, the Irish Post Office finances did not improve.<sup>200</sup> By 1703 therefore Warburton's handling of the finances was again giving cause for concern. This time, the Treasury sent over an inspector, Isaac Manley, to conduct an examination of financial practices and procedures.<sup>201</sup> After thirty-seven years in the employ of the Post Office, Warburton quickly resigned, absconded, and became bankrupt, owing £6,000.<sup>202</sup> He died in 1709.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Report of Sir Robert Cotton Bart. and Thomas Frankland Esq., Postmasters General to the Lords of the Treasury c. 7 June 1694 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, i, 1556-1696, 369.

<sup>197</sup> An abstract of Mr. Warburton's account of the English and inland Irish post office, 16 Sept. 1695 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, i, 1556-1696, p. 461.

<sup>198</sup> Johnston-Liik (ed.), *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 490.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> In England the annual net income rose from £90,000 in 1690 to £148,000 in 1700 though there was no increase in the cost of sending a letter – see Robinson, *The British Post Office*, pp 80-81.

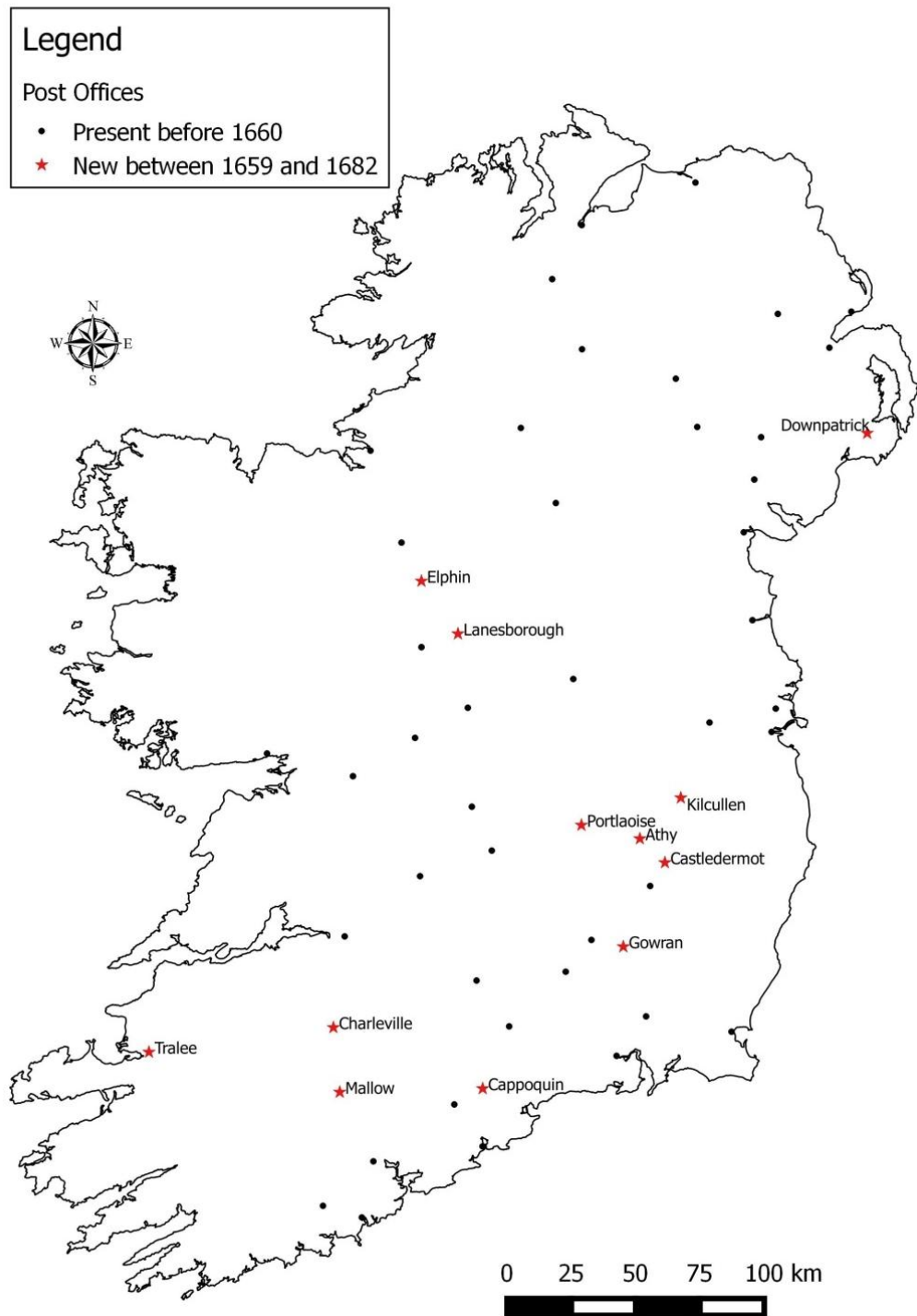
<sup>201</sup> Treasurer Sidney Godolphin to Lord Lieutenant James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, Apr. 1703 in *Cal. Treasury books*, xviii, 217-36 [http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-treasury-books/vol18/pp217-236, accessed 18 Oct. 2015].

<sup>202</sup> Johnston-Liik (ed.), *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 69.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

Map 1.2 Post Offices of Ireland, 1659-82

## Post Offices of Ireland 1659 - 1682



**Sources:** Legg family archives (B.L., Add MS. 63091); reproduced by the Postal History Society as special series no. 5 *A general survey of the Post Office, 1677-1682* by Thomas Gardiner, ed. Bond, pp 69-70.

During Warburton's long term as postmaster in Dublin (c.1667-1703) there were few significant improvements to the service: rather, there were frequent complaints about the quality of the service and the practice of opening of letters without warrants. Although some expansion of the network occurred (the number of post towns rose from by twelve from forty-five to fifty-seven), on the whole the service remained poor as has been highlighted. To a large extent, this was the result of a lack of interest on the part of the farmers, Postmasters General, Warburton himself, and the administration in London, which was ultimately responsible for the Irish Post Office. The fact that few direct references to the Post Office in Ireland feature in either the domestic state papers or those relating to Ireland during this period suggests that so long as the Post Office in Ireland met the state's needs, there was little desire or inclination to improve it. This was in contrast with England where commercial interests were beginning to exert significant pressure for an improved service

### **The Post Office as a lifeline for trade, commerce and conveyance of news**

This thesis has up to this point concentrated on the state's connection with and use of the Post Office. However, as reflected in the legislation generated during the period down to 1703, the Post Office was also becoming increasingly important for commerce as evidenced by reference to it in Cromwell's 1657 Act. One commercial interest that developed a particularly close relationship with the Post Office was the growth newspapers trade. The Irish state papers of the 1650s and 60s reveal a strong appetite for news from England among the colonial administrators and elites in Ireland. The English newsletters and gazettes that met this demand were supplied in Dublin by the deputy postmaster for Ireland and in the provinces by the local deputy postmasters. An abundance of anecdotal references in government officials' correspondence testify to this demand. For instance, in November 1669 Richard Talbot, the future Lord Deputy, in a letter to Joseph Williamson, wrote: 'P.S. Pray order the papers of public news to be sent to me weekly.'<sup>204</sup> Later that month Sir George Lane, the duke of Ormonde's personal secretary, remarked to Williamson: 'I am grateful for his lordship's good offices, and for the newspapers.'<sup>205</sup> The following December Daniel Witter, Bishop of Killaloe, writing to a Robert Francis, requested both newsletters and gazettes: 'Bishop Rust [probably George Rust, Bishop of Dromore (1667-1670)] asks me to say he will

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<sup>204</sup> Richard Talbot to Joseph Williamson, 2 Nov. 1669 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1669-70*, p. 22.

<sup>205</sup> Sir George Lane to Joseph Williamson, 20 Nov. 1669 in *ibid.*, p. 28.

pay you 5*l.* a year if you will send him the news-letters and gazets.<sup>206</sup> A month later Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, writing to Viscount Conway and Killultagh, informed him that to ‘send ... you news which was already in the Gazette is an error I thought I had not been guilty of; for I thought the Gazette meddled not with things done in Parliament.’<sup>207</sup> All of these ‘publications’ relied on the post both for gathering the news and for their distribution. Just how dependent producers of these early newspapers were on the Post Office is reflected in many of their titles. One early example was *The Kingdomes Weekly Post*, which was published in London by a variety of editors and in various forms between 1642 and 1648. Indeed, an illustration featured on the front page of its early editions even depicted a mounted post-rider, complete with post horn and bag of letters<sup>208</sup> (Fig. 1.1).

It was, then, no coincidence that the beginnings of the newspaper industry dovetailed with early years of the public Post Office. Although the newspapers did not contribute directly to the growth and expansion of the postal system, in Ireland as in England, they relied heavily on the Post Office for their growing trade which was shaped in several ways by the practicalities of the post; most notably, the Post Office determined the days on which newspapers were printed and distributed as well as their size and shape. The relationship between the Post Office and newspaper producers was mutually beneficial. In the Post Office clerks of the road held the monopoly on distributing newspapers through the post; in return they were paid a handsome fee which supplemented their wages and kept the cost of running the postal service low. The extent to which local postmasters relied on the income from the gazettes was demonstrated when Thurloe attempted to oust Vaughan in 1658 by charging him for the *Weekly Intelligence*, an early newspaper. Writing to Thurloe, Vaughan stated

many of the gentry and others were very desirous to have the *Weekly Intelligence* sent them; to which end I have contracted with mr. James Hicke, to send mee as many as I had occasion to use; who did constantly send them in the male untill the last weeke, att which tyme,

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<sup>206</sup> Daniel Wytter, Bishop of Killaloe, to Robert Francis, 12 Dec. 1669 in *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>207</sup> Earl of Orrery to Viscount Conway and Killulta, 1 Mar. 1670 in *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>208</sup> *The Kingdomes Weekly Post*, 9 Nov. 1643 available at Early English Books [<http://eebo.chadwyck.com.jproxy.nuim.ie/home>, accessed 26 Feb. 2013].

as I heare, orders were given not to send mee any, unles I would pay 12  
d. the ounce for postage ...<sup>209</sup>

This illustrates how the system operated: deputy postmasters did not pay the postage and could therefore afford to sell the gazettes at a cheaper rate than anyone sending them through the post.<sup>210</sup> While there was a trade in English ‘newspapers’ imported into Ireland from the late 1650s, locally produced newspapers were still struggling to get off the ground during the late seventeenth century. The development of a newspaper trade followed a similar pattern to England, albeit it later. Some early Irish newspapers (including Joseph Ray’s *News-Letter*) which were reprints of London newspapers relied entirely on the Post Office packet service crossing the Irish Sea for their content.<sup>211</sup> This dependency was overtly acknowledged by another reprint of an English newspaper, *The Tatler*, published by Edwin Sandys during the early 1700s, which stated that it would be printed ‘if Packets come in’.<sup>212</sup> Even those that were not reprints relied on the packet for their English and foreign news; almost all articles from abroad began with the phrase ‘Last night a packet arrived from ...’. Furthermore, the intimate connection between the post and newspaper production is borne out by the fact that Irish newspapers were published on Tuesdays and Saturdays, the days the country post left Dublin.<sup>213</sup>

It was not just newspapers, but almost all commercial enterprises, that relied on the Post Office. As early as 1641, when Vaughan was seeking payment for work already completed in setting up the Post Office in Ireland, a testimonial on his behalf was presented to the lord justices and council, who decided on payments. The authors of the testimonial, the leading merchants of Dublin, expressed satisfaction with the new Post Office which they clearly used from the very outset.<sup>214</sup> Later, the 1657 Act, which was binding in Ireland, recognised its significance for commerce, stating that a key function of the post was ‘to maintain a certain and constant Intercourse of Trade and commerce

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<sup>209</sup> Evan Vaughan to Secretary John Thurloe, 13 Jan. 1658 in *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe*, ed. Birch, vi, 745-6.

<sup>210</sup> Twenty years later, on 21 May 1672, writing from Kinsale, Burrows complained to Hicks that gazettes which were due to arrive had not been delivered – see *Cal. S. P. dom., 1672-1672*, p. 33.

<sup>211</sup> Munter, *The history of the Irish newspaper*, p. 70 and chapter 4 ‘Newspaper circulation and distribution’.

<sup>212</sup> *The Tatler*, 24 May 1710 (Dublin edn.).

<sup>213</sup> Munter, *The history of the Irish newspaper*, p. 73.

<sup>214</sup> Petition of Evan Vaughan to the lord justices and council, 5 Mar. 1641 and order of lord justices and council, 15 Mar. 1641 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., Charles I & the Commonwealth with addenda ...*, p. 242).

betwixt all said places.<sup>215</sup> Significantly, at this time when all official letters were transported free of charge, it was the merchants and traders who bore the cost of maintaining the Post Office. In England by this time commercial letters were not just paying for the carrying of official letters; they were generating large profits and hence merchants and traders were fast emerging as the driving force behind the network expansion there. Meanwhile in Ireland although commerce and trade were growing, it would not be until the early nineteenth century that they would come to exert major influence over the network's expansion.

Before the introduction of the postal network, merchants relied on a variety of mechanisms to send letters, including prevailing on the good will of government dispatch riders, when available. Alternatively, a servant could carry a letter. When this involved long distances, it necessitated overnight stays. It could also involve hiring a person or trusting letters to a traveller. Ultimately all of these arrangements were expensive and there was no guarantee that the letters would be safely delivered. The introduction of a reliable and regular official service was therefore welcomed by merchants and traders. Although the cost of sending a letter may have seemed high, the official service was cheaper, more regular and more reliable than the previous alternative options. Rates were set in the 1657 Act and reinforced by the Restoration Post Office Act of 1660. For example, sending a single sheet letter between Belfast and London cost 4*d.* to Dublin and another 6*d.* to London, making the total cost 10*d.*; the rate doubled if the letter comprised two sheets.

The importance of the post to merchants is evident in the signatures attached to the three character references for Vaughan in 1658.<sup>216</sup> Of the sixty signatories to the Carrickfergus reference, at least twenty-two were merchants. These included William Leithers, Hugh Eccles, the younger, William Smith and George Macartney who were among the richest traders or merchants in Belfast and Carrickfergus before and after the Restoration.<sup>217</sup> Sir Henry Piers, in his *Chorographical Description of the County of Westmeath* written in 1682 though not published until 1770, provided the following useful glimpse of commercial life in the Westmeath town of Mullingar, noting how ‘...

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<sup>215</sup> *An Act for the settling of the postage of England Scotland and Ireland* [9 June 1657] in *Acts & ordinances*, pp 1110-13.

<sup>216</sup> Certificate for Evan Vaughan, 18 Jan. 1658 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., Charles I & the Commonwealth with addenda* ... p. 659; certificate of the mayor, aldermen and burgesses of Coleraine, 22 Apr. 1659 in *ibid.*, p. 686; certificate by the earl of Huntington, Sir Charles Coote, and other gentlemen of Connaught, 4 June 1659 in *ibid.*, p. 688.

<sup>217</sup> Jean Agnew, *Belfast merchant families in the seventeenth century* (Dublin, 1996).

they sell all sorts of commodities to the gentry abroad in the county.’<sup>218</sup> While these consumer goods could have been produced by local artisans, it is more likely that they were brought in from further afield, most likely Dublin or England. To facilitate such trading, a working Post Office was a necessity. As the Irish economy began to expand and thrive, particularly after the mid-1660s, and the number of merchants grew, so too did the volume of letters, promissory notes, bills of exchange and bonds of all sorts: this is well documented in Agnew’s study of merchant families in seventeenth-century Belfast.<sup>219</sup>

Little has survived in the way of financial records for the early Irish Post Office. Vaughan stated in 1654 that the Post Office in Ireland was making Prideaux £4,000 a year, but it is not clear if this was profit or turnover.<sup>220</sup> In 1680 the Post Office in Ireland was said to be running at a loss of between £400 and £500 a year.<sup>221</sup> Yet in 1682 the farmers were paying £3,600 *per annum* for it.<sup>222</sup> What surviving evidence there is indicates there was little trouble in farming the post and that those who held the farm were reluctant to give it up. In 1692, in a petition addressed the king, Samuel Travers and Charles Nicholas Eyre, who hoped to acquire the farm, claimed that ‘the post office of Ireland had yielded little or nothing for the last three years’<sup>223</sup> Yet, they were prepared to pay £1,000 a year for the farm, clearly knowing that there was a handsome profit to be made. There is no record of whether they acquired the farm, but it is unlikely they did since the practice of farming out the Post Office in England ceased at the same time as the Treasury assumed control of its finances.

When applying for the farm in 1695, Travers and Eyre stated that its turnover was around £1,500 per quarter.<sup>224</sup> These quoted figures are highly unlikely to have been accurate as the potential farmers would naturally paint a poor picture in order to acquire the farm at the lowest price. Not satisfied with these figures, the Treasury in London

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<sup>218</sup> Henry Piers, *A chorographical description of the County of Westmeath* (Dublin, 1786), p. 78.

<sup>219</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office: a history*, p.77; Agnew, *Belfast merchant families*, esp. chap. 7.

<sup>220</sup> *A true Breviate of the great Oppressions and Injuries done to Evan Vaughan Post-Master of Ireland*, p. 2.

<sup>221</sup> Sir Leoline Jenkins to James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, 8 Dec. 1681 in *Cal. Ormond MSS*, vi, 268-9.

<sup>222</sup> Thomas Gardiner, General survey of the Post Office, 1677-1672 (B.L. Add MS. 62091 Legg family archive).

<sup>223</sup> Petition of Samuel Travers and Charles Nicholas Eyre, Esquires, to the king [c. 2 Mar.]1692 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, i, 1556-1696, 223).

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.



recommended that an inspection be carried out<sup>225</sup> and when it was carried out in 1703, as has been shown, it resulted in the departure of George Warburton.

This increase in revenue testifies to the steady growth in the volume of non-state letters circulating in Ireland during the late seventeenth century. Assuming the very conservative figure of £1,500 per quarter or £6,000 *per annum* is correct, that approximately one half of the letters went to England at an average cost of 6*d.*, and that the average cost of 3*d.* in Ireland, this indicates that approximately 360,000 paid letters went through the Irish Post Office *per annum* during the mid-1690s. This figure does not include letters that travelled free of charge – those concerning state business, or letters received and sent by individuals who were entitled to claim the privilege of free postage, including MPs and the holders of many state offices.

### **The post as conduit for personal correspondence**

The significance of the Post Office to the state authorities and to merchants is, therefore, clearly evident. A third much smaller category of mail carried by the Post Office was personal correspondence. In an Irish context, this mail was especially important in facilitating maintenance of social networks and contacts for new colonial settlers and for English officials and military personnel serving the Dublin Castle administration. For those who lived at a distance from Dublin, contact with home (be it England or Scotland), with the country's major towns and with the outside world played a major role in their maintenance of the English or Scottish character of their households and communities. The appetite for news has already been highlighted in the context of political and commercial developments, but there was also a growing demand for social news, be it about family and friends, or simply gossip. The range of news that was sought and supplied through the aegis of the post is well illustrated in an exchange of letters spanning over forty years (1630-70) between Sir George Rawdon (1604-84) and Edward Conway, second Viscount Conway and Killultagh (1594-1655) and (after Edward's death) with his son, also Edward, third Viscount and later first earl Conway.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> An abstract of Mr. Warburton's account of the English and inland Irish post office, 16 Sept. 1695 ..., 461.

<sup>226</sup> George Rawdon, a Yorkshireman, was initially private secretary and close friend of Edward Conway, first Viscount Conway and later his son, also Edward, second Viscount. Rawdon began managing the Conways' extensive estates in Ulster c.1627. He became very involved in Irish politics, being elected MP for the counties of Antrim, Down, and Armagh for the third protectorate parliament at Westminster, and later to the Irish parliament for Carlingford, County Louth. He maintained a lengthy correspondence with

Rawdon was an Irish MP who also managed the Conway properties around Lisburn<sup>227</sup>. Conway was one of the largest landholders in Ulster, an administrator, politician and soldier<sup>228</sup> who moved between his estates in Ireland, Warwickshire and his London home: 'In England he was consulted regularly about Irish matters when in Ireland he attended the council and parliament, as well as offering informal advice to the lord lieutenant.'<sup>229</sup> Their correspondence consisted of a mix of news that included personal family affairs, political events, affairs of state and gossip. In one letter, dated December 1670, Rawdon informed Conway about the sinking of the packet boat which resulted in significant fatalities, and a duel in the Phoenix Park. He also provided an update on business matters, and referred to a debt of £200 owed to Conway. The political news concerned the Lord Lieutenant and Earl of Ossory.<sup>230</sup> The personal 'titbit' was Rawdon's concern about Conway's health (the latter had recently been unwell). This letter, which kept Conway up to date with recent proceedings, was typical of personal letters of the time and demonstrates just how important the post was in carrying news, and keeping English and Scottish officials and settlers in contact with home. The Post Office provided a relatively cheap and easy means by which such contact was maintained.

Of course it must be borne in mind that the main sources for documenting this opening phase in the development of the Post Office in Ireland are state papers – official documents, letters and semi-official letters – in essence, the records of the Protestant colonial establishment. Surviving letters generated by the two other sections of the Irish population that were literate at this time – the Catholic clergy and the displaced Catholic elites – are comparatively rare, and there is little evidence of either using the Post Office. Those Catholics who lost their lands and positions after the Confederate, Cromwellian and Williamite wars were understandably reluctant to use a communications system that was operated and organised by and for the Protestant

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the Conways, much of which is recorded in the state papers relating to Ireland. The earliest letter dates from 1630 (George Rawdon to Lord Conway and Killultagh, 2 Aug. 1630 (*Cal. S. P. Ire., 1625-32*, p. 563), the latest dated 6 Dec. 1670 (*Cal. S. P. Ire., with addenda 1625-70*, p. 320). No doubt the correspondence began and continued after these dates (Rawdon did not die until 1684).

<sup>227</sup> Patrick Little, 'Rawdon, Sir George' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov.

2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 25 Apr. 2012].

<sup>228</sup> T. C. Barnard, 'Conway, Edward' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov.

2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 25 Apr. 2012].

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Sir George Rawdon to Viscount Conway and Killulta, 4 Dec. 1670 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1669-70*, p. 320.

establishment.<sup>231</sup> Some evidence exists that they had their own *ad hoc* communications network. In 1661 when a Major Folliot arrested a Neill McDavid, who turned out to be a friar, he discovered that the friar was carrying a letter written in Irish.<sup>232</sup> The letter was from a Daniel O’Cahan, addressed to Owen O’Rorke: when translated, it was found to be innocuous.<sup>233</sup> We know that some Catholics did use the Post Office, among them men in positions of responsibility such as Robert Leigh, agent and manager of Secretary of State Arlington’s estates in Ireland from at least 1665 until 1669. As manager of Arlington’s properties, Leigh was in almost weekly contact with him.<sup>234</sup> By contrast, due to the wider problem of a dearth of evidence pertaining to the lower social orders, it is virtually impossible to ascertain whether or what extent Catholic tenants and farm labourers ever used the post. They are likely to have possessed neither the need nor the literacy skills to avail of the Post Office service. However, one section of the Catholic population that certainly needed and used the service was the merchant class. By the early 1660s many Catholic merchants had been expelled from the larger towns and port cities, notably Waterford and Cork.<sup>235</sup> In some port towns, for instance Galway and Limerick, although barred from positions on the municipal corporations, Catholics made up the majority of the commercial population and they also managed to survive in smaller towns.<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, the composition of the Catholic middle class was changing as in the words of J. H. Andrews, ‘there was a considerable ‘new Irish’ element of traders and urban working men.’<sup>237</sup> This section of Catholic Irish society could not have survived in business without using the Post Office. Yet, they only constituted a minority among those who relied on the post. Throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, as it served primarily the interests of the English state administration in Ireland, not surprisingly its clients were overwhelmingly members and supporters of that administration, among them Sir John Clotworthy (d. 1665).

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<sup>231</sup> When stamp auction catalogues of the past thirty years containing Irish postal history are examined, few

reference pre-1700 letters and the few that are listed are those of the ruling Protestant ascendancy.

<sup>232</sup> The lords justices and council to Secretary Edward Nicholas, 21 Aug. 1661 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1660-62*, p. 406.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>234</sup> Mahaffy’s preface to *Cal. S. P. Ire., 1666-69*, p. lviii.

<sup>235</sup> William J. Smyth, *Map-making, landscape and memory: a geography of colonial and early modern Ireland c.1530-1750* (Cork, 2006), p. 139.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> J. H. Andrews, ‘Land and people c.1685’ in Moody, Martin & Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iii; Early modern Ireland*.

### **Case study of a service user: Sir John Clotworthy**

In several respects Clotworthy represented the typical known user of the Post Office during that time. He had supported Vaughan in his struggle with Bathurst in 1658 and was one of those who signed his character reference in 1658.<sup>238</sup> He was a staunch Presbyterian and a second-generation planter with close ties to both the Scottish and English establishments.<sup>239</sup> He was a soldier, politician and businessman. In 1642 he commanded a regiment that helped suppress the 1641 rebellion. He represented County Antrim in the Irish parliament of 1634-5; later he was MP for the Cornish borough of Bossiney in the short parliament and for the Essex borough of Maldon in the long parliament. He was subsequently instrumental in the return of Charles II to the throne. His business interests included holding the monopoly for licensing taverns in County Antrim.<sup>240</sup> He also speculated £1,000 on land under the Adventurers' Act of 1642. For men like Clotworthy, a leading merchant, member of the Protestant elite, a 'pivotal figure' in the Cromwellian administration in Ireland, and thus part of the establishment that was modernising Ireland at that time, having recourse to a functioning official Post Office was essential.<sup>241</sup>

### **Facilitating the onset of modernisation in Cromwellian Ireland**

A reliable and efficient communication network and system was fundamental to the modernisation of any state during this period. In Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland, the Post Office certainly facilitated advancement of that process, its importance being recognised by at least three reforming Lord Deputies – Sidney, Mountjoy and Wentworth. Between 1652 and 1660 the Cromwellian administration in Ireland set about large scale modernisation of the country including settling new people and, significantly for the Post Office, standardising weights and measures, distance and acreage. The latter, a uniform plantation acre, was necessary for surveying the country.<sup>242</sup> Three land surveys carried out during the 1650s (the Gross Survey, Civil

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<sup>238</sup> Certificate of the mayor, aldermen and burgesses of Coleraine, 18 Jan. 1658 in *Cal. S. P. Ire. 1647-60*, p. 659

[<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 25 Apr. 2012].

<sup>239</sup> Raymond Gillespie, 'Clotworthy, Sir John' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn.,

Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 25 Apr. 2012].

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Smyth, *Map-making, landscape & memory*, p. 172; S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 2004). This acre became the standard Irish acre.

Survey and Down Survey) mapped the whole country<sup>243</sup> and the concomitant standardisation of distance or mileage directly impacted the Post Office since letters were rated in accordance with the distance they travelled. Fortunately for Evan Vaughan, the Civil Survey which was empowered to convene local courts of survey in twelve counties in order to gather local knowledge<sup>244</sup> began its work in 1654, just as he set about rebuilding the postal network. The Civil Survey generated numerous reports which had to be sent to Dublin, most likely via the post. Likewise, William Petty had a team of up to 1,000 men, including surveyors and helpers, deployed in the field, carrying out his Down Survey<sup>245</sup> who had to keep in constant contact with Survey headquarters (most likely Dublin Castle), again using the services of the Post Office. These surveys, the information they gathered, and the Post Office which carried that information, were all necessary to the operation of a modernising government in mid-seventeenth-century Ireland.

Just how important the Post Office in Ireland was to the English Crown and Westminster's colonial ambitions for Ireland is evident from the profile of the personnel involved in its foundation and subsequent operation. The first organised post in Ireland was arranged by two reforming Tudor Lord Deputies, Sir Henry Sidney and Charles Blount, Baron Mountjoy, during military campaigns. When the official public Post Office was established 1638, it was another Englishman, Evan Vaughan, appointed at the behest of the English Lord Lieutenant Wentworth, who oversaw the process. After the first network disintegrated during the 1640s, Vaughan returned to England, but was back in Ireland by 1647, endeavouring to rebuilt the network. After the Restoration he continued to serve the English authorities based in Dublin and his staff were English. In 1665 the men who carried the post on the Connaught road were Ralph Ballock, who was paid £30 annually to carry the mail between Dublin and Maynooth, Richard Wilson, who was sub-postmaster in Mullingar, and the others were named Ellis, Coats, Hudlogton, Warnor, Broughton and Zachary Browne: the absence of Irish names is remarkably conspicuous.<sup>246</sup> By contrast, the preponderance of English names shows that appointments to positions in the Post Office were limited to men known to be loyal to the Castle establishment. Those who signed Vaughan's character references were also part of that establishment or at the very least they prominent businessmen who

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<sup>243</sup> Gillespie, *Seventeenth-century Ireland*, p. 189; see also <http://downsurvey.tcd.ie>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

<sup>244</sup> Smith, *Map-making, landscape & memory*, p. 172.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>246</sup> Thurloe's postal accounts for the quarter ending 23 June 1659 (Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS a. 64, f. 32); see also full list in *The inland posts, 1392-1672*, ed. Stone, pp 272-3.

supported the English administration. Tellingly, two of the first three deputy postmasters of Ireland – Vaughan and Bathurst – were English: two were elected as MPs to the Irish parliament – Bathurst for Sligo borough, and Warburton for Gowran in County Kilkenny (1692-93) and Portarlinton (1895-9).<sup>247</sup> Joseph Deane, the first farmer of the Irish Post Office who was elected MP for Inistioge in 1666 and 1670, was another Englishman, born at Pinnock in Gloucestershire.<sup>248</sup> As has been illustrated, there were many disputes for control over the Irish Post Office. However, these were invariably related to grander factional disputes which were being played out in England between parliamentarians and royalists or later between supporters of James II or William III, proving that the Post Office in Ireland was widely regarded as an integral part of the Dublin Castle administration of Ireland.

### **Conclusion**

From its humble and tentative origins in the mid-1500s to the resignation of George Warburton in 1703, the Post Office in Ireland evolved into a vital if taken for granted part of the modernising British ‘composite state’ apparatus. Initially under the Tudors and Charles I, an official post operated only during times of emergency. That changed with the arrival in Ireland of Evan Vaughan, in 1638: by the time he left office in 1663, he had established a network and system that would endure in spite of a lack of dynamism on the part of various officials charged with responsibility for oversight of the post.

Operating as a subordinate extension of the English Post Office, overseen by Dublin Castle but ultimately under the control of Westminster, the Post Office in Ireland had become the official system through which virtually all state communications were conveyed; it was an important intelligence-gathering mechanism for the state, and by 1703 it was also providing modest but nonetheless much-needed revenue to the English Treasury. As the decades passed and the post continued to service the needs of the state administration, its importance for the expanding mercantile community in Ireland also grew significantly though by no means on a scale comparable to England. Furthermore, having the opportunity to avail of a regular mail service enabled settlers, most of whom had arrived since the beginning of the seventeenth century, to communicate with each other and with relatives, friends and professional contacts at home, be that England or

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<sup>247</sup> Johnson-Liik (ed.), *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 490.

<sup>248</sup> John Bergin, ‘Deane, Joseph’ in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 25 Apr. 2012].

Scotland. Successive waves of these arrivistes therefore had a strong vested interest in establishing a reliable, modern Post Office system and network in Ireland, akin to that which was developing (albeit faster) in England.

By 1660 the network that Evan Vaughan established covered most of the country, connecting the main provincial administrative centres with Dublin. By 1703 governance of Ireland was greatly aided by a regular communications system and network provided by the Post Office. The resultant improved communications facilitated the effective subordination of the Irish kingdom to Westminster's governance. The Post Office allowed power to be centralised in Dublin or Westminster and facilitated the simultaneous circulation of notice of changes in policy, new guidelines, laws or taxes, around the country in the expectation of seeing these measures being implemented uniformly. Another necessity for any early modern state was increasingly quick access to information. Having recourse to empirical data regarding the size of the country, its population and land ownership was essential for imposing taxation. Local data had to be collected and stored centrally and during the Cromwellian period (c. 1649-60), while Ireland was being mapped and surveyed, the Post Office played an important facilitating role, carrying correspondence to and from surveyors scattered across the country and conveying (free of charge) the volumes of paperwork collected by them.

Prior to Vaughan's arrival and his establishment of a postal system and network, most of provincial Ireland remained insular and remote from Dublin. Contact between the major towns and Dublin was infrequent and communications were on the whole haphazard and very expensive for both state administration and the commercial sector. However, by offering an initial weekly connection to Dublin, and by 1703 a thrice weekly service, the Post Office made an important contribution to the modernisation of Irish society by significantly reducing this isolation. Thanks to the post, at least some of those living in the provinces could hope to be kept informed about developments in Dublin, London and further afield, to keep abreast of current affairs, debates, or to read about the latest gossip. As a result, those colonists who came to Ireland in the seventeenth century were not entirely isolated from their original families and communities. In a wider context, the Post Office brought Ireland into regular contact with new and modern influences and ideas from the outside world. That is not to imply Ireland was completely isolated before; it was not. However, the Post Office did make this contact comparatively cheap, more frequent and regular. By 1703 the Post Office

was servicing the official, personal and commercial needs of an overwhelmingly Protestant minority who could afford its high rates. However, its core function remained its foundational one – service to the state administration. In that capacity, it played an important and discrete role in consolidating the subjugation of the kingdom of Ireland as part of the British ‘composite state’.



## Chapter two

### The slow and steady modernisation of the Post Office in Ireland,

1703-84

By the time Isaac Manley was appointed deputy postmaster-general of the Post Office in Ireland in 1703, the post was functioning as a vital part of the state apparatus, facilitating the relatively efficient conduct of official government, army and judicial business. Furthermore, as highlighted in the previous chapter, since the Commonwealth era, it began to play an increasingly important role in facilitating the growth of another sector within the kingdom, that of trade and commerce. While as this chapter will demonstrate the expansion of the Post Office during much of the eighteenth century was slow, and often very slow indeed, steady progress was nonetheless made: by 1784, when the Post Office in Ireland became independent of London, its network spanned almost the entire country. It had also become indispensable for the conduct of the island's burgeoning domestic and international commerce, and for facilitating yet another increasingly popular phenomenon within literate circles across throughout Europe, Britain and Ireland – quickening social intercourse through frequent exchange of personal letters between family, friends and acquaintances.

Since the foundation of the Post Office, Westminster's priorities in relation to Ireland changed significantly as its preoccupation with military campaigns during 1638-90 lessened and was replaced (down to the 1780s) by a concerted and sustained drive to strengthen and modernise the country's civil administration at both national and local levels through the introduction of reform initiatives in local government, defence, local and circuit courts, collection of taxation and customs. In recent years, the traditional depiction of the long eighteenth century, 'centered on the themes of stability and oligarchic rule, suddenly terminated by insurrection in the 1790s', has been challenged by historians including Ian Mc Bride<sup>1</sup>. A similar approach needs to be adopted in interpreting the history of the Post Office in Ireland during this era. Certainly the Post Office which functioned very much as part of the Protestant administration engaged in this programme of reform. As T. C. Barnard observes in *The kingdom of Ireland, 1641-1760*,

after 1690 the triumphant Protestants of Ireland ... needed to complete the pacification of the island and ensure that it was not disturbed by

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<sup>1</sup> See McBride, *Eighteenth-century Ireland*, p. 1.

Catholic insurgency. Mundane but vital matters of administration, ensuring that the writ of Dublin ran into the remotest districts, and the interlocking issues of taxation and defence, dominated the deliberations of the victors.<sup>2</sup>

During the early years of the eighteenth century the postal system, network and service played an important part in facilitating these processes of pacification, normalisation of politics and governance, and copperfastening of Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. But it was not all plain sailing: at the same time, it was impacted by struggles within Westminster between Whig and Tory factions, and between the Tory government in Westminster (1710-14) and the predominant Whig administration led in Ireland by Speaker Conolly.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the period 1703-84 the Post Office in Ireland continued to operate as a branch of the English Post Office and was regulated by Westminster rather than the Irish parliament. Thus, when in 1711 Westminster passed a new Post Office Act, replacing the 1660 Act, it applied to Ireland.<sup>4</sup> This Act, which applied to ‘all Her Majesties Dominions’ and even stipulated that there was to be a ‘Chief Letter office in the city of Dublin’, set the regulations that, with few alterations, would govern the service down to 1784 in Ireland and 1837 in England. It is, therefore, examined at some length in this chapter. The relationships between the government administrations at Westminster and Dublin, and between the Post Office in London and Dublin, are also analysed. While at Westminster little attention was paid to the day-to-day running of the Irish postal service at this time, care was nonetheless always taken to ensure that a supporter of the Dublin Castle administration was appointed to the position of deputy post-master general of Ireland. Beyond this, Westminster’s attitude to the management of the Irish Post Office oscillated between a very hands-on approach and a largely non-interventionist one, depending on the prevailing political climate.

This chapter shows how after an initial round of improvements introduced by Isaac Manley, deputy postmaster-general of Ireland (1703-38), progress in developing the network and the system slowed dramatically down to 1784 for a variety of reasons, chiefly a lack of engagement, leadership or dynamism on the part of successive deputy

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<sup>2</sup> Barnard, *The kingdom of Ireland, 1641-1760*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> For a close examination of this period see Hayton, *Ruling Ireland*.

<sup>4</sup> 12 Chas. II, c. 35 [Eng.] (25 Apr. 1660); 9 Anne c. 11[G.B.] (25 Nov. 1710). The number of the Act was re-scheduled in 1896.

postmasters for Ireland. This was in contrast with England where the Westminster parliament ensured that the Post Office operated efficiently and adapted regularly in order to respond to emerging customer needs. However, since there were no Irish-elected MPs in Westminster, and there was little incentive or reward for Westminster MPs to expend time or energy on modernising the Post Office in Ireland, the latter essentially drifted following Manley's death. Yet, notwithstanding this official inertia and the absence of strategic leadership in the Post Office in Ireland, improvements were introduced during that period, notably to the quality of service that element of the Post Office over which the deputy postmasters' secretaries had control. As will become apparent, these advances came about in response to and indeed reflected a growing grassroots level demand from customers in a widening range of sectors within the modernising kingdom.

Improvements in all areas of the postal service are highlighted in this chapter. Notable among these is the increased frequency of the mails, especially from the 1760s when many towns had a delivery six days a week, resulting in a faster turnaround of letters, and this in spite of the relatively slow pace of progress in modernising the Post Office network and system. Furthermore, the Post Office's profits grew as expanding Catholic and Protestant middle ranks added to the volume of letters for which most paid postage rates. It also continued to carry newspapers from home and abroad, albeit now in greater numbers. Whereas there had been faltering attempts at founding newspapers in Ireland since the late 1640s (see previous chapter), from the early 1700s several Irish newspapers, notably the *Dublin Mercury* (est. 1704), *Impartial Occurrences* (est. 1704) and *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* (est. 1725) were established on a more permanent basis.<sup>5</sup> As in England, these were carried free of charge by the Post Office; the result was a significant boost to the nascent Irish newspaper trade. However, meeting the demand for news from abroad proved more challenging since high postage rates between Ireland and England inhibited a large circulation of English papers in Ireland, although English newspapers did circulate.<sup>6</sup> Pamphlets on political and theological debates and controversies of the day were also carried by the Post Office.<sup>7</sup> Such newspapers and pamphlets played a widely acknowledged role in shaping Protestant identity and patriot politics in Ireland, and the Post Office, through its increasingly frequent and widespread

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<sup>5</sup> The *Dublin Mercury* began publication in 1704 and continued until 1760.

<sup>6</sup> Munter, *The history of the Irish newspapers*, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> These included the philosopher and Church of Ireland Bishop of Cloyne George Berkeley's *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge* (Dublin, 1710) and Dean Jonathan Swift's *Drapier's letters* (Dublin, 1724-5).

dissemination of this material, played an important role in informing and facilitating debate on current affairs within literate circles.

If developments in the Post Office in Ireland significantly outstripped those in Scotland during this period, improvements to the Irish network and system were nonetheless modest. Where significant progress did occur was in the quality of service, notably the increased frequency of deliveries (as yet, the issue of speed was not a priority). This chapter explores the reasons for this varied pace of progress across these three elements of the Post Office in Ireland, assessing the relative importance of organisational and external determining factors. It will be shown that in terms of infrastructural development, the needs of the state administration continued to drive progress. This chapter will highlight how the steady rise in the number of post-towns in Ireland that occurred during this period was largely attributable to the growing demands placed on the service by members of the Irish parliament which increasingly sat for longer periods. David Hayton has traced how since the Restoration, representative institutions across England, Scotland and Ireland met for longer periods, processed increasing volumes of business, and consequently elaborated their procedures and expanded their bureaucracies.<sup>8</sup> Whereas between October 1692 and January 1699 the Irish parliament met only four times in sessions that lasted between two and four months, from the mid-1710s down to the mid-1780s, the amount of time that MPs spent in Dublin increased significantly. Now parliament met ‘every second year, usually for six to eight months depending on the time it took to complete the legislative business of the session.’<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as Hayton and Kelly have emphasised, the Irish parliament become more powerful, effective, and busy as the century progressed.<sup>10</sup> As Irish MPs’ reliance upon the Post Office grew, the network, system, and service came under mounting pressure to meet this demand.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the large army stationed in garrisons throughout Ireland needed an extensive postal network both for the efficient conduct of military business and for carrying private letters of officers and to a lesser extent, rank and file soldiers stationed away from home. The following discussion will show that it was servicing the needs of these MPs and military personnel, along with

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<sup>8</sup> Hayton, Kelly & Bergin (eds), *The eighteenth-century composite state*, pp 3-21.

<sup>9</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament 1692-1800*, i, 39; for a precise listing of the sittings see T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, ix: maps, genealogies, lists, a companion to Irish history, part II* (Oxford, 1984), pp 593-608.

<sup>10</sup> Hayton & Kelly, ‘Introduction: The Irish parliament in European context: a representative institution in a composite state’ in Hayton, Kelly & Bergin (eds), *The eighteenth-century composite state*, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> D. W. Hayton, ‘Constitutional experiments and political expediency, 1689-1725’ in Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds), *Conquest and Union: fashioning a British state, 1485-1725* (London and New York, 1995), pp 280-81.

those of English and Scottish-born landowners and administrators in Ireland, growing numbers of commercial users, and those generating and receiving personal letters and newspapers that drove the expansion of the post in Ireland during this period.

While throughout the eighteenth century the Post Office continued to fulfil its traditional, primary functions in the service of the state administration – intelligence-gathering and carrying its writ throughout all kingdoms within the British ‘composite state’, this study shows how, particularly after the passage of the Post Office Act (1711), its third function (generating revenue) assumed unprecedented importance as the post began to yield substantially increased returns to the English Treasury. As trade and commerce in Ireland entered a phase of prosperity which saw Irish imports treble and exports quadruple between 1700 and 1765,<sup>12</sup> the volume of letters carried by the Post Office and the revenue this generated grew dramatically, rising from £13,319 in 1714 to approximately £33,000 in 1785 – a 250% increase at a time when there were no rate increases.<sup>13</sup> The fact that this enormously inflated sum which resulted largely from high postage rates charged to commercial and private letters went to the English Exchequer became a source of grievance for Irish merchants and retailers whose growing reliance and expenditure on the post generated the revenue from which neither they nor the Irish postal system benefitted. By the last quarter of the century, this was added to the grievances felt by Protestant patriots in the Irish parliament. On a related theme, the chapter concludes by highlighting the role of the Post Office in consolidating the colonization of Ireland and ‘ensuring that the writ of Dublin ran into the remotest districts’ through a comparative analysis of the postal systems in eighteenth-century American and Ireland.

While the political changes that occurred in the aftermath of the Williamite War (1689-91) were to have a profound impact on the Post Office in Ireland, this did not become apparent until the 1720s. Following the Treaty of Limerick (1691) and the passing of legislation in the Irish parliament to consolidate their hold on land and

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<sup>12</sup> L. M. Cullen, ‘Economic development, 1691-1750’ in Moody, Martin & Byrne (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: Eighteenth-century Ireland*, pp 159-93, p. 159; James, *Ireland in the Empire*, chap. 8, esp. pp 198-202; Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Declared accounts: Post Office’ in *Cal. Treasury books*, xxiv, 1714-1715, ccclxxiv-ccclxxx [http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-treasury-books/vol29/ccclxxiv-ccclxxx, accessed 21 October 2015]; The ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland. General Post-Office, p. 15, H.C. 1810 (5) x, 1. This report only gives the half-year gross revenue of £1,6476 – hence the estimate of £33,000 for the year 1795.

offices, by 1700 the Protestant ascendancy owned 86% of the land and were firmly in control of the legislature (the Irish parliament), while the Dublin Castle executive, which oversaw the Irish Post Office, functioned as an extension of the Westminster parliament.<sup>14</sup> Through the aegis of the postmasters-general in London, Westminster appointed the deputy postmasters of Ireland. Between 1703 and 1784 four were appointed. The title of the office holder varied over the course of the eighteenth century but in general he was referred to as deputy postmaster general for Ireland until around 1755, and thereafter as postmaster-general for Ireland. (This change in nomenclature strongly suggests that some reforms occurred at that time within the Irish Post Office though these have not been recorded.) Isaac Manley was appointed in 1703, the year after Queen Anne ascended the throne, and held the office until 1738. Manley was succeeded by Marmaduke Wyvill, of whom very little is known: he held the position for sixteen years from 1738 to 1754. A year after Wyvill's death, Sir Thomas Prendergast was appointed to the office and although he served for only five years until his death in 1760, his term proved eventful. Thereafter, Sir William Henry Fortescue was deputy post master from 1761 until the introduction of the independent Irish Post Office in 1784. As will become apparent, it was during his term in office that many improvements, most notably increased frequency of the running of the mails on both land and sea, were introduced.

In England, from 1691 down to 1823 the twin positions of postmasters-general were held by two individuals, one Whig and one Tory.<sup>15</sup> Always a political appointment, the office holders could not sit in the House of Commons; consequently they were normally members of the House of Lords. Granting the position of deputy postmaster-(general) for Ireland was in the gift of the English postmasters-general. Unlike in England, the Irish deputy postmaster could sit in the Irish Commons. Two incumbents, Sir Marmaduke Wyvill and Sir Thomas Prendergast, sat at Westminster, and were appointed to the Post Office in Ireland after they lost their Westminster seats. Prendergast, Manley and Fortescue also sat in the Irish Commons, Wyvill being the exception. Once appointed, the incumbent typically remained in office until his death, except Fortescue, whose tenure ended when the position was abolished in 1784 upon the foundation of a new Irish Post Office. Westminster's regard for and granting of the position of deputy postmaster for Ireland changed during Manley's time

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<sup>14</sup> J. G. Simms, 'The establishment of Protestant ascendancy, 1692-1714' in Moody & Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv, eighteenth-century Ireland*, pp 1-30, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> This is an indication of the importance both parties attached to the Post Office and to ensuring that it favoured neither party.

when the income attached to the position rose to at least £600 *per annum*, making it a more sought after office. After Manley, who had previous experience in the Post Office in London, none of the succeeding deputy postmasters for Ireland invested much time or energy developing the Irish Post Office. It is doubtful if Wyvill spent any time in Ireland and both Prendergast and Fortescue were otherwise engaged, being very actively involved in political affairs in both Westminster and Dublin. Moreover, with the possible exception of Manley, the Post Office was not the primary source of income for these incumbents, each of whom had extensive property holdings – Wyvill in Yorkshire, Prendergast in counties Galway and Tipperary, and Fortescue had a 8,363 Irish-acre estate in counties Monaghan and Louth.<sup>16</sup> Clearly it was the substantial salary that attracted Wyvill, Prendergast and Fortescue who, having secured the office, then treated it as a lucrative sinecure. Consequently, the day-to-day running of the Post Office in both England and Ireland was carried out by the respective secretaries.<sup>17</sup> Attention will now focus on each incumbent's term of office down to 1784. By interpreting developments concerning the Post Office in Ireland within the wider British context of state administration and Post Office priorities, personnel, structures, agendas and policies, the contribution (positive or otherwise) that these four men made to the modernisation of the Post Office in Ireland will be evaluated.

### **A burst of dynamism: Issac Manley at the helm**

Isaac Manley was the first deputy postmaster for Ireland in the eighteenth century. His family came to prominence during the English Civil War (1642-51), when his father, John, fought on the side of the parliamentarians. Later, John served as MP for Denbigh borough in Cromwell's 1659 parliament; he also represented Bridport in the 1689 convention parliament.<sup>18</sup> It was during the Commonwealth era that the family, in the ascent politically and financially, became involved with the Post Office in England. Between 1653 and 1655, John held the farm of the Post Office in return for an annual sum of £10,000.<sup>19</sup> That association continued following the Restoration when John's brother-in-law (Isaac's uncle) Isaac Dorislaus was employed by the Post Office,

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<sup>16</sup> A. P. W. Malcomson, 'The Earl of Clermont: a forgotten Co. Monaghan magnate of the late eighteenth century' in *Clogher Record*, 8, no. 1 (1973), pp 17-72, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, whereas the names of the secretaries of the Post Office in England are known from 1694, in Ireland their identities are unknown until their names start to appear in almanacs during the mid-1760s (see, for example, John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1769), p. 100. The earliest recorded was John Wilson who served as secretary during Fortescue's time (1761-84). For a list of see English secretaries see Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*.

<sup>18</sup> John. P. Ferris, 'John Manley (c.1622-99), of Bryn y Ffynnon, Wrexham, Denb. and the Old Artillery Ground, London' [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>, accessed 2 Oct. 2012].

<sup>19</sup> Order of the Council [of State], 13 Mar. 1634 in *Cal. S. P. dom., 1654-5*, p. 27.

although he had a bad reputation owing to his ‘crude opening of letters.’<sup>20</sup> John Manley had two sons, John junior, who followed his father into politics and became an MP (though unlike his father, he was a Tory), and Isaac, who worked in the Post Office in London and served as comptroller of the English Letter Office immediately before he transferred to Ireland in 1703.<sup>21</sup>

On the basis of his experience as comptroller Manley was sent to Ireland, charged with the task of auditing the books which, as previously explained, the previous postmaster general George Warburton had left in disarray. He made some recommendations for improvements which were approved by the Treasury commissioners in 1703.<sup>22</sup> But he obviously made a favourable impression in Dublin Castle circles as within months of his arrival, he was recommended for one of two vacant commissioner of revenue posts, although it is not known if he was appointed.<sup>23</sup> That year, he also received the endorsement of the Lord Lieutenant James Butler, second duke of Ormonde, who requested the Treasury’s backing ‘for the continuing [of] Mr Manley in Ireland to take care of the Post Office.’<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of the Castle administration, he was a desirable candidate who proved that he could be relied upon to restore stability and regularity to the postal system, and carry out its other functions, including opening letters, discreetly.

For his part, Manley appears to have been keen to stay. He was in debt, having supported (with difficulty) his elderly father, who died in England in 1699. (He had applied to the Treasury on at least two occasions, March 1696 and April 1698, for assistance.)<sup>25</sup> In his circumstances, the offer of the Irish Post Office position was propitious. At the time of his appointment, his salary was £200 *per annum*; soon after his arrival in 1703, it trebled.<sup>26</sup> That the Treasury in London continued to be satisfied with Manley’s performance for some time is evident from a report of the postmasters-general (Sir Thomas Frankland and Sir John Evelyn) to the lord high treasurer in 1710. They acknowledged that Manley was in debt to the tune of £1,200, declared that his

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<sup>20</sup> Ferris, ‘John Manley’.

<sup>21</sup> Duke of Ormonde, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to the lord high treasurer, 22 June 1703 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, iii, 1702-1707, 165.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-01. Unfortunately there is no surviving record of these recommendations.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Southwell to the earl of Nottingham, 10 Jan. 1704 (*Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1696, p. 490).

<sup>24</sup> *Cal. Treasury papers*, iii, 1702-07, 165.

<sup>25</sup> Proceedings upon the petition of Isaac Manley, 6 Mar. 1696 (T.N.A., S.P. dom. 44/ 238/ 202; *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1696, p. 74).

<sup>26</sup> Report of the postmasters-general (Frankland and Evelyn) to the lord high treasurer on the petition of Mr Manley, deputy postmaster of Ireland, 7 Apr. 1710 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, 1708-14, p. 175.



salary of £600 was sufficient, and recommended that he receive a pension of £200 *per annum* ‘for his good services’ and to help support his family.<sup>27</sup>

In keeping with family tradition, soon after his arrival in Ireland Manley involved himself in politics, being elected MP for Downpatrick, County Down in 1705 and continued to represent that constituency until 1713.<sup>28</sup> Later he was returned on three occasions (1715, 1727 and 1735) for Newtown Limavady, County Londonderry. Manley was fortunate in that eight years into his term as deputy postmaster-general the aforementioned landmark Post Office Act (1711) was passed.<sup>29</sup> Its standardisation of mileage and rates and its regulation of Post Office finances undoubtedly assisted Manley in modernising the Irish Post Office. However, the Act made little provision for developing the postal system or network and consequently, many of the improvements made to the Post Office in Ireland during the first three decades of the eighteenth century were in fact the fruits of Manley’s efforts and initiatives rather than the results of implementing the 1711 Act.

Having inherited a poorly managed institution, throughout his thirty-five years in office Manley oversaw significant and rapid expansion of all elements of the Post Office. By the mid-1720s the number of post-towns more than doubled, from 57 when he arrived to 77 in 1724 and 119 by the time of his death<sup>30</sup> (Map 2.1). In addition, the number of sailings from Ireland to Britain increased from two to three a week between 1702 and 1738.<sup>31</sup> Revenue generated also continued to grow rapidly: in 1718, the first year for which figures are available, gross revenue amounted to £14,592, including the sum due on franked letters, while net revenue was £3,066<sup>32</sup>. That increase reflected the upturn in economic activity that began almost immediately after the Williamite War.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, v, 190.

<sup>29</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11 [G.B.] (25 Nov. 1710). The number of the Act was re-scheduled in 1896.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Gardiner, general survey of the Post Office (1677-72) see B.L. Add MS. 62091 Legg family archive. See also John Knapp *Almanack or diary astromical, metoerological, astrological for the year of our lord 1725* (Dublin, 1725), p. 19; John Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1740), p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> John Chamberlayne, *Magnæ Britanniae notitia: or, the present state of Great-Britain, With divers Remarks upon The Antient State thereof* (London, 1708), p. 343; John Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1740), p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 142. While parliament was sitting, as well for a limited period before and after the session, many MPs were entitled to send mail free of charge. The loss to the Post Office due to free and franked letters was determined by how long the parliament was sitting.

<sup>33</sup> Cullen, ‘Economic development, 1691-1750’, pp 159-93.

Although a Tory when first he arrived in Ireland, Manley is understood to have become a Whig in 1711.<sup>34</sup> A card-playing friend of Dean Jonathan Swift and Stella (Esther Johnson),<sup>35</sup> Manley often features in Swift's letters during the latter's sojourn in London (1710-14). As Manley's was a political appointment, the landslide Tory victory in the general election, in Britain, of 1710 (2 October-16 November) seemed set to jeopardise his position. In a context in which 'the precedent has been established in the second half of Queen Anne's reign that whenever the government of Ireland passed from the hands of one party to the other, a purge of office-holders was carried out'<sup>36</sup>, he had reason to be apprehensive. He faced further challenges as he was both very unpopular with the Irish in England, and was rightly suspected of abusing his office in Ireland by opening letters.<sup>37</sup> In Autumn 1710 Swift believed that this practice posed an imminent threat to Manley's position. Writing on 9 September, weeks before the start of the general election in Britain (2 October), Swift told Stella

... I begged Will Frankland to stand [as] Manley's friend in this shaking season for places. He told me his father [Sir Thomas Frankland] was in danger of be [turned] out [of office]; that several were now soliciting for Manley's place; that he [Manley] was accused of opening letters; that Sir Thomas Frankland would sacrifice everything to save himself; and in that I fear Manley is undone.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, v, 190. This fact may also explain why he changed constituencies. He represented Downpatrick in the Irish parliament from 1705 to 1713 in a seat controlled by the Tory Edward Southwell. He did not sit in Queen Anne's 1713 parliament. However, he re-entered parliament in 1715, this time representing Limavady.

<sup>35</sup> These letters were published posthumously in *Journal to Stella*. In this thesis, the Methune 1901 edition with introduction and notes by George T. Aitkin has been used.

<sup>36</sup> McNally, *Parties, patriots & undertakers*, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup> Swift, *Journal to Stella*, letter iv, 21 Sep. 1710, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> Letter iii, 9 Sept. 1710 in *ibid.*, p. 7. The Whig Sir Thomas Frankland was an MP in Westminster. He was appointed in 1691, along with Sir Robert Cotton, a Tory, as joint postmaster-general. In that year the position was divided in an attempt to strengthen the Court party in parliament, and probably as an endeavour to balance Whig and Tory influence in a sensitive office. Frankland retained his position as Postmaster General until the accession of George I. During his tenure 'important improvements in the frequency and extension of postal communication were inaugurated', especially in the area of the foreign, Irish and plantation services. A contemporary remarked that 'by abundance of application he understands that office better than any man in England', and that, despite the war with France, 'he improved that revenue to £10,000 a year more than it was in the most flourishing years.' In 1711 he was appointed to the drafting committee to prepare a bill for establishing a General Post Office for Great Britain and the dominions, and for repealing the individual acts for England and Scotland. A clause in the first Lottery Act 'renders those in this office incapable to be Members of Parliament,' (9 Anne c. 6): hence, Frankland resigned his seat to continue as Postmaster General. He and his son, William, were friendly with Dean Swift, the three men often dining together (History of parliament British political, social & local history – <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>, accessed 16 Apr. 2015).

Frankland, a seasoned Whig, was apprehensive that the anticipated Tory win would result in a re-allocation of political appointments, including that of postmaster general. However, his fears about retaining his position proved unfounded and following the landslide Tory victory, he was left in office.<sup>39</sup> Evidently Swift was keenly attuned to the heightened uncertainty and anxiety that prevailed within the corridors of Westminster and aware of the ruthless competition for office during Autumn 1710, both of which unsettled Post Office personnel in both England and Ireland.

Manley, too, escaped dismissal. Despite complaints about his opening letters and competition for his position, he remained as Deputy Postmaster for Ireland, helped in no small part by his political connections. Chief among his most influential allies were Ned Southwell and Sir Thomas Frankland, together with his brother, John Manley, who ‘stands up heartily for him.’<sup>40</sup> These were powerful supporters indeed. Southwell was Secretary of State for Ireland (1702-30), a close friend of William King, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, secretary to James Butler, second duke of Ormonde and Viceroy of Ireland (1703-07, 1710-13), and MP in both Westminster and Dublin.<sup>41</sup> Manley owed his election as MP for Downpatrick in 1705 to Ned Southwell who controlled the seat.<sup>42</sup> Manley’s brother, John, was a Westminster MP and, like Swift, was closely aligned with the Tory administration at this time.<sup>43</sup> Issac’s relationship with Frankland appears to have been subject to the dictates of political pragmatism. We have heard Swift’s view during the lead-up to the election that Frankland was prepared to sacrifice Manley out of self-interest. By mid-December, with the election behind them, Frankland was said to have been Manley’s friend.<sup>44</sup> Charting Manley’s survival as postmaster general of Ireland through Swift’s letters offers a revealing insight into the shifting dynamics of political patronage in early eighteenth-century Ireland. Following the overwhelming Whig victory in the general election of 1715, Manley was secure in his position; Swift, on the other hand, was under suspicion from the new government. Writing to his card-playing partner, Archdeacon Walls, Swift acknowledged this

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<sup>39</sup> Eveline Cruickshanks and Ivar McGrath, ‘Frankland, Thomas I (1665-1726), of Thirkleby, nr. Thirsk, Yorks. and Chiswick, Mdx.’ at *The history of parliament* [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>, accessed 2 Oct. 2012].

<sup>40</sup> Swift, *Journal to Stella*, letter ix, Dec. 1710, p. 93.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick A. Walsh, ‘Southwell, Edward’ in *Dictionary of Irish biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 4 Oct. 2012]. At this time Manley was MP for Downpatrick.

<sup>42</sup> Walsh, ‘Southwell, Edward’.

<sup>43</sup> Eveline Cruickshanks and Stuart Handley, ‘Manley, John (1655-1713), of Truro, Cornw.’ at *The history of parliament* [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org>, accessed 2 Oct. 2012].

<sup>44</sup> Swift, *Journal to Stella*, letter iv, 21 Sep. 1710, p. 18 and letter xi, 9 Dec. 1710, p. 93.

inversion of their fortunes, observing that ‘Mr Manley is, I believe, now secure in his post; and it will be my turn to solicit favours from him.’<sup>45</sup>

Having undoubtedly helped him survive the storm of 1710, Manley’s willingness to open letters carried by the Post Office and to divulge information gleaned from correspondence to Castle authorities also helped him realise his ambitions for a career in Irish politics. He stood for election as MP for Newtown Limavady in 1715 at the behest of ‘Speaker’ William Conolly, a fellow Whig, and one of the richest and most powerful men in Ireland.<sup>46</sup> It is likely that Manley’s selection as MP for both Downpatrick and Newtown Limavady was in reward for information supplied to Southwell and Conolly respectively. (Hayton refers to Manley as ‘Conolly’s crony’.<sup>47</sup>) As both postmaster-general and MP, Manley remained loyal to the Dublin Castle administration. In 1728 Primate Hugh Boulter, the London-born Church of Ireland archbishop of Armagh, and ‘strenuous advocate of government policy in Ireland’, writing to Thomas Pelham-Holles, first Duke of Newcastle and future Prime Minister, praised Manley as ‘one who has behaved himself well in his post and is well affected to his Majesty, and always distinguished himself by his zeal for the house of Hanover in the worst of times.’<sup>48</sup> Significantly, Archbishop Boulter wrote this recommendation while Manley was actively intercepting letters: that service may have been the basis for his applauding the postmaster-general’s zeal.

It is difficult to ascertain how much time Manley devoted to his Post Office duties. Apart from being an active MP, the only other position that he held was the governorship of the Dublin workhouse from 1732 until his death.<sup>49</sup> He does not seem to have put down roots in Ireland: he never owned property there and for the duration of his sojourn in Ireland, he seems to have lived in the Post Office building which was in Sycamore Alley, near Essex Street in Dublin’s city centre.<sup>50</sup> However, as previously

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<sup>45</sup> Dean Jonathan Swift to Archdeacon Walls, 8 Aug. 1714 in *The Works of Jonathan Swift: D.D. Dean of St. Patrick’s Dublin; Containing Additional Letters, Tracts and poems* ..., ed. Walter Scott (19 vols, Edinburgh 1824), xvi, 190. Sir Walter Scott first published the collected works of Dean Swift in 1814, in 19 volumes. In 1824 he published a second edition which he re-edited and in which he made corrections. It is the 1824 edition that is referred to throughout this thesis.

<sup>46</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iii, 474; *ibid.*, ii, 280; *ibid.*, v, 190.

<sup>47</sup> Hayton, *Ruling Ireland*, p. 225.

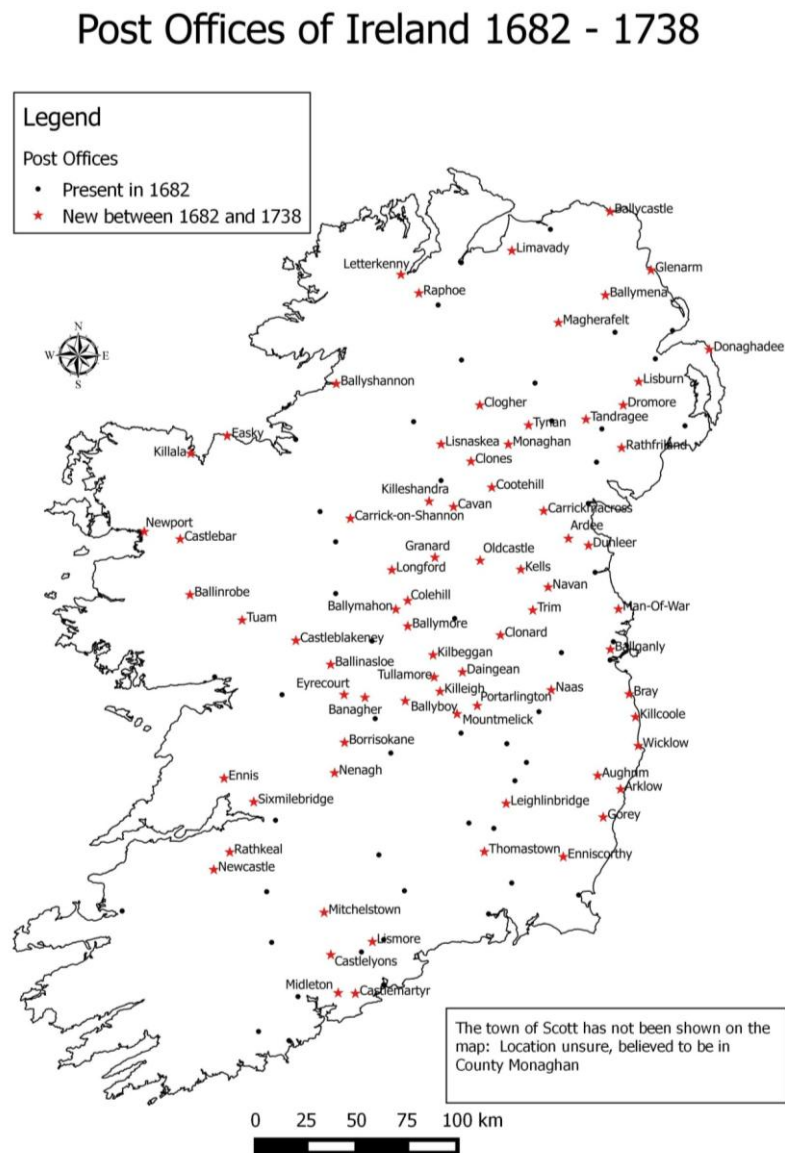
<sup>48</sup> Archbishop Hugh Boulter to Thomas Pelham Holles, Duke of Newcastle, 31 May 1728 in Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, v, 190; Kenneth Milne, ‘Boulter, Hugh’ in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do>, accessed 14 Apr. 2015].

<sup>49</sup> See Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, v, 190. The name of the workhouse is not supplied. Manley was a founding member of the Royal Dublin Society but apparently not an active one.

<sup>50</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, v, 190 states that his main residence was Manley Hall in Staffordshire and that he had estates at Barziers, Oxfordshire. The owner of these

mentioned, the growing number of post-towns, the increased frequency of sailings from Ireland to Britain, and the rise in revenue generated during his term as deputy postmaster-general testify to his success in both overseeing and instigating a significant quickening in the pace of modernisation of the entire Post Office in Ireland.

**Map 2.1 Post Offices opened between 1682 and 1738**



**Note:** Although this map is dated 1682 to 1738, the year before Manley died, it is likely that those towns shown in red became post-towns during his term as deputy postmaster.

**Sources:** Legg family archives (B.L., Add MS. 63091), reproduced and published by the Postal History Society as special series no. 5 *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, pp 69-70; Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1740), p. 94.

properties was, in fact, a different Isaac Manley. The Oxfordshire property was built by an Isaac Manley who was a member of Captain Cook's crew and later an admiral in the Royal Navy. The Manley Hall family had no connection with the Isaac Manley discussed here – see *ibid.*, and Reynolds, *A history of the Irish Post Office*, p. 18. The Post Office had transferred premises from Fishamble Street, near Christ Church Cathedral, about 1709.

## Momentum stalled under the stewardship of Sir Marmaduke Wyvill

If Isaac Manley demonstrated a genuine interest in developing the service, the same could not be said of his successor, another Englishman, Sir Marmaduke Wyvill. The sixth baronet of Burton Constable in Yorkshire, where his family had deep roots and a large estate, Wyvill was appointed postmaster-general for Ireland in 1738 by his brother-in-law Thomas Coke (later Lord Leicester), one of the two joint postmasters-general of Britain.<sup>51</sup> Unlike many other members of his family, very little is known about Marmaduke.<sup>52</sup> His family had served the English monarch since the era of William the Conqueror.<sup>53</sup> His father had been an MP at Westminster, as had the five previous baronets.<sup>54</sup> Marmaduke's career was not so auspicious. After four attempts, he was eventually elected to Westminster as MP for Richmond in 1727, though he was unseated the following year on petition.<sup>55</sup> Ten years later, he was appointed to the postmastership of Ireland. His appointment reflects the political changes that had occurred in Ireland since the Post Office had been established in 1638. Up to and including Manley's appointment, for security reasons Westminster always closely vetted incumbents. Wyvill's selection signalled a change in that the office became more valued and attractive for the title and substantial salary which the Westminster parliament could grant as a favour or reward. Beyond the fact that he owed the appointment to the advocacy of his brother-in-law, the reason for Wyvill's appointment to the position is unknown.

Although he served as deputy postmaster-general for Ireland for sixteen years until his death in 1754, when compared with his predecessor, Wyvill introduced little change; in fact, the momentum in the modernisation of the Post Office, built up by Manley, largely stalled, the only improvement being a very modest and sustained increase in the network (the number of post-towns rose from 118 to 127 at a rate of less than one new post-town a year).<sup>56</sup> Quite simply, Wyvill was not committed to the Post Office; neither had he any interest in Ireland. A contemporary reference to his being 'a great man for sheep in Yorkshire' suggests his preference for spending time in his

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<sup>51</sup> Romney R. Sedgwick, 'Wyvill, Sir Marmaduke, 6th Bt. (1692-1754), of Constable Burton, Yorks' at *The history of Parliament* [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>, accessed 2 Oct. 2012].

<sup>52</sup> Unlike many of his forbearers, he is not even the subject of an *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry.

<sup>53</sup> John Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the commoners of Great Britain and Ireland enjoying territorial possessions or high official rank* (4 vols, London 1888), iv, 467.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 467-70.

<sup>55</sup> *JHC*, 14-15 Mar. 1727; Sedgwick, 'Wyvill, 'Sir Marmaduke'.

<sup>56</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1755), p. 91.

Yorkshire home, and he was the only Postmaster General for Ireland since Vaughan, almost a century before, who did not sit in the Irish parliament.<sup>57</sup> The fact that the development of the Post Office in Ireland virtually stagnated during his term in office demonstrates clearly that as far as Wyvill was concerned, the position was just an additional source of income. Exactly how much the salary was worth at this time is unknown but given that Manley received £600 a year plus a pension of £200, it is unlikely to have been less than £800.

### **Internal strife and systemic stagnation: the turn of Sir Thomas Prendergast**

Wyvill was succeeded in 1754 by Sir Thomas Prendergast who had been linked with the position twenty years earlier. In two letters dated 21 January and 4 February 1734 Marmaduke Coghill, MP for Dublin University and commissioner of the revenue, informed Edward Southwell Jr., Secretary of State for Ireland, that ‘The prints [papers] have given the reversion of the post office to Sr T. Prendergast.’<sup>58</sup> Coghill’s second letter reiterated the point; however, this was not the full story.<sup>59</sup> The newspapers were partly right in that Sir Robert Walpole, first lord of the Treasury, chancellor of the Exchequer and head of the government at Westminster, had twice promised Prendergast the position, initially in 1734 and again on the death of Manley, when Prendergast had canvassed for the position.<sup>60</sup> However, in the end, he was passed over when Wyvill was appointed. A disappointed Prendergast complained ‘heavily’ about not securing the post<sup>61</sup> but in 1754, following Wyvill’s death, he was finally appointed. By then the Post Office premises was situated at Fownes’ Court on College Green in Dublin’s city centre.<sup>62</sup>

Like Manley and Wyvill before him, Prendergast was politically well connected; he was a cousin of the second duke of Richmond and owed his appointment to representations made on his behalf by the duke.<sup>63</sup> Prendergast won the safe seat of Chichester controlled by his cousin the duke in a by-election in 1733.<sup>64</sup> On entering

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<sup>57</sup> Sedgwick, ‘Wyvill, Sir Marmaduke’.

<sup>58</sup> Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southall jr., 21 Jan. 1734 in *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill, 1722-1238*, ed. D. W. Hayton (Dublin, 2005), p. 154.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Second Duke of Richmond to Sir Robert Walpole, ? Mar. 1738 in Earl of March, *A duke and his friends: the life and letters of the second Duke of Richmond* (2 vols, London, 1911), i, 324.

<sup>61</sup> Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southall, 10 Jan. 1735 in *Letters of Coghill*, ed. Hayton, p. 182.

<sup>62</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1760), p. 52.

<sup>63</sup> Romney R. Sedgwick, ‘Chichester Borough’ at *The history of parliament* [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>, accessed 22 Oct. 2015].

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

parliament he promptly voted against Walpole's government, effectively ending his chances of a political career in England since he was not nominated for the seat in the general election the following year (though he did continue to harbour ambitions of returning to Westminster).<sup>65</sup> He therefore directed his attention to Ireland where in 1733, the same year that he had taken his seat at Westminster, he was also elected to the Irish parliament as MP for Clonmel (1733-60).<sup>66</sup> Eventually both his and Richmond's persistence paid off when following the death of Wyvill and Walpole's withdrawal of his objection, Prendergast became deputy post master for Ireland.

He was the first Irishman since Warburton to hold the position and, like Manley and Wyvill before him, he was a strong supporter of the Dublin Castle administration. Prendergast's six years in office (1754-60) were beset by internal strife and as in the case of his immediate predecessor, there was no significant expansion in the network with no new post-town created during his term in office.<sup>67</sup> His first year in office elicited mixed comment. In June 1755 Henry Fox, one of the Secretaries of State at Westminster, remarked that 'Sir T. and Lady Prenediggrass [*sic*] will hardly make free with your Excellence's letters, as I hear they do with other people's'<sup>68</sup> while a few months later, Sir Robert Wilmot, secretary to Lord Lieutenant Devonshire in England, writing to the latter in September 1755, praised Prendergast, stating that 'Every day produces fresh proof of the prudence of Sir Thomas Prendergast in the execution of his office'.<sup>69</sup>

His term in office coincided with a dispute involving staff in the Dublin office which had its origins in Sir Marmaduke Wyvill's time, but reached a climax in the early 1760s with the publication of a pamphlet titled, *The case of Christopher Byron Late an Officer in his Majesty's Post-Office, Dublin submitted to the Consideration of his friends, and the Public*. Printed in 1762, this comprised three distinct petitions addressed to various dignitaries in the Post Office in Dublin and London.<sup>70</sup> Within these petitions are copies of other letters, written between 1755 and 1761. The first petition, dated 1755, was addressed to the earl of Leicester and Sir Everard Fawkener, joint post-

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<sup>65</sup> March, *A duke & his friends*, ii, 200-03, 259, 278-86, 323-30.

<sup>66</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 117; Romney R. Sedgwick, 'Prendergast, Sir Thomas, 2nd Bt. (c.1700-60), of Gort, co. Galway' at *The history of parliament* [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>, accessed 2 Oct. 2012].

<sup>67</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1755), pp 91-2; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1763), pp 91-2.

<sup>68</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 117.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *The case of Christopher Byron late an officer in his Majesty's Post-Office, Dublin submitted to the consideration of his friends and the public* (Dublin, 1762).



masters general: it was written by Christopher Byron on behalf of himself and other supernumerary and junior officers. The second was addressed to Sir Thomas Prendergast, deputy postmaster for Ireland (1755-60); it too included letters. The third, addressed to William Ponsonby, first Earl of Bessborough and to Robert Hampden, dates from sometime between 1759 and 1762 when both were joint postmasters-general.<sup>71</sup> Bound and published in 1762 as a single pamphlet, these petitions merit close analysis since they offer revealing insights into how the Post Office was operating, both officially and unofficially, in the mid-eighteenth century.

The entire pamphlet is primarily focussed on a dispute between Byron and Evelyn Martin, two clerks of the road whose duty it was to charge for the conveyance of letters along one of the three post routes – the Great northern, the Connaught, and the Munster roads. The row between the two men brought to the surface a range of grievances shared by many staff in the Dublin Post Office, particularly in relation to wages and perks associated with the position of clerk. At the time, junior officials like Byron (on whose behalf he purportedly wrote this petition) earned £12 *per annum* with no extras.<sup>72</sup> They had previously applied for a wage increase through the aegis of Evelyn Martin ‘who acted as Accomptant and Comptroller of the Office’ but to no avail.<sup>73</sup> Soon after Byron was made permanent, he was informed by Martin that Sir Marmaduke Wyvill would be deducting 40s. a year from his wages and those of other junior officers. Byron and his colleagues suspected that this money was in fact appropriated by Martin.

On closer examination it emerges that hostility towards Evelyn Martin pre-dated this development, originally stemming from Wyvill’s appointment of him as accomptant and comptroller of the Office ahead of others who were senior to him.<sup>74</sup> Following his subsequent promotion to clerk to the secretary, Martin stirred further resentment when allegedly ‘he, [Martain] by some private agreement, rented, or procured the Privilege of sending and supplying News-papers, to all the Two-penny and every first four-penny Stage from Dublin’ along with other privileges that would normally have gone to ‘Secretary or postmasters Clerks’.<sup>75</sup> He was also accused of having appropriated for himself the privilege of supplying English newspapers to coffee-houses, printers, commissioners of revenue, the linen board, barrack officers and

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<sup>71</sup> Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 431.

<sup>72</sup> *The case of Christopher Byron*, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 6, 7.

others, all of whom paid regularly and handsomely for this service.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Martin was said to have inappropriately acquired the position of clerk of the Leinster post road and many associated benefits. Byron and his colleagues were also aggrieved that when Martin was promoted, in addition to his salary of £50 and other benefits, he supposedly retained his old privileges which he should have passed on to the person who succeeded him in his previous positions. (These privileges were worth about £400 a year in addition to his salary.<sup>77</sup>)

By the time of Wyvill's death in 1754 nothing had come of these grumblings which were left to Prendergast, the newly appointment Deputy Postmaster of Ireland, to sort out. In a petition addressed to Prendergast,<sup>78</sup> Byron set out his many grievances and those of his colleagues, expressing their annoyance that while 'most people in the Military and Civil Employments' had received a raise in their salaries, *they* had not been afforded that treatment; indeed they complained that they were worse off than these other state employees.<sup>79</sup> From this, we glean useful information on the official wages paid to Post Office employees in 1765 (see Table 3.1).<sup>80</sup>

**Table 2.1 The wages and number of years employed for some staff in the Post Office in 1756**

	Salary	Years employed
Richard Tucker	£30	17
Thomas Lee	£28	15
Coghill Haggerty	£15	9
Christopher Byron	£14	7
Samuel Dixon	£12	4
Marmaduke Lamont	£10	3

**Source:** *The case of Christopher Byron ...* (Dublin, 1692).

The sacking of a letter-carrier, John Lewis, for what Byron and his colleagues considered a trivial offence, and his immediate replacement by a close associate of Evelyn Martin, aggravated the already fraught situation. (A letter-carrier collected payment for letters on his rounds, deposited this money in the bank once a month, and

<sup>76</sup> The trade in English newspapers though small was very lucrative as they could reach the provenances quicker than the Irish newspapers. The Irish newspapers relied on the English ones for much of their international and British news. By the time these were printed and ready for distribution, the English newspapers had already been dispatched in a previous post. Also English newspapers were 'in demand among some of the gentry now increasingly anglicised and among senior officers in army garrisons' scattered across the country; see L. M. Cullen, 'Establishing a communications system: news post and transport' in Brian Farrell (ed.), *Communications and community in Ireland* (Dublin, 1984), p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> *The case of Christopher Byron*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> This petition comprised the second section of the pamphlet, p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

then presented a receipt to the Treasurer. According to Byron, Lewis was sacked for his tardiness in passing on this receipt.)

Prendergast's alleged fondness for appointing his friends to well-paid positions ahead of those who were in line for promotion to those posts was another source of grievance for the Post Office staff who appear to have had just cause to complain. A surveyor sent over in 1760 from London to investigate the facts behind this allegation, upheld the aggrieved employees' complaint: he reinstated one officer who had been dismissed, promoted others, and pointedly sacked Prendergast's appointee.<sup>81</sup> The surveyor also increased the wages of younger officers from £17 to £20 *per annum*.<sup>82</sup> After this particular episode in the greater ongoing row, Prendergast devoted little energy to attending to his duties as deputy postmaster.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the dispute between him and Martin on the one hand and Christopher Byron and his colleagues on the other would continue, re-activated by fresh disagreement over who Byron should vote for in the parliamentary elections of 1760.<sup>84</sup> One petition, signed by eleven staff members including clerks of the road, presented the following devastating evaluation of Prendergast's term in office: 'we are sorry to say, [Sir Thomas] rendered himself forever memorable, by a conduct towards the Officers established here before his time, to which we cannot give a softer Appellation, than Tyranny and Oppression.'<sup>85</sup>

Prendergast's Irish nationality appears to have been of no consequence in terms of his performance as deputy postmaster which was decidedly unimpressive, being defined by his disengagement, an unwillingness or inability to quell ongoing tensions and disputes within the ranks, and a resultant retardation to the point of virtual stagnation in the development of the Irish Post Office. In these respects he followed in the footsteps of his equally unremarkable predecessor, Wyvill: for both, the postmastership was little more than another income source. Although the number of post-towns did rise by seven from 117 to 124 during his five years in the office (1756-60), there was also contraction in the network when the connection between Tralee and Dingle that had opened the year before he came into office ceased operation.<sup>86</sup> Prendergast's inertia is further evidenced by the lack of significant improvement to the quality of the postal service: this era saw no increase in the frequency of deliveries of

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 31, 37.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 27-8.

<sup>86</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1755), pp 91-93; *idem*, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1760), pp 90-92.

mail between Dublin and the provinces or between Dublin and London. Like Wyvill before him, Prendergast seems to have had little interest in modernising the post in Ireland, instead leaving the day-to-day running of the Post Office to the secretary.

Following Prendergast's death and at an early stage in his career, Sir William Henry Fortescue (*cr.* Earl of Clermont in 1777) was appointed deputy post-master general for Ireland in 1761. He too had to contend with the ongoing grievances of Byron and his colleagues. In July, just months after Fortescue's appointment, Byron was dismissed from the Post Office. The final section of the petition dated 16 February 1762 and titled, *An ADDRESS to the Right Honourable William Earl of Besborough, and Robert Hampden Esq. His Majesty's Post-master-General*, is Byron's appeal for his reinstatement.<sup>87</sup> Byron complained about the circumstances of his dismissal, made allegations of bullying, cronyism and other abuses within the Post Office, and was particularly vehement in his criticism of Evelyn Martin. Determining how much of this was accurate or merely sour grapes on the part of a disgruntled sacked employee is, of course, a difficult task.<sup>88</sup> But although inherently biased, this pamphlet reveals much about the Irish Post Office in the mid-eighteenth century. It sheds significant light on the inner workings of the Post Office, the poor wages paid to staff, and the importance of the newspaper privilege to senior and junior personnel alike. In addition to exposing disquiet among staff, it shows that jobbery and cronyism were common practices. If the pamphlet is to be believed, bullying was also common. One can also deduce that the deputy postmaster general for Ireland seldom personally attended to the business of the office, relying instead on his secretary. The importance of perks associated with various jobs is clear. However, it is important to acknowledge that in availing of these concessions, the postmaster general differed little from his contemporaries who held political and other public office in both Ireland and Britain. Furthermore, the fact that Prendergast, like Wyvill, acquired the office through political patronage rather than ability once again reflects Westminster's attitude towards the Post Office in Ireland: it

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<sup>87</sup> *The case of Christopher Byron*, pp 34, 51.

<sup>88</sup> *Wilson's Dublin directory* (Dublin, 1766), p. 18. It is not known whether Christopher Byron ever worked for the Post Office again after his dismissal. Wilson's *Dublin Directory* of 1766 lists a Christopher Byron, card maker, of Eustace Street. That was the address at which the Christopher Byron, employee of the Post Office, was resident. Certainly some of the other individuals mentioned in the pamphlet were still working in the Post Office in 1768, among them Richard Turker who became clerk of the North Road, and Thomas Lee who served as clerk of the Connaught road. See John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1769), p. 99. A year later, a John Wilson, possibly the surveyor sent over from London to enquire into matters concerning the Post Office, was listed as secretary and comptroller of the Post Office in Dublin (*The case of Christopher Byron*, p. 31; Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1769), p. 99). Perhaps Wilson, like Isaac Manley before him, having been appointed to the Irish Post Office, settled in Ireland.

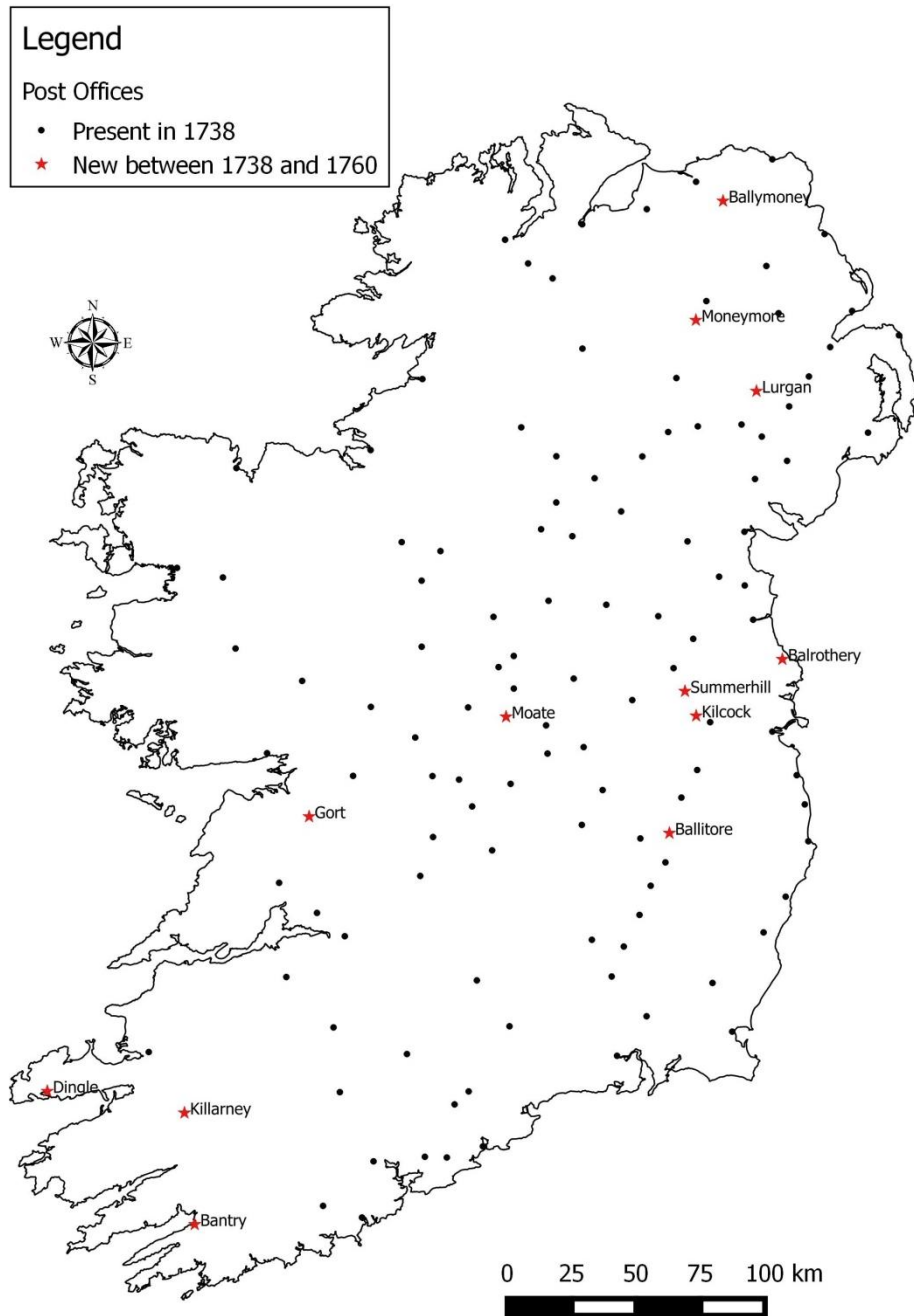
was seen as an attractive position primarily because of the substantial salary and pension attached. However, that outlook was by no means unique to the Post Office. In Ireland and England, it was common practice for prominent figures to hold multiple offices. Thus, Prendergast's being a trustee of the linen board, commissioner of the tillage board for Connaught, and governor of County Galway from 1754 until his death, whilst serving as postmaster-general, was far from unusual.<sup>89</sup> However, with their attention diverted elsewhere, it is not surprising that Prendergast and the other incumbents in this period (Manley excepted) had little formative input into the modernisation of Ireland's postal service which took place during their terms in office.

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<sup>89</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 117.

Map 2.2 Towns that became post-towns between 1738 and 1760

## Post Offices in Ireland 1738 - 1760



Sources: Data from Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanac* (1740), p. 94; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1760), pp 90-2.

### **Among the least of his rewards: Sir William Henry Fortescue and the office of postmaster-general**

Prendergast's successor, William Henry Fortescue, was also Irish-born. He had the added distinction of being the only postmaster-general since Isaac Manley not to have previously sat in the Westminster parliament. Although he cut a figure in his day at both the royal courts of France and England, were it not for a paper regarding his life and times published by A. P. W. Malcomson in the *Clogher Record* in 1973, he would be all but forgotten today.<sup>90</sup> It is striking that even this scholarly pen portrait features only a passing reference and little information regarding his twenty-three year term as deputy postmaster-general for Ireland (1761-84).<sup>91</sup> There are a number of possible reasons for this, notably the dearth of surviving Post Office records and the absence of references to the Post Office in his personal papers, which are scattered in a number of repositories.<sup>92</sup> This lack of relevant material might reasonably be interpreted as reflecting a general disinterest in the Post Office in Ireland on the part of those like Fortescue who, along with this senior position, simultaneously held several others. At the time of his appointment in 1761, Fortescue was MP for Monaghan borough (1761-70); he had previously represented County Louth (1745-60).<sup>93</sup> He was also a *protégé* of George Stone, the London-born Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and one of Dublin Castle's chief 'undertakers' who secured his appointment to the Post Office.<sup>94</sup> In keeping with tradition whereby all incumbents could be relied upon to vote with the administration, including on such contentious issues as the Money Bill during the early 1750s<sup>95</sup>, when the postmastership fell vacant in 1760, Fortescue was identified as an ideal candidate. His parliamentary voting record testified to his loyalty to the Castle administration, and the fact that he controlled three seats in parliament (County Louth, Monaghan Borough and Dundalk Borough) made him a valuable asset to the Castle administration.<sup>96</sup> The Post Office position was just one in a long list of prestigious rewards for his loyalty: he was created first Baron Clermont (1770), then Viscount (1776) and ultimately first Earl of Clermont (1777) while in 1795 he was made a Knight of St. Patrick. A. P. W. Malcomson's summation that 'Throughout his career he did

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<sup>90</sup> A. P. W. Malcomson, 'The Earl of Clermont: a forgotten Co. Monaghan magnate of the late eighteenth century' in *Clogher Record*, 8, no. 1 (1973), pp 17-72.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62, n. 105.

<sup>93</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1769), p. 99; *idem*, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1772); Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, vi, 217.

<sup>94</sup> Malcomson, 'Earl of Clermont', p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iv, 217.

<sup>96</sup> Malcomson, 'Earl of Clermont', pp 19-72, p. 28.

nothing in particular ... but did it rather well' certainly applies to his performance as postmaster general of Ireland.<sup>97</sup>

**Fig 2.1 Portrait, mezzotint, of William Henry Fortescue, first Earl of Clermont (1722-1806) after Thomas Hudson**



**Source:** National Portrait Gallery, London.

Notwithstanding his lack of engagement, Fortescue held the position (the title changed from deputy postmaster general for Ireland in 1761) the establishment of an independent Irish Post Office in 1784. His term coincided with a number of significant improvements, the most impactful being the increased frequency of deliveries of mails and the expansion in the number of post-towns from 137 to 158.<sup>98</sup> Just how much direct input into these advancements Fortescue had is unknown, but for reasons outlined above, it is likely to have been very limited indeed. When he assumed office in 1761 mail travelled along the Munster and Great North roads three times weekly.<sup>99</sup> By the time he left office in 1784, it was running six days a week. On the Connaught road the service was stepped up from twice to three times per week. Furthermore, twenty-one new by-posts routes began operation, including Sligo to Donegal and onwards to Killybegs, and the Galway to Ballynahinch route along which the mail was carried

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp 19-72, p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1760), p. 102; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1774), p. 127

<sup>99</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1760), p. 102.



twice weekly.<sup>100</sup> The service connecting Ireland and Britain also improved significantly: in 1760 there were only three crossings a week, weather permitting, arriving from Holyhead on Saturday, Tuesday and Thursday.<sup>101</sup> By 1782, the service had improved dramatically to the point that according to *Watson's almanac*, 'English Pacquets are due in Dublin every Day of the Week, excepting Friday'.<sup>102</sup> (A six-day a week service may in fact have been introduced as early as 1768.)<sup>103</sup> An innovation introduced during Fortescue's time as postmaster general was the Dublin Penny Post, which began operating in 1773. This was a local delivery network, confined to the city, whereby letters were delivered and collected within defined limits for one penny (see a more detailed examination later in the chapter). Many of these improvements were introduced after 1770 when Fortescue, having been elevated to the peerage, vacated his seat in the Irish parliament, and spent most of his time abroad, living in London and Paris. But while it is extremely doubtful that he paid attention to the Irish Post Office, he took steps to ensure that he remained informed, having appointed his nephew and heir, William Charles Fortescue, as his clerk just three years after he became Postmaster General.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, the secretaries got on with running the service. Their identities only begin to emerge during this time, the first known incumbent being John Wilson, who was in turn replaced by John Lees in 1774.<sup>105</sup> While Fortescue was not an active postmaster-general, he did do an important service to the Post Office by deploying his political acumen during the negotiations for establishing an independent Irish Post Office in 1784.<sup>106</sup> Having relinquished his position as postmaster-general, he was compensated with the lucrative position of customer and collector of the port of Dublin, worth £1,000 a year: he held that office until his death in 1806.

During Fortescue's twenty-three-year term of office, although the number of post-towns increased steadily by twenty-one from 137 to 158 (Map 2.3), the *rate* of increase (almost one a year) was poor when compared with the immediate aftermath of his resignation when twenty-nine were created in just two years. While demand in the mid-1780s was clearly very strong and the increased frequency of mail deliveries endeavoured to meet that need, there was as yet no attempt to increase the speed or to protect the mail *en route*. Theft of the mails and the slowness of the service remained

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<sup>100</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1774), p. 127.

<sup>101</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1760), p. 90.

<sup>102</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizens Almanack* (Dublin, 1782), p. 101.

<sup>103</sup> Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 79.

<sup>104</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1763), p. 73.

<sup>105</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1769), p. 99.

<sup>106</sup> *The parliamentary register or history of the proceedings and debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, the first session in the reign of his present Majesty*, ii (Dublin, 1784), 428.

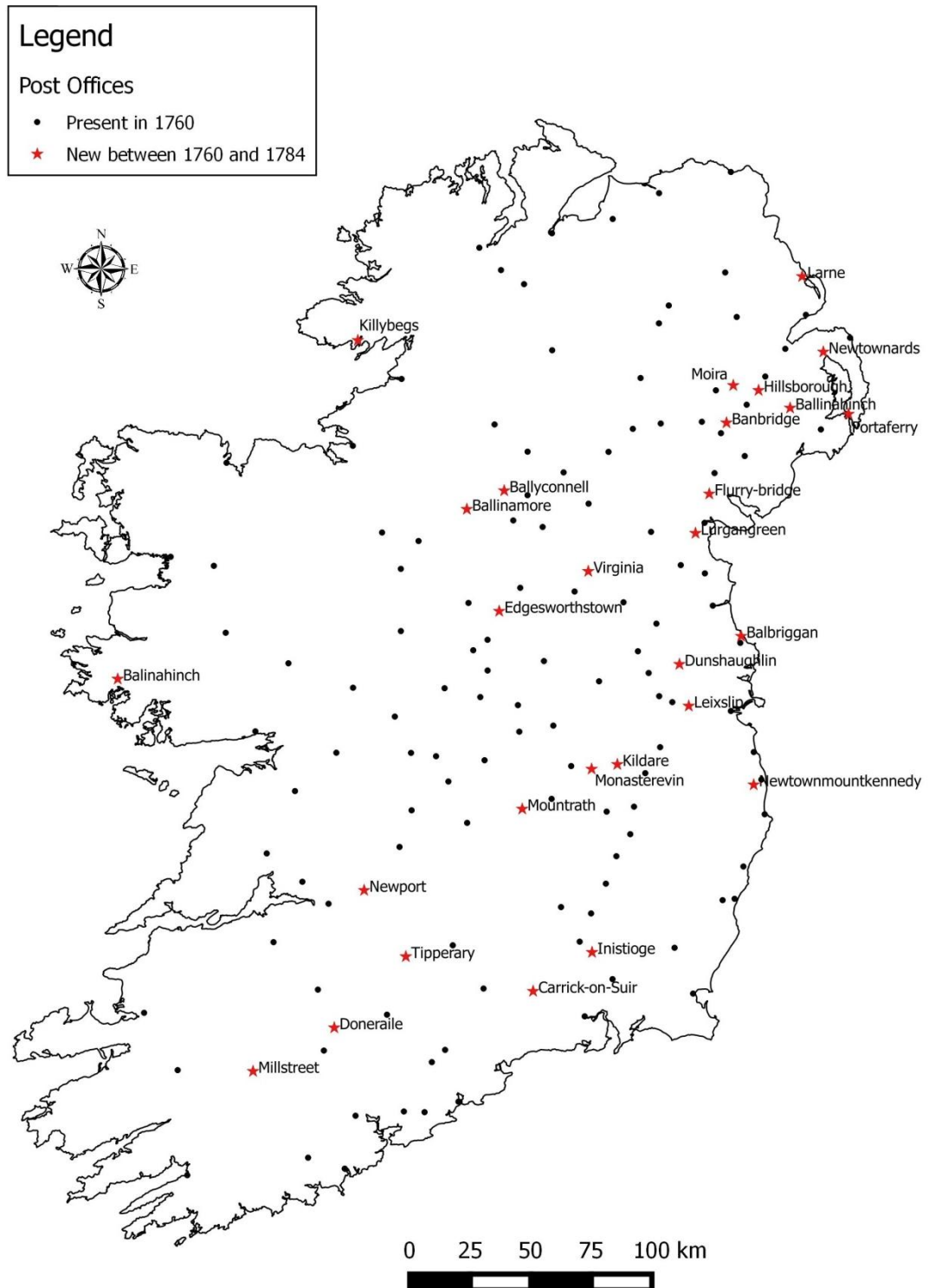
obstacles to the development of a modern, reliable service, a reality acknowledged in both the print media and correspondence at the time (see discussion later in this chapter). It was only in 1784, after the new Irish Post Office was established and Fortescue had retired, that many significant improvements began to be introduced (see next chapter).

### **Causation versus coincidence: progress in the absence of leadership**

Much about the attitude of the Westminster parliament towards the Irish Post Office throughout the eighteenth century can be deduced from the calibre of men whom it chose to be deputy postmasters for Ireland. Early in the century, when the Post Office in Ireland was in need of serious reform and a reliable 'Castle man' was needed, Issac Manley was chosen. Loyal, compliant and conscientious he proved to be, reforming the system, expanding the network, and apparently supplying information to Castle authorities. By the time of his death in 1738, the Hanoverian monarchy was secure, the political situation in Ireland was relatively stable, and the Post Office was fulfilling its expanding role through the increasingly efficient collection and delivery of letters, newspapers, gazettes and so on, albeit working within the constraints of a slowly modernising network and system. The position of Deputy Postmaster for Ireland had become a lucrative and sought after post, in the gift of the Westminster parliament. The next three incumbents – Wyvill, Prendergast and Fortescue – having acquired the office through political patronage, had little direct input into the running of the Post Office. As the country was in a relatively peaceful state, the surveillance aspect of the role was not as vital to the state as it had been at the beginning of the century (or as it would be again towards the end), though it certainly continued. However, during the last third of the century, following the introduction of the Octennial Act in 1768 and with the rise of Protestant patriotism sentiment in Ireland, Westminster once again assumed a more actively interventionist role in Irish affairs.

Map 2.3 Post Offices opened between 1760 and 1784

## Post Offices in Ireland 1760 - 1784



Sources: Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin 1760), pp 90-2;  
Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin 1784), p. 119

### **An emerging profile of Post Office staff**

Thus far, this chapter has focussed on the duties, responsibilities and conduct in office of successive Irish postmaster generals, most of whom devolved the task of running the Post Office to their secretary. The latter position was first created in the London Post Office in June 1692; it is likely that a similar role was created in Ireland around that time.<sup>107</sup> As the importance and usage of the post increased, more information about its structure and personnel featured in printed periodicals of the time. As early as 1762 *Watson's almanac* was printing the names of those who held the more important Post Office positions in Dublin.<sup>108</sup> The list generated in 1769 read as follows:

Rt. Hon. Wm. Henry Fortescue, Postmaster General, and Treasurer  
John Wilson Secretary and Comptroller  
William Forte[s]cure, Accountant  
Thomas Gondwin, Clerk to the Postmaster General  
Thomas Jones, Clerk to the Munster road.  
Tom. Lee, Clerk to the Connaught Road  
Richard Tucker, Clerk to the North Road.<sup>109</sup>

The accountant, William Fortescue, was the aforementioned nephew of Sir William Henry Fortescue, and later MP for Monaghan borough (1798-1800).<sup>110</sup> Having begun his Post Office career in 1766 as clerk to the deputy postmaster general (his uncle), in 1768 he became accountant and later resident surveyor but resigned from the Post Office in 1799 following his election as MP.<sup>111</sup> Richard Tucker, listed as a clerk of the North road, had been an employee of the Post Office for thirty years. A 'Clerk of the Road' for each of the three post routes – the Munster, Connaught and Great North roads – is listed. This official was responsible for the letters transported along his road, including sorting and taxing each incoming and outgoing letter.

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<sup>107</sup> Campbell-Smith, *Master of the post*, p. 718; Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 70.

<sup>108</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1763), p. 90.

<sup>109</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1769), p. 99.

<sup>110</sup> Johnston-Liik records a William Fortescue as MP for Monaghan Borough in 1798-1800: he was one of two MPs so named in parliament at that time – see *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iv, 215.

<sup>111</sup> Johnston-Liik's contention in her *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iv, 215 that he may have been in receipt of a 'masked' pension used to reward informers in 1798 seems plausible since the Post Office was heavily involved in espionage at that time.

### **Money matters: problems and opportunities for increasing Post Office revenue for the English Treasury**

As has been highlighted, a third key function of the Post Office (generating revenue for the government) assumed unprecedented importance from the start of the eighteenth century when the post started to yield increasingly substantial returns to the English Treasury. In that context, the ongoing problem of loss of revenue to the Treasury owing to the exercise of privileges or their abuse by Post Office staff and users of the post increasingly exercised Westminster legislators and became the focus of contests concerning defence and retention of privileges that involved Post Office staff and MPs in particular. In the case of the former, for example, to supplement their wages, clerks of the road enjoyed the privilege of franking newspapers. Whereas sending a newspaper could cost the printers between 4*d.* and 6*d.* per copy<sup>112</sup>, the clerks were allowed to send them free of charge along their own roads, despite charging the printers 2*d.* per copy which they were allowed to keep.<sup>113</sup> As the volume of newspapers increased, so did the value of this privilege. The amount of money made by the clerks was regarded as revenue lost to the Post Office but when an attempt was made to interfere with this privilege during the mid-1750s, the aforementioned major dispute within the Irish Post Office erupted.

However, this loss of revenue pales into insignificance when compared to the sum lost through MPs' franking letters, and their abuse of that privilege. The amount of revenue lost to the Post Office by those entitled to free postage, whether through using or abusing that privilege, grew significantly throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in Ireland. In both England and Ireland, MPs had enjoyed the privilege of franking letters since the Commonwealth era. In the wake of the Restoration the volume of such letters increased annually. In 1670, when the Post was farmed, the Postmaster-General was allowed £4,000 against these letters.<sup>114</sup> However, by 1714 the cost to the Post Office had risen to £25,000. The abuse of the privilege became so extensive that in 1735 a committee of MPs was set up in the English House of Commons to examine the matter. However, little resulted from its findings as MPs were not prepared to tolerate a cut in allowances.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 49.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>114</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 114.

<sup>115</sup> W. Cobbett and J. Wright, *Parliamentary history of England, 1066-1803* (36 vols, London, 1806-20), iv, 148-9; Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 115.

In Ireland MPs enjoyed the same privilege and abused it in the same way as their English counterparts. Not only were they franking letters for their friends, their signatures were regularly forged on letters to avail of free carriage. As early as October 1692 the Irish parliament passed a resolution ‘that it is the undoubted Right and Privilege of the Members of the House of Commons to have their Letters Post free during the Privilege of Parliament.’<sup>116</sup> In 1718 the gross income was £14,592 9s. 8d. including the amount due on franked letters; its net revenue was £3,066. Franked letters thus cost the Post Office £11,526. Moreover, the cost to the Post Office was growing exponentially: in 1719 while the gross income had increased to £19,522, its net had fallen significantly to £753, with franked letters costing £18,769.<sup>117</sup> By then the ratio of franked to paid letters had reached 5:1. The reason for this marked increase was that whereas in 1718 parliament sat for three months only, the following year it sat for nine. It was only while parliament was sitting, and for a period of forty days before and after, that MPs were allowed to receive and send letters free of charge.

Although Irish MPs played a major role in driving the expansion of the Irish Post Office, the Irish parliament had no say in its operations and received none of its income since all profits went into the English Exchequer until 1784. This was one of Dean Jonathan Swift’s grievances. In letter vii, the last of the Drapier Letters: *An Humble Address to Both Houses of Parliament*, completed in June 1725, he complained about Irish Post Office income being used to pay English pensions.<sup>118</sup> One of these, worth £4,700 a year, was paid to Barbara Palmer, the duchess of Cleveland and mistress of Charles II.<sup>119</sup> Swift was not alone in opposing this arrangement. Among the several members of the Irish parliament to voice criticism was Edward Parsons, secretary to the Irish Postmaster General who when writing to the lords of the Treasury in 1721, commented that Irish MPs signed letters for anyone who wanted them, and complained that they had threatened ‘to remove me for taxing their letters’.<sup>120</sup> He claimed that they felt no remorse for doing so and argued that ‘the preventing of money going out of the country is a public good.’<sup>121</sup> Parsons recounted how resistance was their duty as ‘all the net produce of the Post Office is sent to England’ and ‘they profess to prevent it as

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<sup>116</sup> *JHC*, iii, 9 Dec. 1763, 253.

<sup>117</sup> *Cal. Treasury papers*, 225, 1720-28, 77, no. 17; Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 142.

<sup>118</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Sir Walter Scott (19 vols, Edinburgh, 1824), vii, 40.

<sup>119</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, pp 53, 79. In fact this pension continued to be paid to the duchess until 1856.

<sup>120</sup> Representation of the postmaster-general to the lords of the Treasury, 29 Aug 1721 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, 125, 1720-28, 77-8.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

much as they can, and therefore some do declare that they will frank all letters brought to them, and we have too much reason to believe that they are as good as their word.’<sup>122</sup>

Since the mid-seventeenth century the privilege of sending letters free had been jealously guarded by MPs, it being discussed periodically in the Irish parliament. As early as 3 March 1665, when members complained that the ‘Post-master [Warburton] had refused to send members’ letters to the Door of the House [of Commons] to be delivered there’, Warburton was summoned to appear before the house the next day. Following questioning, the house declared itself ‘satisfied he had not misbehaved himself.’<sup>123</sup> Just over ninety years later, in March 1756, Arthur Rochfort, MP for County Westmeath, complained that Lewis Chaboteou, a letter-carrier, had inappropriately ‘authorized and countenanced the charging of and payment of a [M.P.’s] Letter.’<sup>124</sup> Like Warburton, nearly 100 years later, in 1758, the postmaster of Kilkenny was summoned to the House of Commons to explain why he had taxed an MP’s letter.<sup>125</sup> Just how seriously this matter was viewed by MPs is evidenced by the case of Thomas Jones in 1763. Jones, the acting clerk of Munster road, was summoned to the House of Commons in December of that year to answer the charge that he had taxed a letter ‘directed to Edmond Sexten Pery, Esq; a Member of this House at Limerick, the City he represents, to be left at his Mother’s, the only Place of his Residence in the said City, during the time of Privilege.’<sup>126</sup> A vote was called to reprimand Thomas Jones. Before it proceeded, an amendment, proposed by William Fortescue, postmaster general, was added which would have vindicated Jones’s position.<sup>127</sup> However, when the vote was taken, Jones was found guilty by 76 votes to 73. It was ordered that the ‘said Thomas Jones be, for his said Offence, taken into Custody of the Serjeant at Arms.’<sup>128</sup> According to the *Journal of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland* this occurred, and having petitioned and expressed his regret, he was ‘discharged out of custody without Fees.’<sup>129</sup> That this was of paramount concern to Irish MPs is borne out by the fact that these are the only incidents involving Post Office business that were debated in the Irish House of Commons. This lack of debate is unsurprising given how little control the Irish parliament exercised over the Post Office in Ireland. However,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> *C.J.I.*, ii, 49.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., v, 404.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., vi, 90.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., vii, 253.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., vii, 253.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., vii, 254.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., vii, 262.

that was to change in 1784. Given the still high cost of sending a letter, it was little wonder that MPs guarded their privilege so vigorously. Initially the taxes or rates charged on a letter in Ireland were set by the English parliament; later, between 1784 and 1800, they were set by the Irish parliament. The first inland rates relating to Ireland were set by Cromwell’s 1657 Act, and were later reinforced by the Post Office Act of the Restoration parliament.<sup>130</sup> The same Acts fixed the rate between Dublin and London at 6*d.* per single sheet and multiples thereof (see appendix 1 Postage rates 1657-1640)

Unsurprisingly, tightening the regulation of Post Office finances and an attendant determination to reduce the amount of revenue lost to the Treasury was a major priority underpinning the 1711 Post Office Act (analysed in detail below). Another means by which is sought to regulate and maximise profits was through standardisation of postage rate and the introduction of new ones, notably a treble sheet rate. A rate of 6*d.* was set for under 40 miles and 12*d.* for over forty miles. An ‘over one ounce’ rate was also charged with 16*d.* to be charged for each ounce exceeding the first (see Table 3.2). For example, a single sheet letter sent from Galway to Cork was rated twice – 4*d.* to Dublin and another 4*d.* to Cork, totalling 8*d.* If it contained two sheets, the cost double to 16*d.* or 1*s* 4*d.*, and if it comprised three sheets, it cost 2*s*

**Table 2.2 Rates of postage for Ireland set by Act 9 Anne, c. 10 (1711)**

	Single	Double	Treble	Over 1 oz
Up to 40 miles	2 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i> per oz
Over 40 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	16 <i>d.</i> per oz

**Sources:** Act 9 Anne, c. 10 (1711) in *The statutes at large, of England and of Great-Britain: from Magna to the Union of Great Britain and Ireland*, vii, 143.

A letter carried between Galway and Portsmouth in England was liable to four rates: Galway-Dublin, Dublin-London, and London-Portsmouth, plus a penny for the packet boat. This cost was usually borne by the recipient.<sup>131</sup> In 1765 a 1*d.* rate was introduced for any letter travelling no more than one postage stage.<sup>132</sup> In a further significant step forward, in 1773 the Dublin Penny Post was inaugurated. (This is discussed in detail later in this chapter.) Although there were some rate changes within England, those within Ireland did not change until 1784.

<sup>130</sup> *An Act for the settling of the postage of England Scotland and Ireland* (17 Sept. 1656), 12 Chas. II, c. 35 [Eng.] (June 1660).

<sup>131</sup> 9 Anne, c. 10 [Eng.] (1 June 1711).

<sup>132</sup> 5 Geo. III, c. 25 [Eng.] (10 Oct. 1765).



Before the introduction of the uniform penny post and postage stamps in 1840, few letters were prepaid. This helped ensure that letters arrived at their destination. Once a letter was committed to the post, it was handled by many individuals. At the provincial 'post office', the postmaster inscribed the cost of conveying the letter as far as Dublin on the front of the letter.<sup>133</sup> He usually applied a hand stamp called a Town name mark. In Dublin, the clerk of the road that the letter travelled along was responsible for checking that the amount charged was correct. He also stamped the letter, indicating the date it passed through the office and whether or not it was prepaid. If the letter was travelling out of Dublin, it was then passed to the clerk of the road along which it was to travel. He crossed out the old charge and inscribed the new charge. If the letter was intended for a Dublin destination, the 'alphabet man' sorted the letters for collection. When the letter was collected at the Post Office, the 'window man' handed it over and received the money due. After 1773, when the Dublin Penny Post was introduced, the letter was delivered within the city by a letter carrier who collected the money due.

### **The 1711 Post Office Act: a landmark in the evolution of the Post Office**

The single most important piece of legislation relative to the Post Office in Ireland, England and Scotland passed during the eighteenth century was the 1711 Post Office Act. Given that it effectively regulated the Post Office down to the 1840s, the circumstances of its passing and its provisions merit attention at this juncture. This legislation owed its origins to the 1707 union between Scotland and England which necessitated a new Act to unite the independent Scottish and English Post Offices (the Irish Post Office being a branch of the English institution at the time).<sup>134</sup> The 1711 Act superseded the 1660 Act, was passed at Westminster in 1710, and came into effect the following year.<sup>135</sup> Consisting of forty-five sections and stretching to twenty-five pages, this wide-ranging and comprehensive legislation copper-fastened state administration control over the Post Office by ensuring that it remained a monopoly in the gift of Westminster. It was also designed to generate as much revenue as possible for the state. With few exceptions (notably the Test and other oaths) the Act introduced very few

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<sup>133</sup> Envelopes did not come into use until after 1840, as they would have been regarded as an extra sheet and charged accordingly. From 1840 letters were rated according to weight rather than the number of sheets of paper.

<sup>134</sup> For an explanation of this see chap. 8, 'A union Post Office for the British Isles' in Robinson, *The British Post Office*, pp 90-8.

<sup>135</sup> *Post Office Act 1660*, 12 Chas. II c. 35 [Eng.] (17 Jan. 1660).

measures that were new; however, it did tighten up existing rules and sought to regulate existing practices, including when letters could be opened.<sup>136</sup> It covered five main areas: ensuring that the Post Office had a monopoly on the carriage of letters; facilitating trade; the riding post; security of state, and generating money for the state. In so doing, the Act established the Post Office as a permanent part of the state's bureaucracy. In fact it legislated for the bureaucratic nature of the Post Office by laying down detailed rules about what the state should expect of it and how it was to operate.

A total of twenty-five of its forty-five clauses were concerned with operational matters. For example, clause v stipulates that besides London, there was to be 'One Chief Letter office also in North Britain and Ireland and at New York in North America and in the West Indies' and that these were to 'appoint sufficient Deputies'. Many clauses dealt with provincial postmasters' operations, setting down rules and regulations about to keep proper accounts of 'way and by letters' (those that did not go via London and hence the Post Office in London had no record of the amount owed for them).<sup>137</sup> In an effort to curtail the practice whereby many provincial postmasters appropriated much of this money, the Act imposed heavy fines for staff caught embezzling Post Office funds in this way.<sup>138</sup> Strict regulations were also laid down concerning the forwarding of ship letters (letters that came from abroad though not on board a packet boat). For example, if a ship bound from New York to London sought shelter from a storm in Cork, the captain was bound to commit any letters on board to the post in Cork. This proved a very advantageous arrangement for the Post Office which stood to make 10*d.* per single sheet letter as opposed to 1*d.* if the mail had been put in the post at London.<sup>139</sup>

The Act also introduced a requirement that all Post Office employees had to take 'the Test and the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and Abjuration appointed by any of the Laws of the said Part of the United Kingdom.'<sup>140</sup> Since this clause effectively barred Catholics from working in the Post Office, it affected Ireland more so than England or Scotland. It also helped to ensure that employees of the Irish Post Office, down to the lowest grades, were loyal to the Protestant-dominated administration. This

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<sup>136</sup> Among exceptions were the universities of Oxford and Cambridge which could organise their own postal

postal systems as they pre-dated the foundation of the Post Office – see clause XXXIII.

<sup>137</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11 [G.B.], clause XIX.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, clause XX.

<sup>139</sup> A letter put in the post at Cork collected at least three charges; Cork-Dublin, packet rate Dublin-Holyhead, and Holyhead-London. If the letter was destined to travel beyond London, another charge was added. If the letter was put in the post by the captain in London, and addressed to London, only 1*d.* was charged for delivery within London. To help minimise on postage costs, the Post Office made provision for letters to be put in the post at the first port of call.

<sup>140</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11 [G.B.], clause XXVI.

oath, like many of the Act's regulations concerning the day-to-day operations, guaranteed that the Post Office remained a vital element within the state's core bureaucratic infrastructure.

The Act also acknowledged the post's indispensability for the expanding and increasingly influential commercial sector within the British 'composite' state. Cromwell's 1656 Act had first done so: it legislated for the Post Office to 'maintain a certain and constant intercourse of trade and commerce', although this was understood to be secondary to its service to state (meaning the Crown, government, the judiciary and the army). Charles II's Act of 1660 likewise recognised the importance of the postal service for advancing commercial interests, explicitly stating that the Post Office was partly intended for the 'preservation of Trade and Commerce'.<sup>141</sup> Its significance was recognised by the granting of one of two exceptions to the Post Office's monopoly on the carriage to 'such letters as shall respectively concern Goods sent by common known Carriers of Goods by Carts, Waggon, or Pack-Horses and shall be respectively delivered with the Goods such Letters do concern'.<sup>142</sup> Such letters could only relate to the goods carried. The Act also extended the same right to letters pertaining to a ship's cargo. Many of the clauses include the phrase 'for the convenience of trade and commerce'; one in particular concerned Ireland. It stipulated that the postmaster general was 'to keep and maintain Packet Boats to go weekly (Wind and Weather permitting) to and from Donachadee ... to Port-Patrick ... for the convenience of Trade and Commerce between the said Kingdoms ...'.<sup>143</sup> Another clause outlawed what might be referred to today as industrial espionage, specifically declaring illegal the opening of commercial letters, without an official warrant, in order to gain commercial advantage. Any Post Office official discovered doing this was fired and could not be rehired by the Post Office.<sup>144</sup> Precisely how trade and commerce deployed the services of the Post Office, and its importance to business, will be examined later in the chapter.

By 1711 non-state, private, and commercial letters in Ireland as well as England, Wales and Scotland were producing growing profits destined for the English Treasury. Since the time of Withering, the first to be granted the farm of the Post Office in England during the 1630s, it proved a very profitable venture.<sup>145</sup> In an indication of its

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<sup>141</sup> *Post Office Act 1660*, 12 Chas. II, c. 35 [Eng.] (17 Jan. 1660).

<sup>142</sup> C9 Anne, c. 11 [G.B.], clause III.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, clause X.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, clause XLI.

<sup>145</sup> An indication of how profitable the post was is the high rent that the different farmers were prepared to pay: the first, John Manley, paid £10,000 while in 1663 Dan O'Neale paid £21,500.

increasing revenue generation capacity, in 1660 the Post Office could afford to pay £21,000 out of its profits in royal pensions.<sup>146</sup> By 1663 its profits had become so substantial they were granted to James, Duke of York.<sup>147</sup> By 1690 profits went directly to the state, while the royal pensions continued to be paid.<sup>148</sup> Just how important the Post Office was for gathering revenue was recognised in the preamble which read;

An Act for Establishing a General Post-Office for all Her Majesties Dominions, and for Settling a Weekly Sum out of Revenues thereof, for the Service of the War, and other Majesties Occasions.<sup>149</sup>

The Act guaranteed the profits of the Post Office in two ways: first, it set high postage rates and second, it ensured that the Post Office had a monopoly on the carriage of letters. In the ten years preceding the Act, the Post Office gross receipts had grown from £70,000 to £90,000 per year.<sup>150</sup> Queen Anne's cash-strapped government required this revenue to help finance the expensive War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14). To that end, clause thirty-six of the Act made provision for 'the Establishment of a Fond [sic.] in order to raise a present Supply of money for the carrying on of the War and other Her Majesties most necessary Occasions.'<sup>151</sup> This war, which had been ongoing since 1701, was proving exceptionally costly: £250,000 had been borrowed to help finance it, and the Post Office was identified as an appropriate source of income to pay interest on the loan.<sup>152</sup> The premium that the government placed on the revenue generating capacity of the Post Office is evidenced by the number of clauses in the Act that related to money. This legislation introduced a specific weekly sum of £700 to be paid to the Treasury 'upon Tuesday of every week', reaching a total of £36,400 *per annum*. Furthermore, one third of any monies above £111,461 17s. 10d. was also to go to the English Exchequer: that figure was the gross revenue of the Post Office in 1710.<sup>153</sup> Clause xxxix ensured that when the war ended, the weekly £700 would continue to be paid to the Treasury.

This revenue was secured by granting a monopoly on conveyance of letters and by setting high rates, or taxes, for posting letters. Of the original twenty-four pages of

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<sup>146</sup> In 1695 this amounted to £21,000. Two such pensions were paid to the duchess of Cleveland and the duke of Schomberg, one of the duke of Marlborough's Dutch generals.

<sup>147</sup> *JHC*, viii, 491; 15 Chas. II, c. 14 [G.B.] (1663).

<sup>148</sup> *The Post Office: an historical summary* (London, 1911), p. 77; Robison, *The British Post Office*, p. 77.

<sup>149</sup> Preamble to Act, 9 Anne, c. 11.

<sup>150</sup> Hemmeon, *The history of the British Post Office*, p. 182.

<sup>151</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11.

<sup>152</sup> Hemmeon, *The history of the British Post Office*, p. 182.

<sup>153</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11, clause XLIII.

the Act, eight pages were concerned with setting rates throughout Great Britain and Ireland and all the colonies. Curiously the only increase in Ireland was a new band for a treble sheet letter whereas in England all bands were increased by 1*d*. A single sheet letter from London to New York cost ‘one Shilling and three pence, double two shillings six pence, treble three shillings nine pence’. As a result a single sheet letter was sent from Galway to New York was rated thus

4*d*. ... Galway - Dublin  
6*d*. ... Dublin - London  
1*s*. 3*d*.... London - New York  
2*s*. 1*d*. ... Total

This was the rate for a single sheet letter; two sheets cost double that amount (4*s*. 2*d*.), three sheets, 8*s*. 4*d*. and so on.

A consequence of this revenue collection was the introduction of many new postmarks since these enabled a clerk of the road to charge the correct amount. Town-name marks allowed the clerk of the road in Dublin to determine if the correct charge had been levied. Other postmarks featuring the words ‘Ireland’, ‘Dublin’, or were applied on letters conveyed between Dublin and London, thereby assisting clerks in London to tax letters correctly. Few letters were pre-paid but those that were often had a special paid-mark applied. When travelling through either Dublin or London, letters posted for and by certain officials of state and MPs carried free of charge had a ‘free’ hand stamp applied. Ship letter marks were applied to letters carried by private vessels as opposed to packet boats. With the exception of the dating marks, all other hand-stamps related to the collection of money owed on a letter.

Along with the high postage rates, the second means used to ensure the continued flow of revenue into the English Treasury was guaranteeing the Post Office’s monopoly on the carriage of letters: this served several purposes. The monopoly, enshrined in six clauses, prevented attempts to undercut the Post Office with cheaper systems. In 1680 the London Penny Post was established as a private network by William Dockwra before being taken over by the Post Office. In 1709 there had been an attempt to set up a half penny post in London.<sup>154</sup> In both cases the Post Office went to court to assert its right as the *sole* official letter carrier. A fear of weakening this monopoly may explain why two attempts to establish a Penny Post in Dublin failed. The first was in 1692 when Christopher Perkins and William Waller petitioned the Treasury in London to allow

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<sup>154</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 87.

them to establish a system in Dublin similar to that which existed in London.<sup>155</sup> A second, in 1704, was by Elizabeth, Countess Dowager of Thanet and daughter of Richard Boyle, second Earl of Cork; it was supported by the Lord Lieutenant, James Butler, second Duke of Ormonde.<sup>156</sup> Although the countess intended that her system would work under the supervision of the Post Office, both proposals failed because they were private schemes seeking to operate beyond the control of the Post Office. Consequently, it was not until 1773 that a Penny Post was established in Dublin.

This monopoly had the added advantage of making intelligence-gathering easier. The granting of official authorisation to open letters for reasons of state security had been a major priority during the Commonwealth era as explicitly acknowledged in the 1656 Act. The 1660 Act made no explicit reference to the matter. However, the fact that the 1711 Act featured several sections dealing specifically with this practice demonstrates that it was generating an unacceptable level of complaint, mistrust and resentment among service users. Clauses forty-one and forty-two of the 1711 Act sought to address this problem by prohibiting the ‘wilfully opening inbezilling detaining and delaying of Letters and Packets’ by anyone except ‘by an express Warrant in Writing under the hand of one of the principal Secretaries of State.’<sup>157</sup> According to the terms of the Act, the Post Office could continue to collect intelligence, but its staff could only do so under a warrant.<sup>158</sup> The Act also introduced a fine (£20) for the illegal opening of letters. Those working in the Post Office were required to take an oath, printed in the Act, stating that they would not open letters, except under warrant. However, well after the passing of this legislation, correspondents including Dean Jonathan Swift and Peter Ludlow MP were convinced that Isaac Manley illicitly opened letters, to the point that it determined the content of their mail.<sup>159</sup> In 1718 Ludlow confided in a letter to Dean Swift:

I send you the enclosed pamphlet by private hand, not daring to venture it  
by common post; for it is a melancholy circumstance we are now in, that

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<sup>155</sup> Proceedings upon the petition of Christopher Perkins and William Waller, 15 Sept. 1692 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1691-92, p. 449; Sir J. Trenchard to the post-master, 19 Jan. 1694 in *Cal. S. P. dom.*, 1694-95, p. 9; report of Sir John Cotton and Thomas Frankland, postmasters-general on petition of Christopher Perkins and William Waller in *ibid.*, p. 416.

<sup>156</sup> Report of the post masters-general to the lord high treasurer, on the petition of Eliz., Countess Dowager of Thanet, 28 Jan. 1704 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, iii, 1702 – 1707, 229.

<sup>157</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11.

<sup>158</sup> There were other exceptions as well (if the address was incorrect, or a letter was refused, or the recipient would not pay), but the latter two were generally intended to ensure that the letter was returned to the sender.

<sup>159</sup> Swift, *Journal to Stella*, letter iv, 21 Sept. 1710, p. 18.

friends are afraid to carry on even the bare correspondence much less write news ... I need make no apology for not sending it by post, for you must know, and own too, that my fears are by no means groundless. For your friend, Mr Manley, has been guilty of opening letters that were not directed to him.<sup>160</sup>

The practice evidently persisted as again in 1722, Swift complained that a letter addressed to him ‘was opened in the post-office and sealed again in a slovenly manner’.<sup>161</sup>

The clause in the 1711 Act concerning the opening of letters was not updated until 1844 when a parliamentary committee was set up to examine and update the law. The *Report from the Secret Committee*, which detailed how the practice had evolved in the interim, explained how in the case of Ireland, ‘the Principal Secretaries of state were [the] in habit of delegating to the Lord Lieutenant authority for this purpose’ that is, opening letters.<sup>162</sup> The committee cited one example of such a warrant, issued to Marmaduke Wyvill, postmaster-general for Ireland (1738-53), which allowed him to ‘open and detain all such letters as the Duke of Devonshire, the Lord Lieutenant or any person appointed by him should authorize and copies be sent to the duke’.<sup>163</sup> Regrettably, although the committee gave an account of the number of warrants issued in England for the period under review, admitting that there had to be many more, no number was given for Ireland.<sup>164</sup> Two interesting warrants, issued in 1738 and 1741 in England and concerning Ireland, offer a tantalising glimpse of the kind of information that could, on occasion, be discovered by Post Office staff who opened letters at the behest of the authorities. Both were issued at a time of heightened concern about ‘the practice then in constant operation of enlisting recruits in Ireland for the Irish Brigade in France.’<sup>165</sup>

In addition to opening letters and conveying intelligence to Dublin Castle, the Post Office assisted the authorities in monitoring people’s movements through its

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<sup>160</sup> Peter Ludlow to Dean Jonathan Swift, 10 Sept. 1718 in *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Scott (Edinburgh, 1824) xvi, 390. Ludlow served as MP for Dunleer, County Louth from 1713 to 1714, and was elected MP for County Meath between 1719 and 1750.

<sup>161</sup> Dean Jonathan Swift to Robert Cope, 9 Oct. 1722 in *ibid.*, xvi, 304.

<sup>162</sup> *Report from the Secret Committee on the Post Office; together with the appendix ... 1844*, p. 17, H.C. 1844 (582) xiv, 505.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> It is possible that any records of such warrants were destroyed in the Four Courts in 1922. The period between 1831 and 1844 was well covered in the report.

<sup>165</sup> *Secret Committee Report*, p. 12; see also David Murphy, *The Irish brigades, 1685-2006* (Dublin, 2007), chap. 3.

regulation of the hire of horses. The 1711 Act made it illegal for anyone other than local post masters to hire out horses to travellers (those ‘riding post’). Besides granting this monopoly, the Act also tightly regulated the practice, including the price for the hire of horse and guide.<sup>166</sup> Postmasters had to keep up to seven horses ready for public use. This service had a dual purpose: besides gathering information on people’s movements, the rent for horses was kept by the local postmasters, helping to subsidize their income. This section of the Act quickly became outdated. In Ireland, the Belfast stage coach was running by 1741 and soon after, stage coaches were operating throughout much of the country, replacing the riding post system.<sup>167</sup>

Both the 1711 Act and the 1844 Secret Committee report testify to how important the Post Office was for the security of the state throughout the eighteenth century. By allowing the opening and monitoring of private individuals’ letters, and with the cooperation of its provincial postmasters, it continued to provide the state with an efficient intelligence-gathering system. Since the Act applied to ‘Her Majesties Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland Her Colonies and Plantations in North America and West Indies and all other Her Majesties Dominions and Territories’, it represented an explicit reinforcement of Westminster’s control over the flow and type of information that circulated, and the channels by which it did so, throughout the realm. As long as those employed in key Post Office positions could be depended upon by the Crown, Westminster and Dublin Castle, information conveyed by the service could be accessed, scrutinized and acted upon. The immense importance of the Post Office and its efficacy as an intelligence service was of course demonstrated on an exceptional scale during the revolutionary period in Ireland (the 1790s).

While the 1711 Act reinforced and updated provisions for long established features of Post Office operations, it also introduced some new measures designed to align and modernise the institution, its network, system and service across Britain and Ireland. One such measure (already discussed) was the standardisation of rates; another was a requirement to survey post roads. These were to be surveyed to ‘One and the same Measure and Standard,’ in an attempt to impose some uniformity to the length of a mile. The Post Office was ideally positioned to accomplish such a task as the service it provided covered most of the country and certainly the main roads. So important was the task that the surveyors employed to carry it out were ‘sworn to perform the same

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<sup>166</sup> The guide went as far as the next post stage and returned with the horse.

<sup>167</sup> See John Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1741).



according to the best of their skill.’<sup>168</sup> For its part, the Post Office had a keen interest in standardising precise measures of distance since this was one of the key factors that determined the cost of sending a letter.

This collaboration may have begun within just three years of the passing of the Act: Peter O’Keeffe, who has written extensively on the history of Irish roads, has speculated that the Post Office in Ireland may have sponsored Herman Moll’s 1714 single-sheet map of Ireland which included all the post-towns at the time.<sup>169</sup> Moll’s 1720 map featured the statement ‘the Distance of Miles from town to town, according to Mr. Ogilby’s Survey fitt for ye Pocket or Portmanteau.’ It also featured roads and recorded the distance between the towns, information which may well have been supplied by the Post Office. During the 1730s William Chaigneau’s produced a map of Ireland which included the following statement in the cartouche: ‘the Post Towns and Barracks of Ireland’ (This map is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.) Thomas Jefferies, in the cartouche of his 1759 map of Ireland, acknowledged the co-operation of the Post Office in producing his map, noting that it ‘... includes an exact delineation of the roads communicated from the postmaster general of Ireland’.<sup>170</sup> Indeed many maps produced in the 1700s carried similar statements. Post Offices began appearing on town maps from the 1760s: at least two of John Rocque’s maps (Dublin, 1765 and Armagh, 1760) showed the location of the Post Office, reflecting its acknowledged importance at that time. Other than calculating distances, throughout most of the eighteenth century the Post Office had very little interest in roads. However, this was to change in the 1790s when road conditions became important with the introduction of the mail coaches.

The 1711 Act accomplished three major outcomes. It regulated how the Post Office was to operate; it ensured its monopoly on the carriage of letters, and it guaranteed its revenue for the English Treasury. The Post Office after 1711 remained firmly under the control of the Westminster parliament and an embedded part of the state’s bureaucratic structures, with senior-ranking government officials authorised to call upon its staff and harness its infrastructure as the need arose. The passing of the Act opened a new chapter in the historical evolution of the Post Office in Ireland and

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<sup>168</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11.

<sup>169</sup> O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s principal roads*, p. 82. Moll’s map also featured many villages but not roads; Hermann Moll, *A new map on Ireland ... according to the newest and most exact observations* 1714.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas Jefferies, *A new and accurate map of the Kingdom of Ireland Divided into Provinces.....c. 1730*.

England during which it became increasingly indispensable to the modernisation of the British 'composite state' and that of the kingdom of Ireland within that state.

### **Tracing the expansion of the provincial network**

In order to modernise the service, the Post Office had to expand its network so as to extend across as much of the country as was practical, and operate along that network as often as necessary. The Act 1711 ensured that any future expansion of postal services and of the network would remain under the control of the Post Office. As has been highlighted, between 1703 and 1784 the Post Office in Ireland grew slowly and steadily, the number of post-towns increasing from approximately fifty-seven to 142. The network expanded at a similar rate and with the exception of Donegal, much of Connemara and Kerry, its reach was countrywide by 1784. The frequency of the service improved to an exceptional degree. In 1690 the post left Dublin twice weekly; by 1784 mail on the Belfast and Cork routes travelled six days a week,<sup>171</sup> Galway received its letters three times a week, while many towns off the main routes received a delivery twice a week.<sup>172</sup> Other improvements that took place in the eighteenth century included the increased frequency in the Holyhead-Dublin connection, which went from a single sailing a week to a six-day service by 1769.<sup>173</sup> In a further positive development, the connection between the Scottish port of Portpatrick and Donaghadee in County Down was regularised. Similarly, the number of people employed in the Post Office increased dramatically from just sixty-three to in excess of 250. All of this amounted to an expansion of and improvement in the efficiency of existing services, resulting in a more efficient service and an increase in the volume of mail handled by the Post office. Yet, it is worth emphasising there was relatively little innovation in the service during this period with only one new service, the Dublin Penny Post, being introduced in 1773.

It is difficult to trace the *rate* of expansion in the network between Thomas Gardiner's 1682 report which recorded fifty-four post towns in Ireland, and 1725 when seventy-seven towns appeared in the first list of post-towns, published in John Knapp's

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<sup>171</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1774), p. 119.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> John Chamberlayne, *Magnæ Britanniae notitia: or, the present state of Great-Britain, With divers Remarks upon The Antient State thereof* (London, 1708), bk iii, p. 343; Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1776), p. 119.

almanac.<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, this evidence is not unproblematic: whereas Gardiner identified fifty-four provincial post-towns, he mentioned only thirty-three deputy postmasters. These were men paid to ride between towns and drop off a bag at certain towns along the way. For example, John Lort was to ride between Maynooth and Lanesborough and drop off a bag at Mullingar. Since there was no deputy postmaster in Mullingar, the bag was most likely left at one of the local taverns.<sup>175</sup> In 1702 Edward Chamberlayne, in his publication *Angliæ notitia: or the present state of England*, observed that there were forty-five deputy post masters in Ireland; however, he did not list the towns.<sup>176</sup> The accuracy of this statistic must be questioned as in the 1740s the same publication was still listing forty-five Post Offices in Ireland when the number was known to be in excess of 100.<sup>177</sup>

Four years after Knapp's 1725 list, Samuel Watson, in his first almanac (1729) printed a list of 109 post-towns, indicating an apparent increase of thirty-one. The number of post-towns continued to increase steadily from then until the 1784 (see table 3.4).

**Table 2.3 The increase in post-towns in Ireland between 1700 and 1786**

Year	Number of Post-towns	Year	Number of Post-towns	Year	Number of Post-towns
1703.....	57	1740.....	119	1776.....	142
1723.....	77	1750.....	118	1784.....	145
1729.....	108	1759.....	124		
1737.....	116	1768.....	137		

**Sources:** Data compiled from Chamberlayne, *Angliæ notitia*, pt. iii, 442; Knapp, *An almanack* (1725), p. 19; Watson's *Almanacs* (1729-84).

**Note:** Watson's almanac normally headed his list with the comment 'compared with the Post Office books of the previous November'.

These figures show an initial rise to eighty-one post-towns during Manley's term in office, followed by a period of slow growth, with a sudden acceleration in growth after 1760s when elections to parliament became more frequent. (This correlation is

<sup>174</sup> John Knapp, *An almanack: or, Diary astronomical, meteorological, astrological, for the year of our lord, 1725* (Dublin, 1725), p. 19.

<sup>175</sup> *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, pp 69-70.

<sup>176</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliæ notitia* (London, 1702), pt. iii, p. 432.

<sup>177</sup> The 1741 edition of Chamberlayne's *Angliæ notitia* still recorded forty-five Post Offices in Ireland when the number was in fact over 100 (p. 258).

examined in more detail later in this chapter.) Many of these new post-towns, such as Newport in County Mayo and Bantry in County Kerry, were situated far from the original post roads, though this did not necessarily pose a major problem owing to the simultaneous expansion of the Post Office network. In 1690 the network covered 730 Irish miles.<sup>178</sup> By 1729 it had increased to almost 1,000 miles and by 1784, it covered approximately 1,620 miles. Ireland fared well in contrast with Scotland where the number of post-towns only increased from approximately twenty-seven in 1702 to forty-five in 1784.<sup>179</sup> Meanwhile in England the number rose from 159 to 250.<sup>180</sup>

The pace of improvement in the frequency of running mails in Ireland was particularly remarkable. Thomas Gardiner's 1682 report recorded that the mails travelled along the roads twice a week arrived in from the country Mondays and Fridays and went out on Tuesdays and Saturdays.<sup>181</sup> In August 1715 *Dixon's Dublin Intelligence* newspaper stated that 'From the 9th of this Instant August, the Post will begin and continue for some time, to go 3 times a week to all parts of Connaught, as also to all places in Ulster as now have it but twice a week.'<sup>182</sup> By the following month, the service to Birr, Enniskillen, and Ballyshannon had been stepped up to three times weekly.<sup>183</sup> However, this initiative seems to have been somewhat premature as in 1725 when the mail for the Munster and Great North roads departed Dublin on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and returned on Monday Wednesday and Friday<sup>184</sup>, the mails on the Connaught road had reverted to departing twice a week, going out on Wednesdays and Saturdays and returning on Mondays and Fridays.<sup>185</sup> The reasons why the Connaught road returned to a two-day service are not known. At a time when the

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<sup>178</sup> *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, p. 69.

<sup>179</sup> As there are no Scottish almanacs dating from before 1773, the Scottish figure is open to question. Chamberlayne in *Angliæ notitia* (London, 1702) p. 432 records 182 post-towns in England and Scotland.

*The Chapmans and travellers almanac* of 1694 lists 159 post-towns in England, leaving a balance of 23 post-towns for Scotland. In 1757 there were 80 post-towns in Scotland - see R. Flemming, *Edinburgh almanack for the year M.DCC.LIX* (Edinburgh, 1757), p. 63. In the early 1780s there was 105 post-towns in Scotland are recorded - see also (Glasgow, 1783), pp 72-4.

<sup>180</sup> Company of Stationers, *The Chapman's and traveller's almanac* (London, 1702), pp 33-34; T. Longman,

*The new complete guide to all persons who have any trade or contact with the city of London and parts adjacent* (London, 1783), pp 103-4.

<sup>181</sup> *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, p. 34.

<sup>182</sup> *Dixon's Dublin Intelligence*, 20 Aug. 1715.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1715. The mention of Ballyshannon in this advertisement has generated confusion. It implies that Ballyshannon was a post-town by 1715. However, it did not feature in Knapp's 1724 list and was not listed by Watson until 1729.

<sup>184</sup> Knapp, *An almanack* (1725), p. 19.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

economies of Ulster and Munster were expanding (Cork was supplying ships involved in the Atlantic long-distance trade, the city was growing and becoming a busy port, and in Ulster the linen trade was beginning to boom)<sup>186</sup> a three-day service on these two roads would have been justified and profitable. On the other hand, the west of the country, serviced by the Connaught mail road, experienced no such development and it is likely that the Post Office could not justify three connections a week. As the 1711 Act made clear, at this time raising money was more important than service to the public, and a loss making route could not be justified. It was not until some point during the period 1763-68 that the frequency of the service to Connaught was once again increased.<sup>187</sup>

By 1768 the Munster and Great North roads operated six days a week and the Connaught road three times a week. Some branch roads (or bye Post roads as they were known in the Post Office) off the three main roads were travelled twice or three times a week. Of the 138 post-towns in the country, thirty had a six-day service, seventy-one received mail three times a week, and the other thirty-seven had a twice weekly delivery.<sup>188</sup> This was still the situation in 1784. Notwithstanding this improved frequency, throughout this period the service remained slow, as letters were carried by a man on horseback on the main roads while on most by-roads, the post was carried on foot.<sup>189</sup> Despite its limitations, however, the service was reliable, and the network was continuing to grow.

## **The driving forces behind the expansion of the network**

### ***Members of parliament***

While this growth in the network was driven by a variety of factors and vested interests, it was the demand generated by the expanding government bureaucracy, MPs sitting in session in Dublin, and the military that exerted greatest influence in driving the modernisation of the post during this period: the relative importance of each is now assessed. As already noted, a particularly remarkable feature of the modernisation of Ireland's Post Office was the pace at which post-towns were established during the

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<sup>186</sup> Dickson, *Old world colony*, p. 149; McBride, *Eighteenth-century Ireland*, p. 110.

<sup>187</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1763), p. 91; John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1768), p. 102.

<sup>188</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1769), p. 101.

<sup>189</sup> The British Postal Museum and Archive POST 15/154 Irish Post Office letter copy book, relating to management of mail circulation, services and staff, comprising correspondence of the postmasters-general and secretary of the Irish Post Office with the Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland and Chief Secretary's Office in Dublin – see microfilm N.A.I., MFA – Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5.

first three decades of the eighteenth century. Thus, whereas in 1700 there were fifty-seven post-towns, by 1729 a further twenty towns had become Post-towns (see table 3.6). Of these, at least fifteen were the residences of first-time MPs, including Aughrim in County Wicklow and Ballyboy, a very small village in King’s County. Another three – Arklow, County Wicklow, Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, and Ballymore, County Westmeath – were garrison towns that had no resident MP; nor were they county towns. Longford was the only county town; it had no other grounds for becoming a post-town. By contrast, two others – Mountmelick, County Laois, and Rathfriland, County Down – were important commercial towns. Another nine fell into two or more categories: for example, Ennis in County Clare was the newly elected MP’s place of residence, a county town and a military garrison when it became a Post-town. In general, however, in the majority of cases it was the MPs’ exertion of their influence which proved most decisive in the creation of these new post-towns.

**Table 2.4 Towns that became post-towns between 1700 and 1724**

<i>Arklow</i> (Wicklow)	<b>Dunleer</b> (Louth)	<b>Magherafelt</b>
<b>Aughrim</b> (Wicklow)	<b>Ennis</b> CT. (Clare)	(Londonderry)
<b>Ballygalley</b> (Antrim)	<b>Enniscorthy</b> (Wexford)	Mountmelick (Queen’s Co.)
<b>Ballyboy</b> (Kings Co.)	<b>Eyrecourt</b> (Galway)	Naas CT (Kildare)
<b>Ballymena</b> (Antrim)	<b>Gorey</b> (Wexford)	<b>Navan</b> (Meath)
<i>Ballymore</i> (Westmeath)	<b>Kells</b> (Meath)	Philipstown CT (King’s
Belturbet (Cavan)	<b>Kilbeggan</b> (Westmeath)	Co.)
<i>Bray</i> (Wicklow)	<b>Killesandra</b> (Cavan)	Rathfriland ju. (Down)
<i>Carr.-on-Shannon</i>	<b>Keilliegh</b> (King’s Co.)	Trim CT (Meath)
(Leitrim)	Longford CT (Longford)	
Clonard ju (Meath)		

**Sources:** Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1729), p. 19; *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, pp 69-70.

**Note:** Those in bold can be attributed to new MPs; those italicised indicates were military garrisons; those marked ju. were junction towns; com indicates commercial or industrial towns, and CT denotes county administrative town.

In 1703 the Irish parliament began meeting on a biennial basis. Previously its meetings had been very irregular. (It only met, when called, on three occasions during James I’s reign (1603-25) and four times during that of Charles II (1660-83)). More regular meetings meant that MPs, whose main residences were typically in rural areas, were now spending more time in Dublin. In their absence, they depended upon an efficient postal service to maintain contact with family and staff at their country seats and it was for this reason that many towns and villages became post-towns. That this was the MPs’ primary motivation is evidenced by the fact that the newly-created post-towns did not necessary lie within the MPs’ constituencies; rather, it was the

towns or villages nearest to their residences that were conferred with this status. Since many MPs were nominated to a constituency by whoever controlled that seat, often they had no connection with that constituency, and were not resident there. Isaac Manley, deputy postmaster for Ireland, is a case in point: although he was MP for Downpatrick and Newtown Limavady at different times, he had no connections, never owned property, and is unlikely ever to have lived there.<sup>190</sup>

Further evidence of this correlation between the election of new MPs and the growth of post-towns is apparent in the sudden increase in the number of towns after each general election. During 1703-83 only eight general elections were held.<sup>191</sup> Unfortunately, no exact figures relating to the growth in post-towns for the first three of these elections exist. Nonetheless, between 1700 and 1724 the number of post-towns rose by 42%. At least fourteen of these new post-towns can be linked directly to newly-elected MPs, including Ballyboy in King's County and Gorey in County Wexford, both of which were first recorded as post-towns in 1724. Soon after Sir Redmond Evarard's election as MP for Kilkenny city in 1711, his local village of Ballyboy became a post-town<sup>192</sup> while Gorey was both the constituency and the place of residence of Abel Ram who was an MP from 1693 to 1740. A similar pattern emerges in relation to by-elections: in a 1723 by-election, Charles Coote was elected MP for Granard, County Longford: soon after, his place of residence (Cootehill County Longford) became a post-town.<sup>193</sup> Within two years of the new parliament, called on the accession of George II in 1727 to which many new M.Ps. were elected, there were 107 post-towns in the country – an increase of thirty-nine per cent on the number in 1724<sup>194</sup> and further evidence of this correlation. This was the case in Ardee, County Louth. Although it had returned an M.P. to the Irish parliament since 1378,<sup>195</sup> it did not become a post-town until Robert Parkinson of Red House in Ardee, its first resident MP, was elected in 1727.<sup>196</sup>

The next general election did not take place until 1761 and during the intervening thirty-four years, the pace of growth slowed. The number of post-towns rose by only seventeen to 124 while nineteen new post-towns were created, two (Minnimore in County Donegal and Man-O-War in Dublin) lost their post-town

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<sup>190</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, v, 190.

<sup>191</sup> General Elections were held in the years 1703, 1713, 1715, 1727, 1761, 1769, 1776 and 1783.

<sup>192</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iv, 122.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 491.

<sup>194</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1729), p. 19.

<sup>195</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, ii, 288.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 14.

status.<sup>197</sup> The case of Minnimore is revealing regarding the influence of MPs elected in by-elections in determining patterns of growth. When in 1735 George Knox was elected for Donegal County constituency, his home village, Minnimore, became a post-town in the same year.<sup>198</sup> However, that the village's elevated status depended solely on Knox's association with it was borne out by the fact that soon after his death in 1741, Minnimore ceased to be a post-town.<sup>199</sup> Equally instructive is the case of Castlemartyr in County Cork. Despite being a borough since 1676 and returning two MPs to the House of Commons, down to the 1730s none of its MPs resided there.<sup>200</sup> However, a change came when Henry Boyle, who had been an MP since 1713 and who in 1733 was elected speaker of the House of Commons, began building a house on his estate in Castlemartyr that year; soon after, in 1737, Castlemartyr became a post-town.<sup>201</sup> It is striking that during the thirty years between 1703 and 1733, when four general elections were held, sixty-eight towns became post-towns, an average of 2.26 per year or almost two or three a year. By contrast, during the twenty-eight years between 1733 and 1761, when no general elections were held, the growth of post-towns slowed significantly, with only fourteen becoming post-towns, an increase of twelve per cent or an average of one every two years. Finally, in the twenty-four years between 1761 and 1785, there were four elections and in line with the established pattern, the average per year rose to 1.6 or two every three year.

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<sup>197</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1760), pp 90-92. Man-O-War was replaced by White Hart (also in north County Dublin).

<sup>198</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, ii, 419; John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1736), p. 7.

<sup>199</sup> Charles Eogeas, *Genealogical memoirs of John Knox and the family Knox* (London, 1879), p. 43; Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iii, 491; John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1739), p. 94; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1742), p. 94. Minnimore was recorded as a post-town for a few years only between 1738 and 1741.

<sup>200</sup> Three of its previous MPs had lived in Limerick – Robert Oliver (1713 /14), William Southwell (1713/14) and Charles Coote (1715/27).

<sup>201</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1738), p. 4.



**Table 2.5. The relationship between general elections and new post-towns, 1703-85**

Years	Number of general elections and years	Number of new post-towns	Average per year
1703-1733	4 -1703, 13, 15, 27	68	2.26
1733-1761	0 -	14	.4
1761-1785	4-1761, 69, 76, 83	34	1.6

**Sources:** Data compiled from Thomas Gardiner's 1788 list of post-towns; Knapp, *Almanack*, 1725 and Watson's almanacs (1729-86).

### *The army*

Another much more sizeable group also living away from home and in need of a postal service was the army. The number of military had fluctuated greatly over the course of the seventeenth century: on the eve of the 1641 the standing army numbered 943 horse and 2,297 foot.<sup>202</sup> The Commonwealth army was 30,000 strong.<sup>203</sup> In the Restoration era, the standing army was around 7,000 strong<sup>204</sup> and in 1685 James II inherited an Irish army of 8,238 men<sup>205</sup>. This increased number of military personnel contributed significantly to the growth of post-towns between 1699 and 1784. The standing army in Ireland was set at 12,000 by Act of parliament in 1699; that number increased to 15,235 in 1769 and peaked at over 17,000 in 1756 during the Seven Years War.<sup>206</sup> Sean Connolly has emphasised how, in contrast with England, where barracks (when they were built) were located around the coast, in Ireland they were distributed throughout the interior, making a regular official postal service a necessity.<sup>207</sup> Thus, in 1704 there were 101 military installations scattered across the country.<sup>208</sup> In Leinster alone there were twenty-three garrisons, seventeen of which were post-towns; the remaining six were very small camps catering for less than sixty men, including three commissioned officers.<sup>209</sup> The same was true in the other provinces.<sup>210</sup> The extent of interdependence

<sup>202</sup> Alan J. Guy, 'The Irish military establishment, 1660-1776' in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 211.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>205</sup> John Childs, 'The Williamite war, 1689-1691' in Bartlett & Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland*, p. 189.

<sup>206</sup> 10 Will. III, c. 1 [Eng.] (1 Feb. 1699); J. L. McCracken, 'The political structure, 1714-60' in Moody & Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: eighteenth-century Ireland*, pp 1-30; D. A. Fleming, *Politics and provincial people Sligo and Limerick, 1691-1761* (Manchester, 2010), p. 196.

<sup>207</sup> S. J. Connolly, 'The defence of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760' in Bartlett & Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland*, p. 244.

<sup>208</sup> R. Wyse Jackson, 'Queen Anne's Irish army establishment in 1704' in *Irish Sword*, i (1949-53), pp 135-5.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

between the army and the Post Office is evidenced in almanacs and maps of this time. Of the seventy-seven towns on Knapp's 1725 list, sixty-three were also military bases. Beginning in 1733, Watson's almanac printed the names of military figures in the country, including governors of garrisons and barrack-masters.<sup>211</sup> By 1760 the printed lists of post-towns that also had a barracks were marked thus ||<sup>212</sup>: this practice continued until 1796. The importance of the Post Office to the military can be deduced from William Chaigneau's c.1757 map<sup>213</sup> which may have been produced for the army given that the key to the map features only four types of towns – post-towns, barrack for horse, barracks for foot, collections (fig. 3.3). Although other towns were marked, no importance was attributed to them. The towns are connected by straight lines to indicate the distance between them (Fig. 2.2) There is no indication as to whether roads were post-roads or main roads. Although there is no evidence of the Post Office having had input into the production of the map, unlike later maps of the time, the prominence of post-towns is striking.

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1733), p. 52.

<sup>212</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1760), p. 90.

<sup>213</sup> William Chaigneau, *This map of the Post Towns & Barracks in Ireland* (N.L.I., 16 B5). In his book *Printed maps of Ireland, 1612-1850* (Dublin, 1997), p. 109 Andrew Bonar Law dates this map to 1730. However, when the list of post-towns at the bottom is examined many of the towns listed as post-towns did not acquire that status until the late 1750s. The map was dedicated to Henry Boyle, speaker of the House of Commons from 1733 to 1756.

Fig. 2.2 William Chaigneau map c.1757 (section showing North Leinster)



Source: N.L.I. 16 B5 Map of the post-towns and barracks in Ireland.

A total of 277 towns were listed in four columns at the foot of the map. The first notes the name of the town; the second, its position on the map; the third, the type of military town it was, and the fourth indicates whether the town was a post-town, the cost of dispatching a letter from there to Dublin, and the days on which the post left that town. Fig. 2.3 shows the number of men stationed at each installation. Some had just a few men; others housed large numbers of personnel. Of the 277 towns listed, 123 were post-towns.



sailed and that the rest were now leaving.<sup>215</sup> Sean Connolly has also highlighted how, in the absence of a police force in Ireland before the mid-1830s, the army was frequently involved in police work – escorting prisoners, attending executions, occasionally putting down riots and such like: as such, it ‘was an essential part of the machinery of public order in eighteenth-century Ireland’.<sup>216</sup> In the context of these exceptional circumstances, the army was particularly dependent upon a regular postal service. Lastly, in addition to facilitating the routine conduct of military business, an efficient service was important in allowing military personnel to maintain contact with family and friends back home in England, Scotland or Wales.

### **The connection between the Post Office and centres of local government**

As already highlighted, from its foundation, a pivotal function of the Post Office was to provide the state with a communications network that facilitated effective governance through the aegis of each county’s civil administration. Consequently, all bar two county towns enjoyed post-town status. Throughout the eighteenth century the business of local civil administration was mainly conducted by grand juries who, from their bases in county towns, raised local taxes, operated the local courts, and adjudicated the validity of indictments for the twice-yearly visit of the assizes court. In 1734 thirty-six out of thirty-seven county towns where the Lent Assizes were to take place were post-towns.<sup>217</sup> County towns were also where most of the ‘Collectors of the Revenue’ were stationed. *The Gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* of 1732 lists thirty-nine such collectors; again, all bar Baltimore in County Cork and Killybegs in County Donegal were post-towns.<sup>218</sup> While the list also included towns such as Athlone, Donaghadee, Mallow and Newport which were not county towns, all were post-towns.

In 1724 Lifford in County Donegal and Castlebar in County Mayo were the only county towns that did not have post-town status. In the case of Lifford, the reasons were threefold. While on circuit, Edward Willes described it as ‘a sorry little town not big enough for half the company who come to the assizes’.<sup>219</sup> Strabane, on the other side of the bridge across the river Foyle, was a post-town; hence there was no need for another office in nearby Lifford. Lastly, there were other larger towns in the county

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<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 176-7.

<sup>216</sup> Connolly, ‘The defence of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760’, pp 242, 260.

<sup>217</sup> *Lent-Assizes 1733/4* (Dublin, 1733?). The exception was Lifford in County Donegal. Some towns such as Carrickfergus held a county and town circuit court

<sup>218</sup> Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1732), p. 41.

<sup>219</sup> By 1730 Donegal had three post-towns – Ballyshannon, Letterkenny and Raphoe – Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1729), p. 19.

(Ballyshannon, Letterkenny and Raphoe) which were deemed more suitable.<sup>220</sup> Castlebar's close proximity to Newport, where a Quaker community was established in 1719 and which became a post-town sometime between 1724 and 1728, delayed its becoming a post-town until 1732.<sup>221</sup> However, in other instances, the small size of a county town did not stand in the way of its becoming a post-town. Trim in County Meath was described in 1785 as 'a small town with scarce more than one good dwelling house in it' which, 'were it not for being the County Town it would be a very poor village'. Yet, it was a Post Office since 1724.<sup>222</sup>

A small number of towns and villages which were of little military or civil importance and which were not the residences of MPs owed their elevation to post-town status to their location at junctions along a postal route. Kilcock in County Kildare and Clonard in County Meath were two such junction towns. A post-town by 1756, Kilcock was located at the junction where the road for Ballyshannon, County Donegal branched off the Galway road.<sup>223</sup> Individual bags of mail destined for Galway and Ballyshannon were carried in one large bag from Dublin as far as Kilcock. There, the bag was opened, the bag for the Ballyshannon therein was taken out and any local letters added. The two bags were then resealed and sent their separate ways. This task was carried out by local postmasters, often innkeepers, who usually hired local boys to ride between post-towns. The 1784 Post Office Report stated that Elizabeth Hale, postmaster at Kilcock, was 'To ride Thrice Weekly to Dublin also once weekly to Trim and once weekly to Clonard.'<sup>224</sup> Similarly, John Cusack, postmaster in Clonard, had to ride twice a week to Kilcock, once to Philipstown, and once to Mullingar.<sup>225</sup>

### **The influence of trade and commerce in shaping the postal network**

Assessing the influence of trade and commerce in driving the expansion of the Irish postal network at this time is difficult, largely since in comparison with England and excluding Belfast, Ireland's industrialisation was modest and localised. Consequently, surviving evidence of industrialists' and traders' use of the Post Office is largely

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<sup>220</sup> By 1730 all three had become post-towns.

<sup>221</sup> John Knapp, *An almanack or Diary astronomical meteorological and astrological for the year of Our Lord 1729* (Dublin, 1729), p. 37; Kenneth L. Carroll, 'Quaker weavers at Newport, Ireland, 1720-1740' in *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, no. 54 (1976), pp 438-85.

<sup>222</sup> Austin Cooper, *An eighteenth-century antiquary; the sketches noted and dairies of Austin Cooper*, ed. Liam Price (Dublin, 1942), p. 99.

<sup>223</sup> This was the year it was first listed in the almanacs, John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1750), p. 91.

<sup>224</sup> 'Post Office 1784 report' Post 15 (Royal Mail Archive London (hereafter R.M.A.); also N.A.I., M.F.A. – Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5 (microfilm)).

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

anecdotal. Nonetheless, it is clear from passing comments in contemporary correspondence that by the 1730s, traders were heavily dependent upon the postal system in conducting their business. In England, by the beginning of the eighteenth century so strong were the burgeoning industrial and commercial sectors that much of the impetus for the growth in post-towns came from them. As early as the 1690s merchants had been driving the expansion of the postal network in England: this was evidenced by a petition, submitted by the city of Wotton-upon-Edge to the Treasury in 1699, requesting the extension of a post-road as far as their town ‘for the convenience of the clothing trade.’<sup>226</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, that momentum continued, particularly following the passing of the 1711 Act which (as already noted) stipulated that a key function of the Post Office was to facilitate trade. In Ireland, by the 1730s its importance to the commercial life of cities was acknowledged. In October 1739, for example, the mayor and corporation of Cork submitted a memorial to Sir Marmaduke Wyvil, ‘Post Master General of this Kingdom’, complaining ‘That this City is a place of great trade, and labours under many inconveniences by the Post coming in so late at night ...’.<sup>227</sup> It is, however, more difficult to gauge the part Irish industrialists and traders played in the expansion of the Post Office throughout the provinces. Where their influence can be detected is in Mountmellick in Queen’s County, Moate in County Westmeath, and Newport in County Mayo, none of which was a county town, or had a resident MP, or a military barracks. However, all three were Quaker towns and all became post-towns on the strength of local commercial enterprises. When Mountmellick became a post-town (sometime between 1700 and 1724) it was located at the end of a by-post road. In its favour, however, it was home to a successful brewing industry, the second largest in the country after Dublin.<sup>228</sup> Like Mountmellick, Moate was situated off the main post-road and with its own by-post road. Although it became a post-town several decades later than Mountmellick (between 1751 and 1759), it too had a thriving local industry in linen manufacturing and was a prosperous commercial hub.<sup>229</sup> Similarly Newport in Mayo owed its elevation to the local linen industry

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<sup>226</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 81.

<sup>227</sup> *The council book of the corporation of the city of Cork from 1609 to 1643, and from 1690 to 1800 edited from the original with annals and appendices compiled from private records* by Richard Caulfield (Guildford, 1867), pp 287, 288. They also complained about the location of the Post Office in Cork.

<sup>228</sup> L. M. Cullen, ‘Economic development, 1750-1800’ in Moody & Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: Eighteenth-century Ireland*, pp 159-95.

<sup>229</sup> Liam Cox, *Moate County Westmeath: a history of town and district* (Athlone, 1981), pp 57-9. When Moate was first listed as a Post-town in the almanacks, it was called Moaragrenoge; likewise in *Taylor and Skinner’s maps of the roads of Ireland surveyed 1777* (Dublin, 1778), p. 75.

established by the Quakers in 1720.<sup>230</sup> (Interestingly, in the case of Newport, social letter-writing also played an important role in the development of the postal service in the region.) As a result of their local industries, these towns became grafted onto the expanding countrywide grid of post-towns, thereby contributing significantly to its continuous but slow growth throughout the 1700s.

In the late 1740s and early 1750s Ireland experienced a remarkable growth in its economy.<sup>231</sup> This resulted in an expanding market for consumer and readymade goods, sourced from beyond the local community, and led to growing numbers of merchants selling their merchandise through local shops. For example, Thomas King in his book *Carlow the manor and town, 1674-1721* (Dublin, 1997) lists the occupations of those living in the town between 1660 and 1739.<sup>232</sup> During the period 1700-25 there were twenty-seven different occupations which might have involved ownership of a shop that sold goods produced outside the area and which would have needed to use the post on a regular basis: these included an apothecary, clothiers, Innkeepers, vintners, seven merchants, a saddler, a spurrier and tailors.<sup>233</sup> Sixty years later, in 1788, Carlow's increasingly diverse commercial sector was thriving: Richard Lucas in his *A general directory of the Kingdom of Ireland or merchants and traders*<sup>234</sup> lists eighty-six business in Carlow, among these many new types of shops that did not exist in the 1700/20s, including a gun maker, a coal merchant, a soap boiler, an attorney-at-law, a jeweller, a watch maker and a silver-smith, all of whom needed a good quality postal service. Just why merchants in particular were so reliant upon the Post Office will be explained later in the chapter.

### **An innovative departure: the Dublin Penny Post**

Until now, the focus of this discussion has been on the Post Office outside Dublin. In addition to the increased number of post-towns and the expanding provincial network, a major innovation in the postal system during this period was the introduction of the Dublin Penny Post.<sup>235</sup> In 1773 Dublin was a thriving city with a population in excess of

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<sup>230</sup> Carroll, 'Quaker weavers at Newport', pp 438-85.

<sup>231</sup> Cullen, 'Economic development, 1750-1800', p. 159

<sup>232</sup> Thomas King, *Carlow: the manor and town, 1674-1721* (Dublin, 1997), pp 46-52.

<sup>233</sup> Other traders who sourced their materials and sold their products locally are unlikely to have used the Post Office as frequently. These included cordwainers (shoe maker), a miller, a baker, and butchers.

<sup>234</sup> Richard Lucas, *A general directory of the Kingdom of Ireland or merchants and traders most useful companion* (2 vols, Dublin, 1788), ii, 108-13.

<sup>235</sup> For a detailed study of the Dublin Penny Post see J. Stafford Johnson, 'The Dublin Penny Post – 1773-1840' in *Dublin Historical Record*, 4, no. 3 (Mar.- May 1942), pp 81-95 and Manfred Dittmann, *The Dublin Penny Post – Die Dubliner Penny Post* (Munich, 1992). The latter is publication no. 15 by the



129,000.<sup>236</sup> The Irish parliament met biennially, bringing an influx of MPs and their entourages from the country. By 1774 there were 329 barristers and approximately 700 attorneys in the city, together with over 2,600 merchants and traders.<sup>237</sup> It was these personnel, along with the staff of Dublin Castle, the Irish parliament, the courts, customs and the civil service, who relied upon the Penny Post for the conveyance of both official business and private correspondence.

Almost a century before, in 1680, William Dockwra had successfully established a private Penny Post in London. It proved so profitable that the duke of York, to whom the profits of the Post Office were been granted, took Dockwra to court claiming that the Penny Post constituted an infringement on the Post Office's monopoly to carry letters. With a result, York took control of the private scheme.<sup>238</sup> London remained the only city within Britain or its colonies to have a Penny Post until the Dublin system began. Established on 11 October 1773 when William Fortescue was postmaster-general for Ireland, the Dublin Penny Post collected and delivered letters within the city's circular roads.<sup>239</sup> The system which operated on the basis of a network of walks, and eighteen receiving offices, serviced by letter carriers, provided the citizens of Dublin with a reliable and efficient local postal service.<sup>240</sup>

As previously mentioned, there had been two earlier attempts to establish a Penny Post in Dublin – the first, in 1692, by Christopher Perkins and William Waller, and the second by the countess dowager of Thanet, daughter of Richard Boyle, second Earl of Cork: both were opposed by the English Treasury. It was not until 1765 that an Act was passed legislating for the establishment of Penny Posts throughout Britain and its colonies,<sup>241</sup> and eight years later, the first such scheme was established in Dublin. Like its London equivalent, it was independent of the General Post. Although it operated out of the same building as the General Post Office and was under the control of the postmaster-general and his permanent secretary, it had its own staff of clerks, sorters and letter carriers. The launch of the Penny Post was announced on 28 September in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal* in a long advertisement which informed the

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Forschungs-und Arbeitsgemeinschaft Irland (FAI) a German philatelic society which specialises in Irish philately and regularly publishes books on Irish philately.

<sup>236</sup> J. L. McCracken, 'The social structure and social life, 1714-60' in Moody & Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: eighteenth-century Ireland*, p. 31.

<sup>237</sup> William Wilson, *Wilson's Dublin Directory For the year 1774* (Dublin, 1774), pp 98-108, 13-79.

<sup>238</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 74.

<sup>239</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1774), p. 129.

<sup>240</sup> Receiving offices were shops in which letters could be posted, the forerunners of the modern sub-Post Office.

<sup>241</sup> 5 Geo. III, c. 25 [G.B.] (1756).

reader that for the cost of one penny each, letters would be deliveries ‘twice every Day (Sundays excepted) viz. At Nine o’Clock in the Morning, and Four o’Clock, to any part of the City of Dublin within the following Limits, ...’.<sup>242</sup> There followed a listing of the receiving houses (see Table 3.5) and certain conditions, for instance, that packets could not exceed four ounces in weight, and that ‘A penny is to be paid with each Letter put into the penny-post-office, or into any receiving house’.<sup>243</sup> This was the first time that postage for letters not addressed abroad had to be pre-paid. The advertisement stipulated ‘that every such Letter will be delivered to the person to whom it is addressed, within the limits specified, without further charge; but every letter with which a penny is not paid, will be opened and returned to writer.’ It also declared that the receiving houses would remain open from ‘Eight in the morning till ten at Night (Sundays excepted).’

Within a year, the network had expanded beyond the city’s two circular roads to encompass fourteen locations within a four mile radius of the city. An extra 1*d.* was charged for this service which operated once daily.<sup>244</sup> Receiving offices for this Two Penny Post were opened at Glasnevin, Finglas, Rathfarnham, Bow-Bridge, Ringsend, Ballybough Bridge, Clontarf, Chapelizod, Blackrock, Booterstown, Milltown, Sheds of Clontarf, Donnybrook and Castleknock.<sup>245</sup> Payment for the Two Penny Post was made in two moieties, 1*d.* when the letter was put in the post, and another on delivery or collection. Letters from the country post were also carried by the Penny and Two Penny Posts but these were not paid for in advance and money was collected on delivery. Letters intended for distribution via the general post could be placed in the Penny Post for transfer to the general service but the 1*d.* had to be pre-paid and the receiver paid the cost of the general post. Unlike the general post, with the exception of senior officer holders such as the lord lieutenant, MPs using the Penny Posts did not have the privilege of free post. At the time that these Penny Postal services commenced operations, the General Post Office had recently moved from Fownes Court to a larger site on College Green. Despite sharing a premises, the Penny Posts had separate rooms and staff. It is striking that after the extension of its orbit in 1774, this city service did not develop or extend again until 1810, when a major overhaul was undertaken. It continued to operate as a separate system under the control of the postmaster-general for Ireland until 1840 when it was absorbed into the General Post

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<sup>242</sup> *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, 28 Sept. 1773.

<sup>243</sup> Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1774), p. 128

<sup>244</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentlemen’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1783), p. 120.

<sup>245</sup> Samuel Watson, *The Gentlemen’s and Citizens almanack* (Dublin 1776), p. 120.

**Table 2.6 The receiving housed (sub-offices) of the Dublin Penny Post in 1773**

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Wormwood-gate</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Daniel Kingslew, Grocer, Woormwood-gate St., near New-Row Thomas-Street.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Barrack-street</i></p> <p><i>Mrs. Mackerness, Grocer at the Sing of Leicester-house Barrack-street</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Francis-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Charles Wern, Hosier, at the singe if the Stocking Francis-street near the Combe</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>West Arran-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. John Penton, Grocer, at the sign of the brave Irishman, corner of West Arran-street near Smithfield.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Bride-street</i></p> <p><i>M's Gorgan, Grocer, Bride-street opposed Peter-street</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>King-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. James Manchester, Cheesemonger, King-street near Linen Hall.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Great Cuff-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Matthew Keely, Grocer. Great Cuff-street</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Bolton-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr Roach, Perfumer, Bolton-street near Capel-street.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Anne-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr Cambell, Milliner, Anne-street near Dawson-street</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Britain-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Reed Haberdasher, Britain-street near the Mall.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Clare-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Nolan, Grocer, Clare-street</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mary-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Finn, Grocer, Mary-street near Henry-street.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Castle-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr Sleator, Bookseller, Castle-street</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Capel-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Burke, Grocer, at the Black Boy and Sugar Loaf, Capel-street near Essex-bridge.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Essex-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Galagher, Custom-house Coffce-house</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Abbey-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Gill, Shoemaker, at the Gold boot Abbey-street near the Ferry.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>George's quay</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Bredberry, Grocer, at the sing of the three Swedish Crowns, George's quay</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ship-street</i></p> <p><i>Mr, Peter Tomlinson, Grocer, Taatched Cabbn, Big Ship-street</i></p>

**Source:** Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1774).<sup>246</sup>

### **Early improvements to the Dublin-London route**

Improvements and innovations in the service over land such as the Dublin Penny Post and the increased frequency of the mails on the roads during the 1700s was mirrored in the enhanced connection via the Irish Sea. The mail service linking Dublin and London

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

increased from twice a week in 1702 to five times weekly in 1784.<sup>247</sup> Significant obstacles slowed down this connection, notably the virtual non-existence of harbour facilities in Dublin and Holyhead, the vulnerability of small boats that were at the mercy of bad weather, the perilous Menai straights and Conway estuary, the difficult Welsh mountainous terrain and finally a long overland journey between through England.<sup>248</sup> Many of these were not fully tackled until the 1800s. However, a few improvements were made in the 1700s, including the development of some harbour facilities in Ireland and upgrading the roads between London and Chester.

The lack of harbour facilities on both sides of the Irish Sea certainly hampered the smooth operations of the Post Office during the eighteenth century. Holyhead had neither a proper harbour nor a quay. Consequently, ships had to anchor in estuary and both mail and passengers were ferried to and from the vessels in small row boats. Likewise, Dublin Bay had no safe harbour and ships were lost. In one such incident in 1670, the packet boat sank within sight of land: twenty-five people drowned and twenty-one were saved.<sup>249</sup> Another packet boat, the *Anne*, was lost in 1705.<sup>250</sup> There had been several attempts to improve conditions in Dublin Bay during the second half of the seventeenth century but these came to naught. As early as 1674 Andrew Yarranton drew up plans to build a harbour at Ringsend at the mouth of the river Dodder, using the river to maintain deep water at low tide, at an estimated cost of £2,000; however nothing came of this.<sup>251</sup> Many subsequent attempts were made, most notably in 1698 when the Irish parliament submitted the heads of a bill to Westminster concerning the building of a harbour, but it was rejected.<sup>252</sup> Eventually a breakthrough came about in 1703 when a Ballast Office was established with jurisdiction over the river Liffey and Dublin Bay, which had been silting up for years.<sup>253</sup> One of its first undertakings was walling the banks of the river Liffey. By 1728 the south bank was walled as far as the Dodder river, allowing ships to tie up there, including the packet boat which, when the tide permitted, tied up at Ringsend Quay.<sup>254</sup> When the tide prevented the packet boat from tying up, it

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<sup>247</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliæ notitia: or the present state of England, With divers remarks upon The Ancient State thereof* (London, 1702), p. 432; Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1760), p. 90.

<sup>248</sup> For a more detailed study of this route see Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland*.

<sup>249</sup> George Rawdon to Viscount Conway and Killullita, 6 Dec. 1670 in *Cal. S. P. Ire., Sept. 1669-Dec. 1670*, p. 320; Philip Frowde to Joseph Williamson, 6 Dec. 1670 in *ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>250</sup> Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland*, pp 70-71.

<sup>251</sup> Andrew Yarranton, *England's improvement by sea and land showing the way to outdo the Dutch in trade by sea* (London, 1698), pp 151-5.

<sup>252</sup> *C.J.I.*, 2 Dec. 1698.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 July 1707.

<sup>254</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 85.

anchored out in the bay, and the mail was rowed ashore. In 1758 a small pier was built at Dunlaoghre and sometimes the mails were landed there.<sup>255</sup> It was not until the early 1790s, when the Pigeon-house dock was built, that a safe haven for the packet boats was provided.<sup>256</sup> Meanwhile no corresponding development occurred on the Holyhead side.

Notwithstanding this lack of development, the boats carrying mails between Holyhead and Dublin continued to grow larger in capacity and number; indeed, the number of vessels increased from three to five sometime between 1763 and 1768. In 1689 one James Vickers had been contracted to supply three boats to carry mail between Dublin and Holyhead for a fee of £450 *per annum*.<sup>257</sup> Vickers's contract arrangements were a new departure since down to this point, the Post Office had owned and operated the packet boats. Vickers, as contractor, supplied the boats and kept all receipts for passengers and cargo carriage. As Vickers discovered in 1692, transporting the mails could involve real risk to his ships and to the mail on board as when one his vessels, the seventy-ton *Grace*, was captured and stripped by French privateers while at anchor in Dublin Bay.<sup>258</sup> The hull was ransomed back for fifty-guineas; Vickers received £150 in compensation for his losses from the postmaster, and soon after, the mail contract was increased to £500 *per annum*.<sup>259</sup> Vickers suffered double misfortune in 1706 when the packet *Anne* was lost at sea and the *James* was damaged in rough seas.<sup>260</sup> By 1715 John Mackey, who replaced Vickers, likewise supplied three boats with two sailing a week; at that time the post for Ireland left London every Tuesday and Saturday.<sup>261</sup> In 1723 Thomas Wilson obtained the contract for seven years, and renewed it in 1730 for another seven.<sup>262</sup> He in turn was succeeded by John Power who provided three boats of sixty to seventy tons, crewed by eleven men and two boys.<sup>263</sup> He was paid £900 *per annum* by the Post Office to carry the mail.<sup>264</sup>

The increase in the size and number of boats allowed for a real improvement in the frequency of sea crossings which rose from two in 1707 to three in 1737. The London mail arrived from Holyhead on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday; this was still

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<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>257</sup> Report of Sir John Cotton, Knt., and Thomas Frankland ... postmasters-general, 26 July 1693 in *Cal. Treasury papers*, i, 1556-1696, 307.

<sup>258</sup> Report of Sir John Cotton, Knt., and Thomas Frankland ... postmasters-general, 27 May 1693 in *ibid.*, pp 296-7.

<sup>259</sup> Report of Sir John Cotton, Knt., and Thomas Frankland ... postmasters-general, 26 July 1693 in *ibid.*, pp pp 307-8.

<sup>260</sup> Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 70.

<sup>261</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliæ notitia* (London, 1707), pp 441-3.

<sup>262</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 71.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

the situation in 1760.<sup>265</sup> In 1768 the number of boats operating between Holyhead and Dublin increased dramatically from three to six<sup>266</sup> and a year later, the English packets were ‘due in Dublin every day of the week except Friday.’<sup>267</sup> However, this timetable was reliant on wind and delays were not uncommon. Indeed, it was not unusual for all the boats to be in one or other port at the one time, or to have two or more mails arrive together.<sup>268</sup> As James Kelly has shown, from the 1730s officials contrived to ensure that bills reviewed by the British Privy Council were returned to Ireland as expeditiously as possible by using the express ‘flying packet’ or by instructing the post master at Liverpool personally to oversee their immediate and efficient dispatch.<sup>269</sup>

By the 1760s two men were contracted to operate the service, the aforementioned John Power and a Thomas Blair who ran three packet boats – the *Earl of Bessborough*, the *Hampden*, and the *Prendergast*. (The Post Office paid £1,050 annually to the contractors.)<sup>270</sup> The *Prendergast* and the *Hampden* were replaced in 1768 by the *Lord Treven* and the *Fortescue* – both named after Post Office dignities. By then, the value of the mail contract had increased by 8% to £1,137 annually. These extra boats now provided a six-day a week service, between Dublin and London, and as a result the Munster and Ulster roads also began operating a six-day a week service.<sup>271</sup> Letters were no longer held for up to two days in either the Dublin or London offices, waiting to be dispatched and, weather permitting, mail passing between the two cities took just six days to reach its destination.

In 1772 the number of packets boats was reduced to five – the *Dartmouth*, *Le de Spencer*, *Hillsborough*, *Clermont* and *Bessborough*.<sup>272</sup> However, this had no negative effect on the service, as the six-day sailing continued, weather permitting. While each boat was the responsibility of its owner(s), usually the captain(s) who paid all the running costs, it was the Post Office that dictated the timetable. Only in time of war and if a packer was damaged by enemy action did the Post Office pay out compensation, as it did in the case of both Captain Purry, sole owner of *Hillsborough* and Captain

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<sup>265</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1838), p. 4; Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1760), p. 90.

<sup>266</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, p.

<sup>267</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1770), p. 101.

<sup>268</sup> In December 1763, as a result of a ‘hurricane’ on the Irish Sea, the packet carrying the messenger John Finlay with important money-bills then under discussion by the Irish parliament, was blown so far off course that it was feared lost; James Kelly' *Poynings' Law and the making of law in Ireland, 1660-1800* (Dublin, 2007) p. 264.

<sup>269</sup> James Kelly, *Poynings' Law and the making of law in Ireland, 1660-1800* (Dublin, 2007) pp 175-6.

<sup>270</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 78. The three boats were named after the two postmasters-general and the deputy postmaster-general for Ireland at that time.

<sup>271</sup> Watson, *The gentlemen's and citizen's almanack* (1769), pp 101-02.

<sup>272</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 80.

Goddard, sole owner of the *Bessborough*. Purry was paid £453 9s. 0d. and Goddard £614 2s. 1d. for what the report termed ‘ransomed and expenses’ by enemy action on 8 March 1780.<sup>273</sup> This money must have been paid ‘on the spot’ since neither boat was damaged and both continued working, unlike packets based on the south English coast that worked the Atlantic routes and were often damaged by enemy action and put out of service for a time.<sup>274</sup> The two boats and the other three listed above continued to sail between Holyhead and Dublin until the beginning of the 1790s.

Another packet link between Ireland and Britain was via Portpatrick in Scotland and Donaghadee, in County Down. The Post Office Act (1711) legislated for a weekly sailing, setting a rate ‘for every such Single letter Two Pence Double Four Pence Treble Six Pence Ounce Eight Pence.’<sup>275</sup> This connection had existed during the Commonwealth period in the mid-1600s, but appears to have been discontinued<sup>276</sup> as there is no evidence of a service until 1719<sup>277</sup> and it was not until the 1760s that the link was first advertised in the almanacs.<sup>278</sup>

### **Abuses and problems in the management and operation of the Post Office system**

Down to this point, the focus has been on tracing the developing network or infrastructure of the Post Office. Attention will now turn to how examining how the network was managed and how the system operated. In terms of appointment within the Post Office, nepotism and jobbery were commonplace. When Sir Thomas Prendergast was appointed deputy postmaster for Ireland in 1755 he dismissed Thomas Jones, the nephew of his recently deceased predecessor, Sir Marmaduke Wyvill, and appointed his own man, John Gilmer, in Jones’s place as first clerk of the road.<sup>279</sup> This led to some disquiet among the staff. When William Henry Fortescue succeeded Prendergast in 1761, he too brought family members into the Post Office. Within a year of his appointment, his nephew and eventual heir to his titles, William Charles Fortescue, held the lucrative position of ‘Clerk of the dead, and miss-sent Letters, and acting as Deputy Comptroller of the working office’<sup>280</sup> which may have been created for him. By the late

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<sup>273</sup> *Reports of the commissioners appointed by act 25 Geo. III. cap. 19. to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in the several public offices therein mentioned ... 1806* (309), 900-1.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>275</sup> 9 Anne, c. 11 [G.B.] (25 Nov. 1710).

<sup>276</sup> Denis Salt, *The domestic packets between Great Britain and Ireland 1635 to 1840* (London, 1991), p. 15.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1769), p. 100.

<sup>279</sup> *The case of Christopher Byron*, p. 16.

<sup>280</sup> Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1763), p. 90.

1760s he had been promoted to accountant, the third most senior position in the Post Office.<sup>281</sup> Fifteen years later he was ‘Resident Surveyor and Comptroller’ with an annual salary of £300 and also received £19 19s. 8d. annually ‘in lieu of coals and candles.’<sup>282</sup> When William Henry Fortescue left the position of postmaster-general for Ireland in 1784, three of the most lucrative provincial deputy postmasters positions in the Post Office in Ireland were occupied by Fortescues, including one woman. The highest paid deputy postmaster on the North Road was Elizabeth Fortescue whose annual salary was £120.<sup>283</sup> Whether she was related to William Henry is unclear, but Elizabeth was a recurring name in the Fortescue family. In Cork, a Henry Fortescue was deputy postmaster with a salary of £210, and likely related to William Henry who by then had been elevated to Earl of Clermont. Another two handsomely paid deputy postmasters were William Shaw at Kilkenny and Thomas Shaw of Clonmel, whose salaries ran to £196 and £168 respectively.<sup>284</sup> These were the highest paid deputy postmasters in the country. All of these were connected through marriage to John Lees, Fortescue’s secretary of the Post Office during the period 1774-80 and again from 1784 to 1811, and also to the Anderson family (John Anderson was one of the first and for many years the larger mail coach contractors in Ireland – see chapter four).<sup>285</sup> That the deputy postmaster role was particularly lucrative is evident from the 1784 account of the Munster road which stated that eight incumbents received salaries in excess of £100 in comparison with the average for the other thirty-five (£35).<sup>286</sup> These irregular practices continued beyond the establishment of the independent Irish Post Office and were to have a deleterious effect on the next phase of its development.

Notwithstanding the improvements and innovation in the network, system and service outlined above, certain problems persisted and these impacted public attitudes to the post. The country mails, carried by young boys, moved at a very slow. Letters containing money and bank notes were prone to theft by Post Office staff and highwaymen. Letters were often opened, not alone for state security reasons but also to obtain gossip. Among Post Office staff periodically there were problems of drunkenness

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<sup>281</sup> Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1769), p. 99.

<sup>282</sup> Account of the Irish Post Office Post 15: 145/5 (R.M.A.; also N.A.I. (microfilm)).

<sup>283</sup> It is interesting to note here that the deputy postmaster-general for Ireland at this time was William Fortescue (*cr.* Earl of Clermont in 1777). Another Fortescue, Henry, was deputy postmaster of Cork, the highest paid position on the Munster road.

<sup>284</sup> British Postal Museum and Archives, POST 15, Ireland letter book, 1789-97, vol. 1; available on microfilm N.A.I., M.F.A. – Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5.

<sup>285</sup> Neill Burnicadi, *John Anderson, entrepreneur* (Fermoy, 1987).

<sup>286</sup> British Postal Museum and Archives, POST 15, Ireland letter book, 1789-97, vol. 1; available on microfilm N.A.I., M.F.A. – Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5.



and low morale. Much of what was wrong within the institution was reflected in the Acts passed at Westminster, and the Irish parliament Act that established the Irish Post Office 1784.<sup>287</sup> W. E. H. Lecky in his *History of Ireland in the eighteenth century* stated that officers of Irish Post positions whose salaries amounted to 6,000*l.* a year were 'habitual absentees'.<sup>288</sup> As a result of these and other organisational problems, in Ireland as in England, during the eighteenth century the Post Office was not held in high esteem.

A glimpse of how the Post Office was regarded during this period may be gleaned from Samuel Madden's *Reflections and resolutions proper for the gentlemen of Ireland, as to their conduct for the service of their country*. Madden, a highly respected writer and philanthropist, published his book in 1738 in which he commented on the ills of Ireland at the time and suggested remedies. The Post Office was one of the institutions that came in for particularly strong criticism and few of the remedies he suggested were as harsh as the two he recommended for improving the Post Office for

.... the service of the inland trade. The first to oblige our posts, by law, to come in and go out as nearly as possible (storm, floods, and other accidents excepted) at certain hours. It is true such hours are appointed by post-master general; yet, in winter time especially, through the carelessness of the postmasters, the idleness of the post-boys, bad horses, and sometimes even the want of horses, it is strange how like drunkards they turn day into night; by this means much time is lost, and business miscarries, or the notice from our correspondent comes too late to be observed; and as not only trade, but the life and fortune of thousands among us as sometimes may depend on such moments, it would do well to fix the hours by law with a penalty for each post-master of 5*s.* before any two justices, and whipping the boys if they fall short by two hours of his time, with shewing good cause. The other particular relates to the hardship which much the larger part of the kingdom lies under, in having but two post days in the week, by which means business and trade is greatly retarded. To the great danger of the nation, and the discouragement of merchants, and consequently, his majesty's revenue if the post office can bear the expence they should be obliged to send post

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<sup>287</sup> 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Irl.] An Act for establishing a Post Office within this kingdom.

<sup>288</sup> William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A history of Ireland in the eighteenth century* (5 vols, Cambridge 1892), ii, 411.

thrice a week to all the kingdom, and if they cannot they should be enabled to do it; or at worse a third penny more on every letter would fully answer the additional trouble and the advantage for it would be a thousand fold greater to our people.<sup>289</sup>

Evidently Madden's recommendations fell on deaf ears and these problems apparently persisted down to the mid-1780s when the 1784 Act attempted to introduce reform by measures such as setting a minimum speed at which the mails should travel and specifying the punishment for robbery from the mails by Post Office staff and highway men.<sup>290</sup>

In particular, the problem of theft was a major reason why the Post Office was held in such low esteem during this period. In the three years (1805-7) 3,260 persons were paid £74,550 in compensation by the Bank of Ireland for money lost in the post, and a commission of inquiry acknowledged that this was only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>291</sup> The problem was not new. Fifty years earlier, in 1754, an article in the *Belfast News-Letter* informed readers that 'Dominick Hardiman and Gilbert Duff, Waiter at the Elephant in Essex-street were committed Newgate prison ... for taking up letters at the Post Office, and taking out of one of them a bill of exchange to the value of 300*l.* ... Hardiman was apprehended playing Billiards in a Coffee House.'<sup>292</sup> While the exceptionally large sum involved is likely to have been the reason for this particular crime being reported, the crime itself was not uncommon. In a drive to eradicate embezzlement and theft by Post Office staff and their wives, two clauses in the 1784 Act (xxxvi and xxxix) punishments of 'death as a felon' for the former and death as a felon but 'without benefit of clergy' for the latter were prescribed.

Highwaymen were also a serious threat. In the eighteenth century it was normal for boys as young as fifteen to carry the mails between towns. Just how young some were and the distances they travelled can be ascertained from newspaper reports such as one in *Finn's Leinster Journal* in 1807. Titled 'A curious Fact' it recounted how

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<sup>289</sup> Samuel Madden, *Reflections and resolutions proper for the gentlemen of Ireland, as to their conduct for the service of their country* (Dublin, 1738), p. 183.

<sup>290</sup> 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.] *An Act for establishing a Post Office within this kingdom.*

<sup>291</sup> *The ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland. General Post-Office*, p. 5, H.C. 1810 (5) x, 1.

<sup>292</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 22 Feb. 1754.

Arthur McAnally the post-boy between Antrim and Belfast has within the last two years, travelled on horseback 18,980 Irish, or 24,155 English miles a distances very nearly equal to the circumference of the globe! It is remarkable of this boy now about 17 years of age that he never tires on horseback, and that he enjoys uninterrupted good health.<sup>293</sup>

Significantly, this report implies that the boy was already carrying the mails when he was just fifteen years of age. Reference to ‘post-boy or rider’ in the 1784 Act indicates that this was not uncommon. A drawback of having such youths carrying the post between towns was their vulnerability to highway robbery. From the mid-1770s, reports of post-boys being robbed whilst carrying mail appear in the newspapers. One such advertisement from 1776 related how

... the Post-boy carrying his Majesty’s Mail of letters from this Office to Wicklow, containing Letters for the Towns and Districts of Wicklow, Arklow, Gorey, and Enniscorthy, was robbed of said mail at one o’clock this Morning [22 April 1776] at the Corner of Castle-street n Stephen’s Green by two men one of whom held him down, while the other took the Mail away...<sup>294</sup>

In 1778 at least three reports of similar robberies were publicised: in all cases, rewards ranging from fifty to one hundred pounds were offered for the apprehension of the perpetrators.<sup>295</sup> Similarly in England highway robberies were common (the number reported per year varied from twelve to up to fifty<sup>296</sup>) and from the 1720s the Post Office there began to place a notice in the *London Gazette* informing the public of all such robberies.<sup>297</sup> In 1767 capital punishment for robbing the mails was introduced but it did little to deter highwaymen from robbing unarmed post-boys.<sup>298</sup> It was not until the introduction of the mail coaches in England in 1784 and in Ireland six years later that instances of highway robberies were reduced to what contemporaries regarded as an ‘acceptable’ level. The fact that prior to then, few if any precautions were taken to protect the mails or to replace young boys with men would seem to indicate that the

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<sup>293</sup> *Finn’s Leinster Journal*, 1 Oct. 1807.

<sup>294</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 Mar. 1776.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Nov. 1778.

<sup>296</sup> Campbell-Smith, *Master of the post*, p. 87.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

Post Office had little regard for the youths it employed or for its private paying customers.

Theft was not the only reason for disquiet; as already mentioned, there was also considerable suspicion and concern about the privacy of the mails. In 1735, during a debate in the English House of Commons regarding this issue, an accusation was made by the opposition

... that they [letters] were often broke open and perused by the clerks; that this practice of breaking open letters had become frequent, and was so publicly known ... that the liberty given to break open letters at the Post Office could now serve no purpose, but to enable the little clerks about that office to pry into the private affairs of every merchant, and of every gentleman in the kingdom.<sup>299</sup>

If this practice was common in England, the same was true of Ireland. Not only were Dean Swift's letters opened, so also were those of his friends. Dr. William King (not to be confused with Dr. William King, Archbishop of Dublin), when writing to Swift's niece Mrs. Whiteway, included a long postscript addressed to 'the gentleman who intercepted my last letter addressed to Mrs Whiteway': King asked this gentleman to forward the missing letters that he suspected this man had kept.<sup>300</sup> Swift himself remarked how he 'imagined, for some months past, here and in London, that the meddlers of the post-office here and in London have [grown] weary of their curiosity by finding [how] little satisfaction it gave them'.<sup>301</sup> Edward Synge, Church of Ireland Bishop of Elphin, writing to his daughter some fifteen years later in 1750 and concerned that a previous letter had gone missing in the post, advised her that 'As this may happen again, it may be proper on some occasions to write only the initial Letter of names, when by it I may know whom you mean.'<sup>302</sup> Opening letters at the Post Office both officially and unofficially was therefore common practice and damaged the reputation of the service in the eyes of some of the country's prominent letter writers in that era.

The speed at which the mails travelled, or more particularly the lack of it, was also beginning to become a matter of concern though not yet a priority for those using the service. Echoes of Samuel Madden's complaint about 'the idleness of the post-boy'

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<sup>299</sup> Cobbett, *Parliamentary history of England*, ix, 842.

<sup>300</sup> William King to Mrs Whiteway, 24 June 1737 in *The works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Scott (Edinburgh, 1824), p. 85.

<sup>301</sup> Dean Jonathan Swift to Mr. Pulteney, 7 March 1737 in *ibid.*, 19, 39.

<sup>302</sup> Edward Synge to (daughter) Alicia Synge, 5 July 1751 in *The Synge letters: Bishop Edward Synge to his daughter Alicia, Roscommon to Dublin, 1746-1752*, ed. Marie-Louise Legg (Dublin, 1996), p. 316.

in 1737 can to be heard in the 1784 Act which sought to regulate how post-boys were to carry the mails. It stipulated that:

any post-boy or rider having taken his Majesty's mails ..., [who] shall quit or desert ... or shall loiter on the road, and by selling news-papers, or suffering them to be read, or any other manner wilfully mispend his time, so as to retard the arrival of the mail or bags ... or shall not in all possible cases convey the mail or bags of letters, or expresses, after a rate of three Irish miles and a half by the hour at least, ... shall for every such offence forfeit the sum of ten shillings ... [or] justice to committ every such offender to house of correction, there to remain for a time not exceeding twenty one days.<sup>303</sup>

Evidently the problem had persisted. Post-boys were not the only Post Office staff who were troublesome during the eighteenth century. As demonstrated above, Christopher Byron painted a grim picture of an office where drunkenness was common, and morale was low as a result of bullying, low wages and insecurity around tenure owing to nepotism and jobbery.<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, the Post Office premises was in poor condition by the early 1780s: in 1782 the roof of the GPO (or Letter Office as it was then known) in Flownner's Court fell in.<sup>305</sup> Soon after, the office moved to the south-eastern side of College Green on the corner with Grafton Street.<sup>306</sup>

### **The reliability of the postal service: insights from correspondents**

Notwithstanding its many failings and limitation, on the whole the service appears to have been reliable as the following correspondence illustrates. The first collection spans a six-year period (1746-52) and comprises letters written by Bishop Edward Synge to his daughter Alicia.<sup>307</sup> Synge, who was Protestant bishop of Elphin in east Connaught, had his main residence in Kevin Street in Dublin but from May to September each year he lived in the bishop's palace in Elphin. Meanwhile, his daughter Alicia remained in

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<sup>303</sup> Clause XL of *An Act for establishing a Post Office within this kingdom*, 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.] (25 Mar. 1784).

<sup>304</sup> *Christopher Byron late of the office in his Majesty's Post-Office, Dublin* (Dublin, 1762), pp 27-31, 54.

<sup>305</sup> Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 207.

<sup>306</sup> J. T. Gilbert, *A history of the city of Dublin* (3 vols, Dublin, 1854-59), iii, 37.

<sup>307</sup> *The Synge letters*, ed. Legg.

Dublin. The pair usually exchanged letters twice a week, all that the postal service at the time would allow. Between 1746 and 1752 the post from Elphin arrived in Dublin twice a week on Monday and Friday and departed from Dublin on Tuesday and Saturday.<sup>308</sup> Elphin was on the Sligo branch of the Connaught post-road, a two-day journey from Dublin. Although the post is seldom mentioned in the letters, what comments are made are revealing.

There are, for example, a few references to the slowness of the mails and misdirection of letters. When letters arrived late, either in Dublin or Elphin, it was remarked upon: ‘you do not get your letters in the morning ... I write to the Post Office about it’ or ‘Your letter has miscarry’d as some of mine did last Spring’.<sup>309</sup> Of the 489 letters (double this number to 978 when replies are taken into consideration), only *one* (from Alicia to her father in September 1750) ever went astray and was not found.<sup>310</sup> That this was unusual is evident from his reaction. Synge wrote that he would make enquiries at the Post Office, and have a contact of his there, look into its loss.<sup>311</sup> A year later he even commented ‘I was vex’d at one of your letters being irrecoverable [*sic.*] lost last year ... here is so much carelessness in the office, you may expect some to go astray.’<sup>312</sup> Notwithstanding his comment, the Synges’ correspondence demonstrates that it was in fact reliable service.

### **The role of the Post Office for Irish commerce and trade**

Up to this point this chapter has concentrated on the state administration’s handling of the developing Post Office, profiling Post Office managerial personnel, tracing and explaining its expanding infrastructure. But attention now turns to exploring how during this period, a growing number of others in Irish society, notably banking institutions, absentee landlords, newspaper printers, and in the latter part of the century, shopkeepers, used the post for business and/ or personal purposes. Its importance for the conduct of banking business during the late 1780s was reflected in Richard Lucas’s note in *A general directory of the Kingdom of Ireland* that the Cork banks’ ‘hours of attendance [were] from 10 to 2 o’Clock, and on post-days from 5 o’Clock in the evening

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<sup>308</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1745), p. 93; idem, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1751), p. 85.

<sup>309</sup> Edward Synge to Alicia Synge, 18 Aug. 1750 in *The Synge letters*, ed. Legg, pp 421, 247.

<sup>310</sup> Edward Synge to Alicia Synge, 15 Sept. 1750 in *ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> Edward Synge to Alicia Synge, 5 July 1751 in *The Synge letters*, ed. Legg, p. 316.

to do post business only'.<sup>313</sup> Thus, the arrival and departure times of the post determined the banks' closing time. In the case of shopkeepers, we gain valuable glimpses of the volume of letters generated by them and the extent of their reliance on the post from newspaper advertisements. One of many that appeared in Finn's *Leinster Journal* on 13 Oct 1774 read as follows:

Just arrived to Jacob Watson and Strongman [Waterford] a cargo of Leaf Tabacco, a choise Parcel Rohea Tea in half Chest, Singlos and fine Green Teas, London Bag Hops, Salt Pepre, English lump Sugar, &s They will be supplied with Pepper, Hemp, French Brandy, Sallad Oyle, &s. Those who favour them with their Custom, may depend on good Usage.<sup>314</sup>

Assuming that these items were acquired from separate suppliers, this order alone generated a minimum of five letters between each supplier and the shopkeeper. The first was from the wholesaler to inform Jacob Watson about the goods that he had in stock. (This may have been a single letter or a catalogue.) Watson then replied with an order. When the goods arrived, they were paid for by money sent through the post; the payment transaction generally took at least three letters to complete. For security reasons bank notes sent through the post were usually torn in half: the first half was initially dispatched, and when a letter arrived confirming that it had arrived, the second half was sent.<sup>315</sup> Besides five different teas, eight other items were listed. The number of letters can be therefore multiplied in accordance with the number of different suppliers Jacob Watson had.

We gain further insights into the range of commodities imported into Ireland during the mid-1770s and the role of the postal service in facilitating that trade from another advertisement featured on the same page of Finn's *Leinster Journal* in which a merchant, 'Theobald Whittyat the Cross Waterford',<sup>316</sup> advertised eleven different brands of tea. According to the advertisement 'he is constantly supplied with large Quantities of Jamaican, Antigus and Barbadoes Rum', four brandies, six other spirits along with variety of wines and twelve other alcohol drinks. Other items included 'Pot Ash .... Writing....sealing wax, wafers, Flambeaus [A large ornamental

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<sup>313</sup> Richard Lucas, *A general directory of the Kingdom of Ireland or merchants and traders most useful companion*, (Dublin 1788) p. 9.

<sup>314</sup> *Leinster journal*, 13 Oct. 1774.

<sup>315</sup> The author possesses several such letters.

<sup>316</sup> *Leinster journal*, 13 Oct. 1774.

candlestick].....hair powder.....’ and he reported that ‘just landed a large quantity of English bottled cider’. In total, forty-five individual items were advertised, excluding the reference to ‘every other article in the Grocery Way’. Maintaining a constant supply of such an array of imported items, combined with the fact that many would have been bought and sold on credit, necessarily generated a very significant amount of correspondence. The above examples illustrate the important part played by the Post Office in facilitating this commerce, and in the process, modernising Irish society.

An alternative and revealing approach to examining traders’ letters and their reliance on the post involves tracking the itinerary of specific commodities imported to Ireland via London. The example of rum gives an indication of the large volume of letters generated in relation to the importation of just one product. The first letters raised were between Irish wholesalers and their English suppliers concerning the cost of the rum, the quantity required and the payment.<sup>317</sup> The Irish wholesaler then dispatched a letter or catalogue to each of his customers. If the retailer or grocer decided to purchase the rum, this generated a minimum of four letters between wholesaler and shopkeeper, as explained above. Again, using Richard Lucas’s 1788 directory it is possible to estimate the number of merchants similar to Theobald Whittyat who were operating in the south of the country. Taking a sample of just eight of the thirty-five provincial towns listed in the directory, there were eighty-nine grocers or spirit merchants. Waterford had twenty-seven such businesses, ‘Passage near Waterford’ had two, Athy thirteen, Arklow eight, Bray three, Carlow six, Clonmel twenty-three, and Carrick-on-Suir seven.<sup>318</sup> If each of these received a letter or a catalogue from a wholesaler, this came to a total of eighty-six letters. Based on a minimum calculation of four letters per order, this amounted to another 344 letters. One or two suppliers may have provided the spirits and perhaps the tea to Theobald Whittyat but there were over twenty-one other items mentioned in the advertisement which would have been supplied by a variety of wholesalers. This example demonstrates the volume of letters required to run such businesses and the indispensability of the post for such traders by the 1770s. Furthermore, Craig Bailey’s work on the Nesbitts of eighteenth-century London and their commercial networks, L. M. Cullen’s study of the Fitzgeralds of London (1718-59), Thomas M. Truxes’s work on London’s Irish merchant community and North

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<sup>317</sup> Irish wholesalers were prevented from trading directly with Jamaica under the Navigation Acts, and so had to deal through a London wholesaler.

<sup>318</sup> Richard Lucas, *A general directory of the Kingdom of Ireland or merchants and traders most useful companion* (Dublin, 1788). The name may imply a countrywide directory but in fact it only includes Cork and towns in the south Leinster and Munster.



Atlantic commerce in the mid-eighteenth century, as well as recent scholarship published under the auspices of The Irish in Europe Project demonstrate Irish merchants' heavy reliance on the postal service for the conduct of their international business.<sup>319</sup>

An indication of the sums of money sent by merchants via the post is provided by the fact that the Bank of Ireland paid 3,260 individuals £74,550 during just three years (1805-7) in recompense for the Post's miscarriage of Bank Notes and Bank Post Bills. In reality, the sums lost were significantly greater than this compensation would suggest since the amounts paid out generally fell far short of actual value since the Bank of Ireland refused to pay any claimant who was unable to declare the number of the Note and there was significant loss of private bankers notes.<sup>320</sup> While it is impossible to quantify the volume of traders letters the passed through the post, by the early eighteenth century and probably earlier traders and merchants were the heaviest users of the service which proved vital in driving the modernisation of the Post Office in Ireland.

Merchants and shop keepers were not the only commercial users of the service. The post was also important to the absentee landlord. In 1729 Thomas Prior published a pamphlet *A list of absentees of Ireland, and the yearly value of their estates and the income spent abroad ...* which listed the absentee landlords. (It was subsequently reprinted several times throughout the eighteenth century.)<sup>321</sup> His 1745 list includes over 110 'first' and 'second class absentees'. (First were those who rarely visited the country, and second was those who might spend a month or two each summer in the country.) For this large number of absentee landlords, a reliable and well-organized postal system was essential if they were to run an efficient and profitable estate at a remove. The cases of two such absentees, the earl of Abercorn and the duke of Devonshire, are revealing in terms of their reliance on the postal service.

In 1744, James Hamilton succeeded his father as eighth earl of Abercorn. He inherited extensive estates in Essex and Ireland, in and around Strabane in County Tyrone, and by the time of his death in 1789 he had acquired large estates in his

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<sup>319</sup> See Bailey's, Cullen's and Truxes's essays in David Dickson, Jan Parmentier and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds), *Irish and Scottish mercantile networks in Europe and overseas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Gent, 2007); see also [www.irishineurope.com](http://www.irishineurope.com), accessed 12 July 2014.

<sup>320</sup> *The ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland ... 1810*, p. 6 H.C. 1810 (5) x, 1.

<sup>321</sup> Thomas Prior, *A list of absentees of Ireland, and the yearly value of their estates and the income spent abroad* (Dublin, 1729; reprinted and updated 1745, 1767, 1769, 1783).

ancestral home, Scotland. His Irish estate consisted of 60,000 acres.<sup>322</sup> Abercorn only visited his Irish estates seven times in forty-five years; his longest stay was one of ten months, and it was followed by an absence of fifteen years.<sup>323</sup> Although seldom in Ireland, he nonetheless ran an efficient estate through his agents and in 1790 its annual rental income was £20,000.<sup>324</sup> The successful management of this estate was made possible by the post. Abercorn was kept informed and issued instructions through a constant stream of letters across the Irish Sea between himself and his Irish agents. In 1744, when he became eighth earl, there was a three packet sailing a week, weather permitting, and mail also reached Strabane three days a week. By 1769 both of these routes were operating six days a week service. The majority of the letters were addressed to Abercorn's agent in London.<sup>325</sup> The postal link between London and Dublin was continually improving; after the Chester route through Wales began operating in 1785, London and Dublin were only three days apart, again weather permitting.<sup>326</sup> Strabane was another three days away so it was possible to get a letter from London to Strabane and back in eight days. If the duke was at his Edinburgh residence, the service via Portpatrick and Donaghadee was even quicker. Although not all absentee landlords ran their estates with the efficiency of Abercorn, many did. Devonshire's Irish estates were in counties Cork and Waterford and incorporated the towns of Lismore, and much of Bandon and Youghal.<sup>327</sup> His estates were administered through an elaborate bureaucracy, headed by the duke and his auditors based in London. Of the resident agents in Ireland, the most senior was based in Lismore; another was in Bandon. Sub-agents and bailiffs were in Youghal and Dungarvan while Devonshire's law agents were based in Cork and Dublin.<sup>328</sup> The only means of maintaining regular contact between these various officials was the post as reflected in the many thousands of letters concerning the estate in the archives at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and at Lismore Castle in Waterford.

Another commercial enterprise for which the post became increasingly important during this period was the newspaper trade. Until the mid-1750s the majority

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<sup>322</sup> William H. Crawford, *The management of a major Ulster estate in the late eighteenth century: the eighth earl of Abercorn and his Irish agents* (Dublin, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> John H. Gebbie, *An introduction to the Abercorn letters, as relating to Ireland, 1736-1816* (Omagh, 1972), p. x.

<sup>326</sup> Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 84.

<sup>327</sup> For information on these estates see Lindsay J. Proudfoot, *Urban patronage and social authority: the management of the Duke of Devonshire's towns in Ireland, 1764-1891* (Washington DC, 1995).

<sup>328</sup> Proudfoot, *Urban patronage & social authority*, p. 90.

of the press-reading public was in Dublin. Although it is impossible to quantify the number of newspapers distributed beyond the metropolis at that time, the trade was sufficiently significant to generate substantial additional income for the clerks of the roads. During the second half of the eighteenth century the circulation of newspapers continued to grow dramatically; Robert Munter has estimated that between 1775 and 1785 the weekly circulation of newspapers in Dublin was 43,000 while at the same time circulation in the rest of the country rose from 769 to 2,428.<sup>329</sup>

The extent to which early newspapers in Ireland (and England) relied on the Post is evident from their names which included; *Flying Post*, later known as *The Post Master* (c.1699-1710), *Dublin Post-Boy* (1712-c.1724), *Protestant Post Boy* (1712-c.1724) and *Dublin Evening-Post* (1732-34). The masthead of *The Dublin Post* (see Fig. 3.4) gave particular prominence to two vital elements in the postal system upon which its production and circulation of copy relied – the post-rider on horseback, complete with post-horn, and the packet boat. Its particular reliance on the latter was acknowledged in the prospectus of the *Dublin Post* which stated that the paper would be printed every Tuesday and Saturday if the packet boat came in on time but if not, it explained, ‘we will not trouble Gentlemen with any paper.’<sup>330</sup> This comment also reflected the kind of news being printed in the *Post*; like all early newspapers it featured little by way of local reportage and thus relied on the London newspapers for news - hence the importance of the packet.<sup>331</sup> For many papers, the non-arrival of the packet boat meant a delay or alternatively printing a supplement.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Munter, *The history of the Irish newspapers*, p. 87.

<sup>330</sup> *Dublin Post*, 21 Nov. 1702.

<sup>331</sup> Munter, *The history of the Irish newspapers*, p. 207.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

**Fig. 2.4** The masthead of the *Dublin-Post* complete with Post-boy blowing horn and a packet boat



**Source:** *The Dublin-post. With the freshest advices, foreign and domestick* (Early English Books Online).<sup>333</sup> Note the comment regarding one British and one French packet.

It was not only the packets' schedule that determined the publishing and distributions days. Like the banks, the printers' schedule was dictated by the schedule for postal deliveries. Thus, once the papers were printed, those destined for the country and for individual houses in Dublin were sent to the Post Office for distribution by the clerks on Monday, Wednesday or Friday. Further evidence of the Post Office's influence (albeit indirect) over the newspaper trade is evident in its dictating the size and format of newspapers. For example, *Dalton's Dublin Impartial News Letter* of 29 June 1728 was purposely printed 'in a whole sheet, one half thereof being left blank' so as to allowed any 'Gentlemen or Dealers writing to his [*sic.*] friends ...' to re-address the newspaper, with no need for a wrapper, thereby avoiding the postage charge for a two-sheet letter.<sup>334</sup> It should be emphasised that notwithstanding their reliance on the Post Office, the latter made little money from newspapers since as we have seen, the clerks of the road were allowed the 'privilege' of sending newspapers free of charge along 'their'

<sup>333</sup> *The Dublin-post. With the freshest advices, foreign and domestick*. Eighteenth-Century Collections Online [http://find.galegroup.com.jproxy.nuim.ie/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=nuim&tabID=T001&docId=CB3330450143&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>, accessed 2 Aug. 2014].

<sup>334</sup> *Dalton's Dublin Impartial News Letter*, 29 June 1728.

roads, yet charged the publishers. In Ireland they retained that privilege down to the early nineteenth century, long after it had been phased down in England.

### **Glimpses of the use of the post for exchange of private mail**

In addition to official and business letters, the Post Office carried individuals' personal mail. By the start of the eighteenth century this aspect of its service was so taken for granted that it was not specifically mentioned in the legislation. In a case of art reflecting reality, the increasing volume of these 'social letters' became the inspiration for a new epistolary novel genre which began in England during the 1680s with works such as *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (London, 1684) by Aphra Behn. Almost a century later, in 1781, Elizabeth Sheridan published *The triumph of prudence over passion*, one of the first such novels by an Irish author.<sup>335</sup>

In their introduction to *Irish provincial cultures in the long eighteenth century*, Raymond Gillespie and Roy Foster label the new emerging social class in eighteenth century Ireland the 'middling sort.'<sup>336</sup> In Dublin these were 'the emerging professions, such as lawyers, clergy and merchants .... in the countryside too there were social groups such as middlemen and squireens who had few of the attributes of gentlemen but whose economic position suggest they should command some measure of status'.<sup>337</sup> They were literate and belonged to 'the ambiguous social field between those who had received honours through royal touch by means of a title ... and the recognizably subservient world of small leaseholders or the survivors at the bottom of the urban hierarchy.'<sup>338</sup> The former were entitled to free postage; the latter, for the most part, were illiterate and had little use for the post. Hence, it was this middling sort who sustained the post as for the most part they paid for their letters.

Evidence of how this middling sort actually used the post features in the *Irish provincial cultures* volume, with several of the essays drawing upon the correspondence of their subjects. For example, John Bergin examines the career of Richard Lahy (c.1695-1773), an Irish law agent in eighteenth-century London whom from the late 1720s until his death in 1773 represented many clients in Ireland, including the earls of

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<sup>335</sup> Aphra Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (London, 1684). This was the first of a three-volume set, the other two being *Love Letters From a Noble Man to his Sister: Mixt With the History of their Adventures* (London, 1685), and *The Amours of Philander and Silvia: Being the Third and last Part of the Love-Letters Between a Noble-Man and his Sister* (London, 1687; republished by Penguin, New York, 1996). See also Elizabeth Sheridan, *The triumph of prudence over passion* (Dublin 1781; republished by Four Court Press, 2011, edited by Aileen Douglas and Ian Campbell Ross).

<sup>336</sup> Gillespie & Foster (eds), *Irish provincial cultures*, (Dublin 2012) p. 25.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

Thomond. Robert French, a member of the French family of Frenchpark in County Roscommon, oversaw Thomond's legal practice in Ireland and the two men corresponded frequently between 1736 and 1769. As Bergin's essay demonstrates, the post was vital in facilitating this arrangement.<sup>339</sup>

Three selected sets of social correspondence published by the Irish Manuscripts Commission bear out the importance of the post for this 'social' form of communication during the eighteenth century. The first is the correspondence of Marmaduke Coghill.<sup>340</sup> An MP in the Irish parliament for forty-two years (1692-1739) he was a close ally of Speaker Conolly and sometime chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>341</sup> For many years, he corresponded with his friend Edward Southwell and, after his death, with Edward's son, Edward Junior. Edward Senior had been Chief Secretary for Ireland and an MP in the Irish parliament.<sup>342</sup> Edward Junior was also to become Chief Secretary and an MP. Although both Coghill and Edward Senior were involved in politics, by the time the correspondence commenced, Edward had retired from public life but Coghill was still very much involved in Irish politics. Whereas Coghill spent most of his time in Ireland, the Southwells were absentee landlords living in England. Coghill's letters were informal and concerned with the political happenings of the day, their common businesses interests, and family news. Occasionally reference was made to the post: in a letter dated 24 November 1725, for instance, Coghill remarked 'We had four packets last Saturday' which brought two letters from Southwell.<sup>343</sup> He went on to discuss the political furore of the day, Wood's halfpennies, and ends with comments on Edward's son and the death of a friend. The following year while Edward Junior was on the grand tour of Europe, Coghill even suggests a potentially suitable Irish wife for Edward Junior, 'if you [Edward Senior] will take a wife for him out of this Kingdom.'<sup>344</sup> Clearly, keeping the Southwells informed about the latest news from Ireland was a major concern for Coghill.

The second selected correspondence, that of the Pakenhams of Tullynally in County Westmeath, like many big houses archives in Ireland, demonstrates the extent to which their occupiers relied on the post for social contact. Eliza Pakenham in her book

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<sup>339</sup> John Bergin, 'Richard Lahy, an Irish law agent in eighteenth-century London' in *ibid.*, pp 75-92. The essay includes 126 footnotes, of which 97 cite letters to or from Lahy.

<sup>340</sup> *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill*, ed. Hayton.

<sup>341</sup> Linde Lunney and Patrick A. Walsh, 'Coghill, Marmaduke' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org/>, accessed 8 Nov. 2012].

<sup>342</sup> Walsh, 'Coghill, Marmaduke'.

<sup>343</sup> Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southall sr., 24 Nov 1727 in *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill*, ed. Hayton, p. 13.

<sup>344</sup> Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southall sr., 30 Nov 1727 in *ibid.*, p. 31.

*Soldier, sailor: an intimate portrait of an Irish family*<sup>345</sup> draws upon the private letters of family members to construct an account of their lives during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, exploring their relationships with each other and with their friends who were scattered far and wide, both in Ireland and abroad.

The third selected collection of private letters from this era belonged to Emily, duchess of Leinster (d. 1814), the second of the celebrated Lennox sisters – Caroline (d.1774), Louisa (d. 1821), Sarah (d.1826) and Cecilia (d. 1769) who maintained a lively correspondence throughout much of their adult lives. Emily’s correspondence consists of 1,770 letters exchanged between her and her sisters, and between her and other members of her household.<sup>346</sup> These letters are very much of a private nature, discussing often deeply personal and intimate matters including childbirth, marriage, life and death and thereby demonstrating the vital importance of the post in enabling these women to maintain social contact with family and friends. As Emily’s correspondence demonstrates, the post also facilitated another important development in Ireland as across Europe at this time – the sharing and circulation of books and other reading recommended material, what some scholars regard as a Republic of Letters.

### **The Post Office and the majority of the Irish population**

As important as it is to know who used the post, it is equally important to examine those among the population who did not use the Post Office, although this is a difficult task since surviving information tends on the whole to be circumstantial. The majority – rural, Catholic labourers and tenant farmers – do not appear to have used the post, or if they did, little or no evidence has survived. Just how little demand there was for the postal service in poorer parts of Ireland is evident from the very slow development of the postal network in those areas (see Figs 3.5a-5c) particularly the west. Even as late as 1690 the most westerly post-towns were still Galway, Sligo and Limerick: of the forty five post-towns there was only five west of the Shannon, and many westerly counties had no post-towns. Although the situation improved down to the mid-1780s, the disparity persisted. For example, in 1700 the counties of Mayo and Galway, which together covered an area of just over 45,000 square miles, had just one post-town – Galway. By contrast, at the same time King’s County (Offaly) and Westmeath, an area of 15,000 square miles in total or one third the size of Mayo and Galway, had two post-

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<sup>345</sup> Eliza Pakenham, *Soldier, sailor: an intimate portrait of an Irish family* (London, 2007).

<sup>346</sup> *The correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster (1731-1814)*, ed. Brian Fitzgerald (3 vols, Dublin, 1948).

towns – Athlone and Mullingar. In 1784 the two western counties had nine while the two midland counties had eleven. As the Post Office grew during the eighteenth century, few towns west of the Shannon became post-towns. Of the sixty-three new post-towns to emerge between 1700 and 1724, only three (Tralee, Ennis and Elphin – two county towns and a junction town) lay west of the Shannon. By 1784, although the number of post-towns had grown to 145, only thirteen were in Connaught, three in Donegal and three between west Cork and Kerry. In Connaught, over 90 per cent of the population was Catholic.<sup>347</sup> In other words, in 1784, the western third of the country, which was predominately Catholic and poor, had fewer than twenty post-towns, while the other two-thirds had 125 post-towns. This imbalance prevailed until the mid-1800s. In this context, the absence of surviving letters, written in the Irish language between 1690 and 1784 that were carried by the postal system, confirms the impression that the post was not used to any significant degree by the majority rural, Catholic, labouring and tenant population.<sup>348</sup>

There were many reasons why the Catholic majority did not use the post. Illiteracy was a major impediment. As late as 1806, of the 1,500,000 Irish households who spoke Irish, only 20,000 were said to be able to read it, let alone write it.<sup>349</sup> In parts of Connaught the literacy level was as low as 10-15 per cent.<sup>350</sup> Sending a letter was also too expensive for most. During the period 1690-1784, the cost of a single-sheet letter over less than 40 miles was 2*d.* (table 3.2) and twice that for a double-sheet letter. This was at a time when the average daily wage of a farm labour was 6½*d.*<sup>351</sup> A single letter to London cost 6*d.* – almost a day’s wages – while a letter to America cost 1*s.* 6*d.*<sup>352</sup> Furthermore, as previously noted, there was mistrust of the service. Lastly, the majority of the population had no need of the service. Members of the Catholic majority, unlike their Presbyterian neighbours in Ulster, were not yet leaving the country in large numbers; hence, their world was largely a local one as they rarely left their own neighbourhood for long. Consequently, they had little or no need for a postal

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<sup>347</sup> McCracken, ‘The social structure & social life, 1714-60’.

<sup>348</sup> Envelopes were not used until the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840. As all letters passing through the post during the eighteenth century had postmarks applied to them, it is relatively easy to ascertain whether a letter passed through the post. Of the many thousands of letters dating from the 1700s onwards seen by this author during the past forty years, none written in Irish show any evidence of having been posted.

<sup>349</sup> *First report of the commissioners on education in Ireland*, p. 82, H.C. 1825 (400) xii, 86.

<sup>350</sup> McBride, *Eighteenth-century Ireland*, p. 56.

<sup>351</sup> Cullen, ‘Economic development, 1750-1800’, p. 186.

<sup>352</sup> Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1760), p. 92.



service. This situation, however, change dramatically in the nineteenth century as the numbers leaving Ireland for America in particular reached millions.

However, one section of the Catholic population that did use the Post Office was the rising Catholic merchant class. The penal laws restricted ownership of land by Catholics and, as a result, many turned to trade. Maureen Wall has argued that early in the 1700s, Catholics controlled a large share of the trade in the country.<sup>353</sup> This was reflected in the case of Cork where there was an attempt by the Protestant freemen of the city to stem the rising tide of Catholic merchants.<sup>354</sup> This expanding section of the Catholic population had little option but to use the post for business reasons, their correspondence most likely being in English or in the language of those from whom they were buying goods. But while many were from dispossessed gentry families and some were surviving catholic landowners, and although both placed a premium on a good education,<sup>355</sup> these merchants still only constituted a minority within the entire Catholic population. Thus, from the 1690s until the establishment of the independent Irish Post Office in 1784, the majority Catholic population appears to have made little use of the Post Office, although that would change dramatically during the next century.

### **One exceptional individual's experience of the Post Office: Dean Jonathan Swift**

Thus far, the focus has been on outlining the development and structure of the Post Office in Ireland and attempting to profile those within Irish society who used the service during the period 1703-84 in particular. To complement this macro-level survey, one exceptional individual experience of using the service is now explored. A prolific letter writer, political pamphleteer, and for a short time 'editor' of two newspapers, Dean Jonathan Swift relied on the postal system to distribute his work both cheaply and efficiently. During most of the first decade and a half of the eighteenth century he spent much of his time in London where he was at the heart of the English Tory establishment. While in England, he became editor of the Tory journal *The Examiner* and wrote many pamphlets in support of that government. The most efficient way for his pamphlets and newspaper to reach the largest audience possible was through the post and as already noted, Swift was friendly with Sir Thomas Frankland, one of the postmasters-general.

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<sup>353</sup> Maureen Wall, 'The Catholics of the town and the quarterage dispute in eighteenth-century Ireland' in *I.H.S.*, xi, no. 42 (Sept. 1952), pp 91-114.

<sup>354</sup> Dickson, *Old world colony*, p. 412.

<sup>355</sup> McCracken, 'The social structure & the social life, 1714-60', pp 31-56.

While in England he wrote regularly to Stella, whom he may have later married. Sixty-five letters written between 1710 and 1713 and published posthumously as *The Journal to Stella* are of a very personal, informal nature, featuring personal information, gossip, in-house jokes and clearly indicate that he maintained close contact with friends in Ireland. After the Tories' defeat in the 1715 general election, Swift, realizing he had no influence with the new Whig administration, returned to Ireland. From 1720 he set about publishing a series of pamphlets, most notable his 'Drapier Letters' in which he questioned England's right to interfere in Ireland.<sup>356</sup> The only direct reference to the Post Office appeared in letter vii of the Draper letter, *An Humble Address to Both Houses of Parliament*, when Swift complained 'that the whole revenues of the post-office here so righteously belonging to the English treasury are arising chiefly from our own commerce with each other ... and the pensions paid out of Irish revenues to English favourites'<sup>357</sup> (that is, pensions paid to the king's mistresses and other royal favourites.<sup>358</sup>) Equally, very little reference is made to the Post Office carrying pamphlets. In one letter dated 14 March 1734 that Swift received from a London merchant named Francis Grant, the latter discussed an enclosed pamphlet which, according to the letter, concerned the establishment of an Irish fishing industry.<sup>359</sup> Swift's dependency on the post increased further after he became editor of *The Intelligencer*, a short-lived periodical published between May and December 1728 and distributed via the post.<sup>360</sup> His controversial pamphlets, combined with his previous political activity in England, led to his mail being opened. As early as 1707, when he was writing under the pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff, he accused Post Office staff of intercepting and holding the fictional Bickerstaff letters.<sup>361</sup> This continued into the early 1720s: in October 1722 he wrote: 'I escaped hanging very narrowly a month ago; for a letter from Preston, directed to me, was opened at the post-office, and sealed again in a very slovenly manner, when Manley found it only contained a request from a poor curate.'<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Scott (19 vols, Edinburgh 1824). The first five Drapier letters are in vol. vi, 348- 490 and nos 5 and 6 in vol. vii, 4-57.

<sup>357</sup> A humble address to both houses of parliament in *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Scott (19 vols, Edinburgh 1824), vi, 40-41.

<sup>358</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 53.

<sup>359</sup> Francis Grant to Swift, 14 Mar. 1734 in *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Scott (19 vols, Edinburgh, 1824), xviii, 200.

<sup>360</sup> *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org.jproxy.nuim.ie/home.do>, accessed 28 Sept. 2012].

<sup>361</sup> *Memoirs of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Sir Walter Scott (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1834), ii, 94, n. 1.

<sup>362</sup> Swift to Robert Cope, 9 Oct. 1722 in *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Scott (19 vols, Edinburgh, 1824), xvi, 390. Cope was a friend of Swift.

A major figure in eighteenth-century English literature and Enlightenment circles, Swift communicated regularly with many of the influential writers of the day including John Gay, Thomas Parnell, John Arbuthnot and most importantly Alexander Pope, sometimes receiving up to six letters a day.<sup>363</sup> As already emphasised, letters exchanged via the post between Swift's friends were commonly intercepted; as Alexander Pope remarked, 'no secret can cross your Irish Sea, and every clerk in the post office had know of it.'<sup>364</sup> That Swift's daily timetable was often decided by the comings and goings of the postman and his going to the Post Office himself to put letters in the post is borne out by comments such as 'I have something more to say upon this part of the subject but the post is just going, which forces me in great haste to conclude.'<sup>365</sup>

An exceptional figure in early eighteenth-century Ireland, in his use of the post Jonathon Swift demonstrated the utility and weaknesses of that service. His letters to Stella represent the private letters and correspondences of his time. As a man of letters, the post provided him with a means of communicating and exchanging ideas with his contemporaries. Like many other leading political and church figures, he also relied on the post to conduct his business affairs. As a controversial author, editor of newspapers and writer of political pamphlets, he depended on the post for their distribution while his letters were regularly opened and scrutinised by the authorities. Although Swift and his friends resented having their mail opened, arguably the post 'made' Jonathon Swift as without the regular contact with his 'audience' that the post facilitated, he might have remained a little-known Church of Ireland rector.

### **Retrospect on progress**

In 1703 the Post Office had expanded little beyond its initial 1659 network of 660 miles and fourth-five Post-towns. Over the next ninety-four years the number of post-towns and the network almost trebled to 145 post-towns and covered 1,600 miles. The frequency of the mails also increased; in 1703 on some routes the mail travelled three times a week and twice weekly on others. In 1784 thirty-five towns received mail six days a week, Thursday and Saturday being the days no mail arrived from Dublin. Eighty had had a three-day week service arriving on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The

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<sup>363</sup> Thomas Harley to Dean Swift, 19 June 1714 in *ibid.*, 125.

<sup>364</sup> Alexander Pope to Lord Bolingbroke, 15 Sept. 1734 in *ibid.*, xviii, 230; Dr King to Mrs. Whiteway, 24 June 1737 in *ibid.*, xix, 85.

<sup>365</sup> Swift to Count de Gyllenborg, 2 Nov. 1719 in *ibid.*, x, 293.

other thirty had a twice weekly service arriving on Tuesday and Saturday. Not only did the country service improve, within the city of Dublin the Penny Post system was introduced. The connection between London and Dublin also improved from twice weekly to six days a week if the weather conditions on the Irish Sea were favourable. All these improvements resulted in a much more regular postal service.

### **The role of the Post Office in Westminster's governance of Ireland and the North American colonies: a comparative perspective**

As Ireland was small and close to Britain, it was relatively easy to organise and monitor the postal network, and by extension to conduct ongoing surveillance for any covert operations, there. This was in contrast with Britain's colonies in North America where it was much more difficult for Westminster to monitor, anticipate and suppress seditious activity owing to the distance involved and because it was not until the eve of the Seven Years War (1756-63)<sup>366</sup> that an efficient postal communications network or packet service to America was established. Prior to this, sending mail to America was a haphazard affair. Ships captains sailing to the colonies let it be known when they were leaving. They hung a bag in a tavern or coffee house where letters for the ships destination could be deposited. On arrival, these letters were delivered to the local Post Office or coffee house for collection.<sup>367</sup> (By contrast, in Ireland at this time there were three packets a week.<sup>368</sup>) Furthermore, the internal American postal system was haphazard, and did not show a profit until 1761.<sup>369</sup> The lack of a proper postal service resulted in poorer and slower official, commercial and private communications, making it harder for Westminster to govern from afar. It also had profound repercussions for British Army campaigns extending beyond this period: this was best exemplified during the war between Britain and the United States (1812-14).<sup>370</sup> Commercial development was also impacted. Whereas in Ireland, having access to a regular, reliable postal service enabled English landowners to exert tight control over the running of their Irish

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<sup>366</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 166.

<sup>367</sup> Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr. and Hugh Talmage Leflet, *Colonial America* (New York and London, 1968), p. 368.

<sup>368</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1738), p. 4.

<sup>369</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 171.

<sup>370</sup> Had news of the Treaty of Ghent (24 Dec. 1814) which was intended to end the war reached American shores sooner, the Battle of New Orleans which took place sixteen days later on 8 January 1815 and resulted in over 2,000 British soldiers being killed, wounded or missing might have been avoided. Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steel Commager and William E. Leuchtenburg, *A concise history of the American Republic* (Oxford, 1977), p. 169.

estates from their seats in England, in the American colonies, the lack of a comparable service allowed the colonists to assert greater autonomy over their commercial affairs by sometimes ignoring legislative prohibitions. A case in point was the iron industry which continued to grow despite Westminster passing a law limiting the industry in the colonies in 1750. The colonists paid no attention to the legislation; in fact the state assemblies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Massachusetts all granted bounties for new plants after the law was passed.<sup>371</sup> This could not have happened in Ireland where, for example, the Navigation Acts, which seriously limited Ireland's freedom to trade, were enforced.

As already noted, the importance that Westminster attached to the Post Office in Ireland was borne out by its insistence that the deputy postmasters of Ireland be appointed by the postmasters-general in England and not by the Irish parliament. The fact that almost all incumbents were Englishmen appointed over the heads of the Irish parliament is evident from Marmaduke Coghill's speculation about the likely successor to Isaac Manley's death in 1738:

I presume the news of Mr Manly's death has reached London some time ago Sr. T. Prendergast who was a Competitor for his employment is now I hear without hope, & complains heavily to Sr. Robert for breach of promise, my Ld Leiu, had he any power in the disposeall of this employment is inclined to Mr. Cope, tho the governing people here are for Harry Bingham, *but I suppose my Ld. Lovell will insist on his right of disposing of the employment*, as it has bin said, & Sr. Marmaduke Wyvell is to have it, it is an easy place with a salary of 600*l.* [£600], a year more, I don't know what Sr. Marmaduke Wyvell circumstance are but suppose not very great, since he takes this employment in this Kingdom, which requires constant residence.<sup>372</sup>

Clearly then, the appointment was in the gift of Lord Lovell (Thomas Coke), confidant and adviser to Robert Walpole, leader of the British cabinet,<sup>373</sup> and one of two joint Postmasters-General of the Post Office in Great Britain. That appointment

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<sup>371</sup> Importation Act, 23 Geo. II c. 29 [G.B.]; Morison, Commager & Leuchtenburg, *A concise history of the American Republic*, p. 50.

<sup>372</sup> Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southall, 10 Jan. 1735 in *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill*, ed. Hayton, p. 182 (italics added by this author for emphasis).

<sup>373</sup> Romney R. Sedgwick, 'Coke, Thomas (1697-1759), of Holkham, Norf.' at *The history of parliament* [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/>, accessed 11 Nov. 2012].

mechanism remained in place until the formation of the Irish Post Office in 1784. In America, the story was somewhat different. In 1691 an Englishman, Thomas Neale, was appointed Postmaster General for all the American colonies for twenty-one years. However, he never set foot in America, but appointed Andrew Hamilton of New Jersey as his deputy.<sup>374</sup> After Hamilton, four more Americans – Alexander Sportswood, Elliot Benger, Benjamin Franklin and William Hunter – held the deputyship.<sup>375</sup> Some within the colonies were quick to harness the postal service to promote the case for independence from Britain. Franklin used the post to circulate his newspaper. William Goddard, owner and printer of several newspapers, set up his own distribution / postal system since the distribution of his papers was being severely curtailed by the British authorities charging exorbitant rates.<sup>376</sup> This drove him to declare that ‘The post office had long been an engine in the hand of the British ministry to promote their scenes of enslaving the colonies and destroying the English constitution.’<sup>377</sup> In June 1775, just days after news of battles Lexington and Concord reached London, in a rather clumsy attempt to gauge public opinion in America and garner intelligence from there, the British government ordered the opening of all letters carried by the packets from the colonies.<sup>378</sup> This was never done in the case of Irish packets: it was never necessary since its Post Office was so firmly under the control of the British administration. On 26 July 1775 the Second Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin postmaster general for the Post Office of the United Colonies. Whereas in Ireland the Post Office was still firmly in the grip of the British authorities, in America it was in the hands of colonists intent on gaining independence. Within a decade, Ireland would have its own independent Post Office.

## Conclusion

The 1784 Act which established the independent Irish Post Office reflects the state of the Post Office at the time. Many of the clauses concern abuses of the post both by those working within the Post Office and outside it. In defence of the Post Office in Ireland, it

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<sup>374</sup> Barck & Leflet, *Colonial America*, p. 370.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: the colonial experience* (New York, 1964), p. 340.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339. In March 1774 Goddard was attempting to establish a system in opposition to the regular system. A development commented on by Thomas Hutchinson Governor of Massachusetts in a letter to the earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies – see Thomas Hutchinson to the earl of Dartmouth, 21 Mar. 1774 in *Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783* (Colonial Office series), viii transcripts 1774, ed. K. G. Davies (Dublin, 1975), pp 71-72.

<sup>378</sup> Julie M. Flavell, ‘Government interception of letters from America and the quest for colonial opinion in 1775’ in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 58, no. 2 (Apr. 2001), pp 403-30, 403.

differed very little from the Office in England. There it was viewed by the public with the same scepticism as in Ireland. Like in Ireland letters were liable to be opened, the mails were slow and often robbed. Both at Lombard Street, the headquarters of the English Post Office, and at Westminster, the attitude of the postal authorities in London towards the Post Office in Ireland was, on the whole, indifferent. So long as the Post Office in Ireland did not lose money and fulfilled its duties to the state, the state cared little for how efficient it was or how well it served the public. To a lesser extent this was true of the English system as well. The slow but steady expansion of the network and increased frequency of the mails kept Ireland in touch with the outside world, enabling the country's reading public to keep abreast of the latest news, customs and fashion at home and abroad. Thus, the post was an essential force for the modernisation of Ireland.

The previous chapter demonstrated how the post in Ireland during the 1500s had aided in a small way the Tudor conquest of Ireland and the new Post Office had played an important role in the Stuart and Cromwellian consolidation of that conquest. As this chapter has shown, that service to the state administration continued throughout the Hanoverian era. During the 1700s the post was an integral part of the composite state's bureaucracy, facilitating the continued exercise of effective British authority in Ireland. The constantly expanding network of post-towns, combined with increased frequency of the mails, enabled Westminster maintain a firm grip on the affairs of the Irish kingdom during the long eighteenth century.

## Chapter three

### Accelerated modernisation of the Irish Post Office during the secretaryship of John Lees, 1784-1803

This chapter examines the first phase of the interlude during which the Irish Post Office (as distinct from the Post Office in Ireland) functioned independently of the Post Office in London and was answerable to the Irish parliament. Throughout this politically turbulent period, it continued to serve and support the Dublin Castle administration and during the 1790s and early 1800s its intelligence-gathering function proved vital in assisting the Dublin Castle authorities with detecting and suppressing insurrection. After decades of slow and steady development, this was also an era of significant and unprecedented expansion, innovation and modernisation of the postal infrastructure and service under the loyal, active and able (if self-serving) stewardship of John Lees, secretary of the Irish Post (1784-1803).<sup>1</sup> The number of post-towns increased dramatically by eighty-one percent, rising from 142 to 258.<sup>2</sup> By 1803 its network extended across the whole country and a new safe, secure and increasingly speedy means of transporting mail – the mail-coach – was operating on the main routes. Although there is no statistical data on the volume of letters carried, the rise in the Irish Post Office's income from £42,440 in 1785 to £118,435 in 1805, combined with the growth in its Dublin office core staff (from 107 in 1784<sup>3</sup> to 125 in 1797<sup>45</sup>), reflect the scale of the increase in the volume of letters processed.<sup>6</sup> This spurt of growth resulted from a significant shift in the driving forces behind the modernisation of the service. Whereas during the period 1690-1784 the scale, pace and direction of development was largely driven by the needs of the state administration (both military and civil) in Dublin

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1784 and 1803 John Lees was secretary of the Irish Post Office. Lees continued as secretary until his death in 1811. However, by 1803 his son Edward was running the Irish Post Office. being secretary in all but name.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1784), p. 119; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1800), pp 143-45.

<sup>3</sup> British Postal Museum and Archive, POST 15/154, Irish Post Office letter copy book, available on microfilm N.A.I., M.F.A. – 43-Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5. In 1784 the staff cost for the Dublin office was £8,333 1s. 0d.

<sup>4</sup> *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post-office revenue, United Kingdom: part II. Ireland*, pp 200-7, H.C. 1829 (353), xii, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communications with Ireland*, pp 338-49, H.C. 1832 (716), xvii, 1.

<sup>6</sup> R. V. Clarendon, *A sketch of the revenue and finances of Ireland and of the appropriated funds, loans and debt of the nation from their commencement ...* (Dublin, 1791), p. 63 (Early English Books online); *First report from the Select Committee on postage; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, p. 511, H.C. 1837-38 (278) xx, pt.I.1. **This** report gives the mileage as 7,616 English which converts to 5,996 using a conversion of 1.27 English to one Irish.



and Westminster together with those of rural MPs sitting in the Irish parliament, although these remained extremely important, it was those in the commercial sector that now became more significant in driving growth in the Irish Post Office between 1784 and 1803.

Yet, in spite of all this growth and expansion, it was also an era of significant fraud, corruption and nepotism within the Irish Post Office. A parliamentary report published in 1810 was to expose the scale of corruption within the Irish Posts Office under the stewardship of John Lees who acquired a vast fortune by taking inappropriate advantage of his position.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, as this study will show, Lees served the Dublin Castle administration well, particularly during the revolutionary period of the 1790s, and notwithstanding his many faults, he can be credited with making a significant contribution towards much of the modernisation of the Irish Post Office between 1784 and his semi-retirement in 1803.

During this time, the Post Office once again stepped up its role as a significant driving force in accelerating the modernisation of Ireland whilst operating as a very visible, indispensable and acceptable part of the composite state infrastructure across the length and breadth of the country. As such, it was in the state's interest to ensure that the Post Office operated and (importantly) was *seen* to operate as efficiently as possible. The introduction of mail coaches was a particularly significant landmark in modernising not only the postal service but Irish society. As will become apparent, the manner in which the Dublin Castle administration responded to this innovation offers revealing insights into the authorities' growing awareness of the reputational and practical benefits to be derived from its association with this increasingly popular and indispensable state department whose reach and relevance was extending to growing numbers within Irish society.

As mentioned, the period 1784-1803 was marked by political turmoil and change both within and outside Ireland. Two years before the establishment of the Irish Post Office, the Irish parliament had won a degree of legislative independence. Against the backdrop of revolution in France and the ensuing wars, the United Irishmen's failed rebellion, the passing of the Act of Union (1800) and Robert Emmet's abortive rising (1803) unfolded and most had major repercussions for the Irish Post Office. Legislative independence resulted in the Irish Post Office being answerable to the Irish rather than

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<sup>7</sup> *The ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland. General Post-Office. (Ireland), H.C. 1810 (5) x, 1.*

the Westminster parliament: a major consequence of this was that the money generated by the Irish Post Office was thereafter kept for the Irish Exchequer. The Post Office also played an important role in enabling the Dublin Castle authorities to suppress the 1798 rebellion. As will become apparent, after the Act of Union, the Irish Post Office was once again subject to the control of the Westminster parliament; there, its operations, like those of the Irish administration as a whole, soon came in for intense scrutiny and regulation.

### **The establishment of an independent Irish Post Office**

Throughout the 1700s in a context of growing Protestant patriotism, there had been grumblings in Ireland regarding Westminster's control of the Post Office there. Dean Swift was among the first to complain that the revenue generated went into the English rather than the Irish Exchequer.<sup>8</sup> Well before the Irish parliament won a degree of legislative independence in 1782, it had been attempting to wrest control of the Post Office in Ireland from Westminster. In 1784 it was agreed that the two Post Offices should separate.<sup>9</sup> The record of the Irish House of Commons debate which took place on Tuesday 9 March 1784 prior to its becoming law show that the negotiations that culminated in this decision had been ongoing for almost a decade.<sup>10</sup> The first round took of talks was between representatives of the Westminster and Irish parliaments while John Hobart, second earl of Buckinghamshire, was lord lieutenant (December 1776-January 1777); however, nothing came of these.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that the six Lord Lieutenants that followed were in favour of establishing an Irish Post Office, no progress was made. The likely reasons for this include their short terms in office and reluctance on the part of the English Treasury to forgo the revenue. It was not until Robert Henley, second earl of Northington, became Lord Lieutenant in May 1783 that pressure was brought on the British administration to authorise an Irish Post Office but again, the stumbling block was the loss of income to the English Exchequer.<sup>12</sup> However, by that time, the Post Office in Ireland was just about paying its way, the packet service crossing the Irish Sea alone generating a profit.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The parliamentary register or history of the proceedings and debates of the house of commons of Ireland, the first session in the reign of his present Majesty* (17 vols, Dublin, 1784-97), ii, 427.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

During the final three months of negotiations, the Irish parliament was represented by John Lees (later appointed secretary of the new Irish Post Office) and Lord Clermont, who was postmaster-general of Ireland and, by the 1780s, permanently resident in England.<sup>14</sup> The negotiations were tough; the Irish delegation wanted Ireland and England respectively to keep its own revenue.<sup>15</sup> The British negotiators would not agree to this, asserting that the Irish Post Office would gain 8*d.* per letter for processing work done by the English Post Office on letters sent from England to Ireland whereas England would only receive 4*d.* for each letter going in the opposite direction. It was eventually agreed that each would keep an account of what was due to the other Post Office and the amount due would be settled each year. Packet boats continued to be a stumbling block since under British law, only British packets could carry mail in and out of Britain. It was eventually agreed that the packet service would continue to operate under the control of the British Post Office, which would keep all the revenue generated by the service. In compensation, the Irish Post Office received £4,000 annually and retained the right to operate its own packets, if it so desired.<sup>16</sup> The profits of the packet service stemmed from the 1*d.* charged on every letter carried by a packet boat crossing the Irish Sea; in 1801 this charge had doubled to 2*d.*<sup>17</sup>

On the whole, Clermont and Lees secured a fair deal.<sup>18</sup> At a time when the Post Office in Ireland was just about breaking even, the £4,000 compensation was deemed satisfactory by the Irish parliament since the cost of acquiring and operating Irish packet boats was prohibitive. The notion that if the parliamentary privilege of free postage was curtailed, the Irish Post Office could become very profitable was also mooted. However, no effort was made to curtail the exercise of that longstanding privilege which was jealously guarded by MPs; in fact its abuse would only increase during the period of independence (1784-1831).<sup>19</sup> In the new dispensation, Clermont was to be replaced by two postmasters-general of Ireland, as occurred in England. In return for giving up his post, he was handsomely compensated.<sup>20</sup> This separation of the two offices had been anticipated in England as *An Act for establishing certain Regulations concerning the*

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>15</sup> An account of the negotiations was given during the debate concerning the setting up of the Irish Post Office in the Irish House of Commons on 9 March 1784 and recorded in *ibid.*, 429-32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> 24 Geo. III, c. 6. [G.B.]. In 1801, when the English internal rates were increased, the Irish Sea rate rose to 2*d.* – 41 Geo. III, c. 7 [U.K.].

<sup>18</sup> *The parliamentary register* ..., ii, 427.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Clermont was appointed collector of the port of Dublin, a position worth £1,000 per year (see chap. two).

*Postage and Conveyance of Letters and Packets by the Post between Great Britain and Ireland* had been passed the previous year at Westminster.<sup>21</sup> However, it was not to come into force until an Act was passed by the Irish parliament in July 1784.

The bill passed quickly through the Irish parliament. Having been presented by Mr Foster, it had its first reading on 12 March 1784 and its second the following day when it was referred to a committee of the whole house; at that point, one (unrecorded) amendment was made.<sup>22</sup> It received its third reading on 22 March and was then sent to the Lords.<sup>23</sup> On 3 April the Lords approved the bill without amendment.<sup>24</sup> Having been sent to the Lord Lieutenant, the bill was returned with royal assent on 14 May.<sup>25</sup> The new Irish Post Office was established following the passing of 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17, *An Act for the establishing of a Post-Office within this Kingdom*, in the Irish parliament.<sup>26</sup> The preamble to the Act stated its purpose and outlined how the Office was to operate:

For the better support of your Majesty's government, and the convenience of trade be it enacted ... that as soon as conveniently may be there shall be one general letter-office and post-office established in some convenient place within the city of Dublin, with sub-offices throughout this kingdom from whence all letter and packets whatsoever to or from places within this kingdom, or beyond the seas, may be with speed and expedition sent, received and dispatched; and that the person, or persons from time to time to be appointed by the King's Majesty, his letters patent under the great seal of Ireland by the name and stile of his Majesty's Post Master General of Ireland, and that there shall be a secretary, a treasurer or receiver general an accountant general and a resident surveyor of the said general post-office; and also a comptroller of the sorting office thereof, to be appointed, made and constituted in like manner by letter patent under the great seal of Ireland.<sup>27</sup>

This Act resembled much of the legislation that governed the British Post Office at the time. While the 1711 Act remained the cornerstone legislation governing the Post

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<sup>21</sup> 24 Geo. III, c. 6 [G.B.].

<sup>22</sup> There were two Fosters sitting in the Irish house of commons at this time. John represented County Louth. John Thomas represented the borough of Dunleer in County Louth. It was more likely the former as he was a very active parliamentarian – see *C.J.I.*, xi, 223-4, 227, 231, 233.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>26</sup> 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.] (1785).

<sup>27</sup> Preamble 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.] (1785).

Office, by 1784 it had been updated and amended on at least twenty-three occasions.<sup>28</sup> Certain emphases in these subsequent Acts signalled a shift in the Post Office's priorities away from predominantly serving the state administration in favour of facilitating burgeoning commerce. This was reflected in the opening sentences of the preamble to the 1765 Act which declared that the Post Office was necessary 'for the Preservation and Extension of Trade and Commerce'.<sup>29</sup> Similarly the 1767 Act stated 'it is of utmost importance to the Trade and Commerce of these kingdoms, that all Letters, Packets. Bank Notes Bills of Exchange may be sent and conveyed by the Post with the greatest safety and Security.'<sup>30</sup> Although neither Act makes explicit reference to service to the state, it is clearly taken for granted. By contrast, the Irish Act (1784) stressed that the primary function of the Post Office was service to the State. The first sentence of the preamble explained that the legislation was being introduced 'For the better support of your Majesty's government, and the convenience of trade'.<sup>31</sup> Another striking divergence from the English Acts was the fact that the Irish Act (which was a revenue Act), like all such legislation generated under Poynings' Law, had to be renewed annually. Interestingly, there was little discussion about the bill in the press: the *Freeman's Journal*, *Belfast Newsletter* or Finn's *Leinster Journal* published verbatim the main points in the Act, but no editorial comment.<sup>32</sup>

Little changed in the internal structure of the Post Office in Ireland after 1784: in fact, organisational reform was stifled. During the early 1790s the Post Office in England was beginning to modernise itself. This was part of the ongoing reforms taking place in public administration in Britain which began in the 1780s with the establishing of the commission for examining the public accounts.<sup>33</sup> Since these commissioners were appointed by the Westminster parliament, they had no jurisdiction over the Irish Post Office. The commissioners' tenth report, published in 1788, concentrated on the British Post Office and instigated considerable reform within the postal systems in Great Britain. It highlighted many faults, mostly concentrating on head office in London,

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<sup>28</sup> *A collection of the statutes relating to the Post Office* (London, 1793) lists forty Acts still in force relating to the Post Office.

<sup>29</sup> 5 Geo. III, c. 25 [G.B.] (1765).

<sup>30</sup> 7 Geo. III, c. 50 [G.B.] (1767).

<sup>31</sup> 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.] (25 Mar. 1785).

<sup>32</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 17 July 1784.

<sup>33</sup> *J.H.C.*, vii, 755; *Report of Select Committee on the Post Office*. The Select Committee report was republished in 1808 along with the minutes of evidence as *Reports of the commissioners appointed by Act 25 Geo. III. cap. 19. to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in the several public offices therein mentioned*, H.C. 1806 (309) vii, 1; see also John R. Breihan, 'William Pitt and the Commission on Fees, 1785-1801' in *Historical Journal*, 27, no. 1 (Mar. 1984), pp 59-81.

where abuses included double jobbing, with office holders drawing large salaries while subordinates did most of the work. For example, the receiver general, who had a salary of £730, only attended the Post Office twice a week and his work was carried out by a deputy who was paid £58 *per annum*.<sup>34</sup> Such abuses were also common in the Irish Post Office (as will be shown later) and continued throughout the lifetime of the independent Irish Post Office, long after they had been eradicated from the British Post Office. It would be another forty years before these were seriously tackled within the Irish system.

The Irish Act stipulated that like its British counterpart, the Irish Post Office was to have two postmasters-General. Between 1784 and 1831 ten individuals held this office (see figure 3.1)

**Table 3.1 The postmasters-general of Ireland, 1784-1831**

<b>First postmaster-general</b>	<b>Second postmaster-general</b>
1784-89 James Agar, first Viscount Clifden	1789 William Ponsonby, first Baron Ponsonby
1789-1806 Charles Loftus, first Viscount Loftus	Charles Coote
1806-09 Richard Hely-Hutchinson, first Earl of Donoughmore	1797-1806 Charles Moore, first Marquess of Drogheda
1807-31 Charles O'Neill, first Earl O'Neill	1806-09 Lord Henry FitzGerald
	1808-09 Richard Trench, second Earl of Clancarty
	1809-1831 Laurence Presons 2 <sup>nd</sup> Earl of Rosse

**Sources:** Samuel Watson's almanacs (1784-94); Watson Stewart's almanacs (1795-1830).

In Britain the two postmasters-general and the secretary constituted the board of the Post Offices which made important decisions on matters including the awarding of mail coach contracts. The assent of both postmasters-general was required for such decisions, thereby ensuring a system of checks and balances. Whereas in principle the same arrangement obtained in Ireland, in practice, owing to the continual absence of one or other and often both postmasters-general, the assent of only one was deemed necessary. In many instances, the secretary of the Irish Post Office used this to his advantage. Similarly while the joint office of postmasters-general in Britain could not be held by a member of the House of Commons, this was not the case in Ireland.

<sup>34</sup> *Reports of the commissioners appointed ... to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments...*, H.C. 1806 (309) vii, 1.

William Ponsonby, one of the first two joint postmasters-general, was a member of the Irish House of Commons when appointed in 1784. In Britain, the post was often given to an MP who resigned his seat on entering the House of Lords. With the noted exception of Richard Trench, postmaster-general for one year only (1808-9), the Irish postmasters-general invested little if any effort or time in discharging the duties associated with the position. Consequently, effective authority within the Irish Post Office rested with the secretary, John Lees. Throughout his term in office, although technically the Post Office was under the charge of the Irish parliament, in reality (as will be demonstrated), it operated for, and remained very much under the control of, the Dublin Castle administration.

### **John Lees's career prior to his appointment as secretary of the Irish Post Office**

John Lees was to dominate the Irish Post Office until 1803 when, as his health started to fail, his son, Edward began to take over. However, John continued to hold the position until his death in 1811. As he was such a dominant figure within the Irish Post Office, this chapter examines the main developments in the Post Office during this period of independence through the prism of his career. Lees came to Ireland as the private secretary of George Townshend, fourth Viscount Townshend (later first Marquess Townshend) when the latter was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (1767-72). He had served with distinction under Townshend in the army in Germany and the two remained close friends, corresponding with each other until John's death in 1811.<sup>35</sup> The year 1767 marked a significant shift in civil administration in Ireland when Lord Lieutenant Townshend established a permanent presence in Dublin. (This was a departure from tradition whereby the Lord Lieutenant was only resident while the Irish parliament was sitting and much of the business of administration was carried out by the lord justices.<sup>36</sup>) As a consequence, the Chief Secretary's Office acquired far greater importance and influence, becoming a portal 'through which passed the entire business of the kingdom'.<sup>37</sup> In addition to the Chief Secretaries, the office had an under-secretary and a second secretary. In 1767 these two officials were Richard Jackson and Thomas Waite, both of whom were MPs in the Irish House of Commons; to these Townshend added his private secretary, John Lees who was to hold this position until 1775 when he

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<sup>35</sup> Edith M. Johnston, *Great Britain and Ireland: a study in political administration* (Edinburgh, 1963) quotes extensively from the Townshend papers (B.M. Add. MS. 24,138, Add. MS. 38,497).

<sup>36</sup> Johnston, *Great Britain & Ireland*, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

left to become secretary of the Post Office.<sup>38</sup> Lees returned in 1781, after the office was reformed, to serve as military under-secretary for a year. This placed John Lees at the very heart of the British ‘composite state’ administration in Ireland. During the next ten years, while three different men held the office of Chief Secretary and there were two different Second Secretaries, both Thomas Waite and John Lees retained in their positions, providing continuity. When the Earl of Harcourt replaced Townshend as Lord Lieutenant in 1772, he requested that Lees be retained in that position: he was to prove invaluable to the Castle administration.<sup>39</sup>

Presented with this opportunity, Lees made himself indispensable. Edith M. Johnston in *Great Britain and Ireland, 1760-1800: a study in public administration* asserts that Lees was one of two essential influential figures behind the state administration in Ireland: ‘he was the link between the executive and the legislature, and without him and Waite the government of Ireland by a resident English Lord Lieutenant would have been impossible.’<sup>40</sup> During his term at the Chief Secretary’s Office (1767-77) he regularly carried private messages between the Lord Lieutenant and Court.<sup>41</sup> At the same time he developed an exceptional knowledge and understanding of the Irish political system, how it worked, the various personalities and factions involved – no doubt helped by his position as secretary of the Post Office. Lees was commended for his loyal service, his acute knowledge and understanding of politics, his capacity to judge character, and his precision in reportage by Lord Lieutenant Harcourt when writing to Lord North, the British Prime Minister, in December 1775:

I have sent you my private Secretary, Mr Lees to give your Lordship any further lights which you may wish to have ... I shall take the liberty to assure your lordships that no one can give you so precise, so accurate, and so faithful, an account of everything that relates to the [Irish] House of Commons. He is thoroughly acquainted with all its proceedings having attended all its debated, as well as in Lord Townshend’s time, as during the last and present sessions of parliament. There is not a member of the house of whom he has not more or less knowledge. Many of them he knows

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<sup>38</sup> Little is known about John Lees’s early life. He was born in Cannock, Ayrshire, Scotland, about 1737. The son of Adam Lees and Agnes Lees (nee Goldie), he was one of four children – three boys and one girl. Little else is known of his early years. Lees served with distinction in the British Army in Germany during the Seven Years’ War, when he first came to the attention of George Townshend, second Marquis of Townshend. The latter had seen service in Scotland, Canada and Germany. With the exception of the duke of Portland, each of the Lord Lieutenants of this time relied on and trusted Lees, even after he had officially left the administration.

<sup>39</sup> Johnston, *Great Britain & Ireland*, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 69, 81. Both his diary in Trinity College Dublin and *Cal. Home Office papers*, i, 1760-1765, ii, 1776-69 and iii 1770-73 testify to this.



intimately, their characters their views, their particular merits and demerits. No one, in short had so fair an opportunity of acquiring so thorough a knowledge of an insight into the various connections of this Kingdom; and it is that knowledge, joined by the strictest honour, good sense, and unblemished integrity that has enabled him to do me, and permit me to say, his Majesty the most important of services.<sup>42</sup>

He served as secretary on two occasions. During his first term (1774-81) the Irish Post Office was still a branch of the London Office while his second (1784-1811) coincided with the early independence phase. Unencumbered by monitoring or regulation from London, in time Lees would take full advantage of opportunities to intercept and examine letters, although there is no evidence that he did so at this point in his career.

In addition to carrying messages between London and Dublin for the Lord Lieutenant, he carried letters for the duke of Leinster who, as colonel of the Dublin Volunteers, might have been regarded as a leader of the opposition. An entry in Lees's diary for 27 October 1779 states 'the Duke of Leinster having imparted to me his intention to give the Government a decided support in case certain terms for himself & his friends were granted – at his graces request I have embarked for England to lay the same before the minister.'<sup>43</sup> Significantly Lees's clandestine intervention occurred during the campaign for free trade with the colonies and only days before the great parade demanding free trade took place on College Green, outside the Post Office, indicating the significant role Lees played as a go-between among 'Protestant patriotic' elements in Ireland, and for the administrations in England and Ireland.

For his loyal service, Lees was amply rewarded. His first lucrative appointment was as comptroller of customs of Drogheda (1769-81). In 1770 his salary for this position was increased by £400.<sup>44</sup> Later, he held the same office in Cork (1781-3). Between 1776 and 1781 he was searcher of the port of Wexford. In 1780-81 he was also made gentleman usher to black rod in the Irish House of Commons.<sup>45</sup> With the possible exception of the latter post, it is doubtful if he spent much time or energy in fulfilling his duties in any of those roles as to do so would have taken him out of Dublin. Nonetheless, each provided him with an income, and, by the standards of his day, he

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<sup>42</sup> Earl Harcourt to Lord North, 15 Dec. 1775 in *The Harcourt papers*, ed. W.E. Harcourt (12 vols, Oxford, 1885-1905), x, 49-50.

<sup>43</sup> Diary of John Lees, 28 Oct. 1779 (T.C.D. MS. 9875).

<sup>44</sup> King's letters (Treasury), 30 Mar. 1770 in *Cal. Home Office papers*, iii, 1770-1772, 176.

<sup>45</sup> J. C. Sainty, 'The secretariat of the Chief Governors of Ireland, 1690-1800' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C*, 77 (1977), pp 1-33, 25-6.

was by no means unusual in holding multiple offices. In 1775 Lees was appointed secretary of Post Office in Ireland. He served until his resignation in 1781 when he was appointed under-secretary to the military department; there, his military experience was undoubtedly useful.<sup>46</sup> In 1783 he was offered the job of under-secretary in the Home Department in London by Lord North, then British Prime Minister, but politely refused, claiming he was not qualified for the post.<sup>47</sup> It has not been possible to ascertain why Lees turned down this offer, but at this time he was involved in the negotiations for establishing an independent Irish Post Office, and it is likely that his decision was shaped by his realisation that the Irish institution had the potential to make him a wealthy man.

Lees's career trajectory demonstrates that he was an able, politic and shrewd administrator, a steadfast supporter to the Castle administration in Ireland. He was at the helm of the Irish Post Office which, although nominally answerable to the Irish parliament, was first and foremost loyal to the Castle administration thanks to his efforts. His first term as Post Office secretary (1774-81) coincided with major political changes both within Ireland and internationally. After the general election on the accession of George III in 1760, the Protestant patriot 'movement' had been gathering pace. The passing of the Octennial Act in 1768 resulted in a larger turnover of MPs, many of whom could be termed Protestant patriotism.<sup>48</sup> Further afield, increasing resistance to British rule in America resulted in the outbreak of war in 1775. In Ireland, many sympathised with the rebel forces in America. Increasingly, fast and frequent conveyance of news about developments in America and other places abroad which was facilitated by the Irish Post Office helped quicken the pace of political events and contributed to a changing political landscape in Ireland. As a result, more than ever, the Dublin Castle administration needed reliable, up to date intelligence. Opening letters was the easiest, quickest and cheapest way of gathering such information. Since by law, the Post Office had a monopoly on carrying letters, it was vital that the Castle administration had their own man overseeing the Post Office.<sup>49</sup> John Lees was the ideal candidate. His military experience and his intimate acquaintance with the political

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<sup>46</sup> Johnston, *Great Britain & Ireland*, p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> 7 Geo. III, c. 3 [Ire.] (1768).

<sup>49</sup> As early as 1760 the Prime Minister, John Stuart, third Earl of Bute, had written to the postmaster-general in Ireland directing him 'to detain, open, and copy all such letters or packets as the Lord Lieutenant, or some person appointed by him, shall think may contain matters of dangerous consequence': Earl of Bute [prime minister] to the Irish postmaster-general, 8 Oct. 1761 in *Cal. Home Office papers*, i, 1760-1765, 68.

system made him discerning in intercepting letters. He was also adept in discriminating between useful information and idle gossip featured in the mail.

Yet, his conduct around the time of his appointment was controversial. After John Wilson, secretary of the Post Office in Dublin, died in 1771, he was replaced by John Walcot in March that year.<sup>50</sup> Having previously been accountant general in London, he might have been expected to continue in this new job for some years.<sup>51</sup> However, in a manoeuvre designed to allow Lees to replace him as secretary in Dublin, Walcot was offered the lucrative position of post agent in Dover. The then agent in Dover, a Mr. Barham, was old and infirmed. To permit Barham to retire and Walcot to replace him, John Lees was to pay Barham an annual pension of £350 out of his salary as secretary of the Post Office in Ireland: again, this was not an uncommon practice.<sup>52</sup> However, upon the death of Barham, Lord Carteret (one of the joint postmasters-general in London) persuaded Lees to continue paying the pension to a friend of Carteret, one Peregrine Trevis who had no connection whatsoever with the Post Office. Fortunately for Lees, this uncommon and dubious arrangement did not come to the public's attention until 1786 when, in an attempt to discredit the leader of the government, it was cited by William Pitt's enemies in parliament. The House of Commons produced a report on the matter which exonerated Lees, even though it was discovered that there had been some irregularity concerning the payment.<sup>53</sup> Another figure in the background of this transfer of Walcot from Dublin to Dover was offered the job of under-secretary in the Home Department in London by Lord North, then British Prime Minister, but politely refused, at that time secretary of the Post Office in England and part-owner of the Dover packets. However, he was no ordinary secretary, having been in charge of the so-called 'secret office'<sup>54</sup> within the Post Office building in Lombard Street, London during the years 1752-87, and having served as secretary of the English Post Office (bar a brief period – 1765-8) from 1762 until 1798.<sup>55</sup> This coalescence of events, timing, and

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<sup>50</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 29 June 1771; Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1772), p. 100.

<sup>51</sup> *Reports of the commissioners appointed by Act 25 Geo. III. cap. 19. to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, ...*, p. 854, 1806 (309) vii, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Breihan, 'William Pitt & the Commission on Fees', pp 59-81.

<sup>53</sup> *Report from the committee appointed to enquire into certain abuses in the Post Office presented to the house of commons May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1787 and with appendix*. The 'secret office' was a room with eight personnel, which included trained engravers, letter openers, deciphers, and translators who intercepted and opened letters at the behest of the government. For a full and detailed account of the activities of the secret room see Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century*.

<sup>54</sup> Julie M. Flavell, 'Government interception of letters from America and the quest for colonial opinion in 1775' in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 58, no. 2 (Apr. 2001), pp 403-30, p. 411.

<sup>55</sup> Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century*, p. 78.

personnel around Walcot's transfer points to a deliberate drive by Dublin Castle to have Lees appointed secretary of the Post Office in Dublin.<sup>56</sup>

In 1781 Lees left the Post Office to take up the position of military under-secretary to the Chief Secretary.<sup>57</sup> He installed in his place his nephew and friend, John Armit, who was no doubt charged with continuing Lees's espionage work and keeping him supplied with any useful information that he intercepted. However, Lees's return to the Castle was short-lived: on 6 May 1782 he received a letter dismissing him from the under-secretary post; his nephew was also dismissed from the Post Office.<sup>58</sup> His diary reveals his shock at the news. The reason given for the dismissal was that Armit had, under instructions from Lees, been opening the new Lord Lieutenant, Lord Portland's dispatches.<sup>59</sup> Determined to challenge his dismissal, on 1 July Lees estimated his worth at £14,722, settled his affairs, and set off for England 'to lay his case before' the authorities there on the 8 July.<sup>60</sup>

Since his arrival in Ireland in 1767 Lees had served faithfully four lord lieutenants, and it was likely that he now turned to these influential figures to advocate for him.<sup>61</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* reported that he was 'spending a few months lately in England in friendly intercourse with his old friend Lord Carlisle'.<sup>62</sup> In January 1773, on his arrival back in Ireland after six months in England, he wrote in his diary 'this day I return to Ireland in triumph.'<sup>63</sup> He certainly had, and according to the *Freeman's Journal*, John Armit was also returned to the Post Office 'under the sign manual of Majesty.'<sup>64</sup> Never before had such a patent been given to the secretary of the Post Office in Ireland. Although at a public level this position was not regarded as either important or particularly prestigious, it was nonetheless vital to the effective operation of the Castle administration. By ensuring that the position was protected by royal patent, Lees was securing his future. The guarantee that appointment to the secretaryship would remain above political whims meant that he could not be dismissed so easily as he had

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<sup>56</sup> Johnston, *Great Britain & Ireland*, p. xii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>58</sup> Diary of John Lees, 6 May 1782.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* Portland had been sworn in as lord lieutenant on 14 April 1782.

<sup>60</sup> Diary of John Lees, 1, 8 July 1782.

<sup>61</sup> George Townshend (1767-72), first Marquess Townshend, Simon Harcourt, first Earl Harcourt (1772-76), John Hobart, second earl of Buckinghamshire (1776-80), and Frederick Howard, fifth earl of Carlisle (1780-82).

<sup>62</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Jan. 1773.

<sup>63</sup> Diary of John Lees, 12 Jan. 1783.

<sup>64</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 16 Jan. 1773.

been from his previous position. The following July, after a very successful meeting with Lord Portland, Lees recorded in his diary how;

After a long pointed conversation his Grace ensured the result which was an absolute promise to make provision to the amount of not less than £300 for my nephew – to appoint me Secy [secretary] to the Post Office in his room and to grant me an addē [additional] salary of £400..... His Grace was on the whole very civil – said he had been very much deceived and that he had never meant any injury on my character – repeating that my dismissal had been originated from a malice political nature.<sup>65</sup>

Lees had secured the position he desired. He could only be dismissed by the king, and he was once again back at the centre of power. He was also well aware of the possibilities presented by the secretaryship. His counterpart in London, Anthony Todd, who had been at the centre of the irregular payments controversy in 1774, had made himself wealthy through his position in the Post Office, just as one of his predecessors, Williamson, had one hundred years before. Like Williamson, Todd had risen from humble enough origins. His father was a farmer and began his life in the Post Office as a clerk.<sup>66</sup> He rose through the ranks and become a powerful and very wealthy man, with sufficient wealth to marry his daughter, Eleanor, to the future earl of Lauderdale, making him the grandfather of the ninth earl of Lauderdale.<sup>67</sup> No doubt Lees could see himself in a similar position in Ireland. As has been intimated, this may also explain why he did not accept the position of under-secretary in the Home Department in England offered to him by Lord North in 1783. On 1 August 1784 he took up the position as secretary of the Irish Post Office for the second time. He wrote in his diary that day: ‘This day I entered my office as Secretary – W. Armit as Acco[untant] General and Mr. Shaw as comptroller of the Post Office.’<sup>68</sup> Lees now held the very lucrative job as secretary and two of his friends held the next two most important positions within the Irish Post Office.

From 1774 to the mid-1780s, against the backdrop of the American War of Independence, it was important that Dublin Castle retained control of the Post Office in Ireland and, if necessary, use it to monitor MPs sitting in the Irish parliament. In that

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<sup>65</sup> Diary of John Lees, 16 July 1783.

<sup>66</sup> Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century*, p. 97.

<sup>66</sup> Patrick Woodland, ‘Todd, Anthony’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan. 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58418>, accessed 29 Oct. 2015].

<sup>67</sup> Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century*, p. 97.

<sup>68</sup> Diary of John Lees, 1 Aug. 1783.

context, Lees's return ensured that intelligence-gathering rested firmly in Castle hands. Lees, meanwhile, set about making his fortune from the office. He continued to appoint his supporters to Post Office positions including clerks of the road.<sup>69</sup> It was their responsibility to tax letters. They had the authority to open letters in order to check the number of pages, thereby ensuring that the correct rate of payment was charged. Under these pretences, they could examine the contents of letters. The close link between the Post Office and Dublin Castle administration was symbolically demonstrated in October 1788 when a new mail-coach was officially launched and displayed to the public for the first time by the Lord Lieutenant in the Castle yard rather than outside parliament.<sup>70</sup>

The extremely close collaboration between the Post Office and the Castle with regard to intelligence-gathering was most evident during the 1798 rebellion crisis: this will be discussed at a later point in the chapter. However, espionage was not Lees's only concern, and as will be demonstrated, to his credit he also oversaw many improvements in the postal system infrastructure. Within two years of the establishment of the Irish Post Office he announced in an advertisement on the front page of the *Freeman's Journal* a major expansion of the Post Office network.<sup>71</sup> This included the creation of twenty-nine new post-towns, five new cross-post routes, and an increase in the number of delivery days to many towns. Wexford, for example, was to have a six-day week service instead of the existing three; the service to many other towns was also stepped up from a two-day to a three-day a week delivery. Moreover, in contrast with the immediately preceding decades, this rapid expansion continued throughout the years 1784-1803.

### **Tracing and explaining network expansion**

Under John Lees's stewardship the number of post-towns doubled from 142 to 286.<sup>72</sup> This increase of 144 or 101% translates into six or seven new post-towns each year between 1784 and 1800 – a stark contrast with the period 1703-84 when growth averaged approximately one a year. Similarly, the mileage covered by the network grew from just over 1,600 in 1784 to just over 6,000 Irish miles in 1829.<sup>73</sup> Unsurprisingly the

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<sup>69</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 30 Sept. 1788.

<sup>71</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 27, 29 June, 6 July 1786.

<sup>72</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack for the year of our Lord 1804* (Dublin, 1804), pp 143-4.

<sup>73</sup> Calculating mileage is difficult as the Irish Post Office used Irish miles and the various parliamentary reports used both Irish and English miles. The two figures used here are Irish miles; the 1784 figure is taken from Post 15:154/5 letter book (1744-1809) while the 1829 figure is taken from the *Report from the Select Committee on Post Communications with Ireland : with minutes of evidences, and appendix*, pp

number of staff also increased, from 102 to 127 working in the G.P.O. in Dublin, and from 152 to over 265 employed outside the city by 1797.<sup>74</sup>

**Table 3.2 The increase in post-towns in five-year intervals (1784-1804)**

Years	Number of new Post-towns	% increase in five year intervals	Total number of post-towns
1784 - 1790	50	34%	195 (1790)
1791 - 1795	43	23%	238 (1795)
1795 - 1800	47	25%	265 (1800)
1800 - 1804	21	7%	286 (1804)

**Sources:** Samuel Watson's almanac (1784-94); Watson Stewart's almanac (1795-1804)

When the increase in post-towns in Ireland is compared with Scotland during the period 1784-1800 Ireland is shown to have performed very well. In 1784 Ireland had 145 post-towns, Scotland 105, England and Wales, 245.<sup>75</sup> By the early 1800s Ireland had 268 post-towns, an increase of 123, or eighty-five percent.<sup>76</sup> At the same time in Scotland, the rate of expansion was less impressive: the number of post-towns rose to 185, an increase of eighty (seventy-six percent).<sup>77</sup> Not surprisingly, both Ireland and Scotland paled in comparison with England and Wales where, between 1784 and 1800, the number of post-towns grew from 254 to 763, an increase of 509 (208 percent)<sup>78</sup> during the throes of industrial revolution. Nonetheless, the comparison is useful, exposing the changing nature of both societies: while England was fast becoming an industrialised nation for whom the post was a vital part of that process, Ireland remained

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338-45 H.C. 1831-32 (716) xvii, 1 However, this figure was originally given as 7,616 English miles and has been converted here for standardisation purposes.

<sup>74</sup> British Postal Museum and Archive, Post 15:154/5 letter book (1744-1809), available on microfilm N.A.I., M.F.A. – Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5; *Nineteenth report*, pp 200-06.

<sup>75</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1784), p. 119; J. Chalmers, *The Aberdeen almanack for the year 1784* (Aberdeen, 1784), pp 64-5; T Longman, *The complete guide to all persons who have any trade with the city of London and parts adjacent* (London, 1783), pp 103-4.

<sup>76</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1800), pp 143-5.

<sup>77</sup> Chalmers, *The Aberdeen almanack for the year 1784*, pp 64-5; David Ramsay, *The Edinburgh almanack and Scots register for 1800* (Edinburgh, 1800), pp 109-10. When Lees's expansion is compared with that of his counterpart in Edinburgh, William Kerr (1786 to at least 1809), both the number of new post-towns and the rate of increase in Ireland outstripped Scotland: *The Edinburgh almanack and Scots register for 1786. Containing a correct kalendar, lists of the Scots peers, baronets, state officers, courts ...* (Edinburgh, 1795), p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Laurie and Whittle, *A correct list of the principal towns in England and Wales with their distance calculated from the General-Post-Office with their rates of postage* (London, 1797), pp 2-21.

primarily an agricultural economy in which the post (though itself vital) did not require as dense a network of post-towns.

Many of the reasons for this growth in the number of Irish post-towns remained constant. Servicing the needs of country MPs and members of the House of Lords whose homes were in the country but who lived in Dublin when parliament was sitting, remained a priority. Equally, the drive to support the operations of an increasingly busy civil administration and an expanding network of army barracks and outposts lent growing impetus to the modernisation of the postal network and service. However, by the 1780s even these major interest groups were no longer the main drivers behind the remarkable development of the Irish Post Office. Rather, it was the growth in Ireland's trade, commerce and industry, and the merchants', retailers', industrialists' and traders' need of an efficient postal service that proved most important in driving the modernisation and enlargement of the Post Office.

By 1803 much of the west of Ireland was connected to the postal network. A mail route also ran along the west coast of Donegal, from Donegal town to Rutland Island. For the most part these connections in the west were direct lines to the nearest county or large town; they did not connect smaller towns. These direct lines of communication were clearly designed to facilitate contact between a central authority, like a county town, and its hinterland. For example, letters between Castlereagh to Galway, two towns situated only thirty miles apart, travelled via Athlone, a journey of ninety-four Irish miles.<sup>79</sup> Letters between Swinford and Castlereagh, two towns only fifteen miles apart, had to travel over 150 miles. In the south-west it was a similar story, with letters between Dingle and Bantry being routed through Cork. This would suggest that there was little trade that needed regular contact between neighbouring towns.

By contrast, in the east of the country (Leinster and East Ulster) the pattern of development was different. Here a network of cross-post routes evolved, connecting a series of towns with each other as opposed to forming a single connection to a local administration town. Armagh, for example, was one of the major linen centres in 1783 and was the hub in a network of postal routes.<sup>80</sup> These connected Armagh to towns and villages including Aghnacloy, Dungannon, Portadown, Newry, and Monaghan which were in turn laterally connected to each other. This web of postal connections, driven by

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<sup>79</sup> Irish miles have been used as the Post office in Ireland worked in Irish miles. This figure has been calculated using the map attached to *Report from the Select Committee on Post Communication with Ireland: with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, H.C. 1831-32 (716), xvii, 1.

<sup>80</sup> J. H. Andrews, 'Land and people, c.1780' in Moody & Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: eighteenth-century Ireland*, p. 250.



pressure from commercial interests in the region, reflected interconnecting linen trade routes. Furthermore, when the Ulster linen industry and towns associated with it are examined closely, the relationship between that industry and the development of the Post Office becomes apparent. In volume four of *A new history of Ireland*, J. H. Andrews presents a map entitled ‘Sales in brown linen markets 1783’<sup>81</sup> which features those Ulster towns that sold between £1,000 and £150,000 worth of brown linen *per annum*. It includes forty-four towns associated with the linen trade: of these, twenty-seven were post-towns in 1783; the remaining seventeen would become post-towns by 1803. Other linen towns including Ballygawley, Fintona and Fivemiletown that did not feature in Andrews’s map as they were not important centres during the early 1780s grew in importance and became post-towns.<sup>82</sup> Few were county towns or civil administration centres, or had army barracks, or were home to a local MP. The only reason they became post-towns was their connection to the linen industry.

MPs and active members of the House of Lords continued to influence the growth in the number of post-towns until the passing of the Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament in 1800. Three examples of MPs’ home towns or villages becoming post-towns during the period 1784-1803 are Swords, County Dublin, Ballinakill, Queen’s County, and Rathmelton in County Donegal. Two years after Charles Cobb was first elected in 1783 for the borough of Swords, County Dublin, Swords becomes a post-town.<sup>83</sup> In a by-election in 1785, Michael Trench was elected MP for Maryborough. His country address was Ballinakill, Queen’s County,<sup>84</sup> and Ballinakill became a post-town the same year. The same was true of Annesley Stewart, elected MP for Charlemont, County Armagh. In 1783 his country address was given as Feltrum Dublin, three years later his country address was listed as Ramelton (Rathmelton) County Donegal; it became a post-town that same year.<sup>85</sup> So tight was the correlation between MPs being elected and their local towns being upgraded to post-towns that by 1802, following the general election to the new United Kingdom parliament, of the 100 Irish MPs returned, only two lived in towns that were not yet post-towns. These were Joshua Cooper, MP for Sligo County, whose address was Coloony, County Sligo, and

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>82</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 379-85, H.C. 1829 (353); Jack Johnston, ‘Flax and linen in the Clogher Valley’ in *Clogher Record*, 11, no. 2 (1983), p. 294.

<sup>83</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 385.

<sup>84</sup> *Stuart’s Irish Merlin or universal almanack for the year of our Lord* (Dublin, 1787), p. 67.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1776), pp 50, 120.

John Stewart, MP for Tyrone, whose address was Aughnacloy, County Tyrone. Within a year, both had become post-towns.<sup>86</sup>

The same was true of the correlation between the stationing of British soldiers and the growth of post-towns in Ireland during this period. In 1784 Watson's almanac lists sixty-five towns or villages with army barracks; of these, forty-six (71%) were post-towns.<sup>87</sup> Of the remaining nineteen, seven would become post-towns by 1800; at least four of the barracks were decommissioned, and the remainder were situated in very close proximity to a post-town. For example, Charles Fort in County Cork was close to Kinsale, and Clare castle in County Clare was situated only a few miles from Ennis. By the mid-1790s, although the barracks network had severely contracted, the majority of those still operating were also post-towns: in 1796 Watson recorded that forty-two of the fifty-four barracks towns in Ireland (78%) were post-towns.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the proportion of barrack towns that were post-towns was higher than a decade before. However, the ongoing French wars and the 1798 rebellion precipitated a barrack building program which in turn led to an increase in post-towns. One barrack town which became a post-town was Fermoy, County Cork. Originally it was a small village positioned on an important crossing of the Blackwater river on the main Dublin to Cork road. In 1797, when the government was looking for a temporary barracks close to Cork, John Anderson, the mail coach contractor, presented a site in Fermoy, free of charge, and offered to build a barracks.<sup>89</sup> By 1800 a permanent barracks that could house 1,400 men and 100 horses was under construction and within four years,<sup>90</sup> as a result of the ensuing influx of soldiers, Fermoy became a post-town.<sup>91</sup> In some instances, post-town status was conferred even faster. Only a year after a new barracks was built on Bere Island, County Cork in 1801,<sup>92</sup> Castletown Bear became a post-town two years later in 1803.<sup>93</sup> At least fifteen post-towns created between 1796 and 1813 had been barrack towns. Furthermore, as it is difficult to ascertain how permanent all barracks were, or how long they were occupied at any one time, one must allow for the possibility that an even greater number of the newly created post-towns were linked to sites with army barracks.

After Napoleon's defeat at the battle of Waterloo (1815) and the threat of invasion receded, a slowdown in the construction of new barracks in Ireland followed.

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<sup>86</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1804), pp 53, 156.

<sup>87</sup> Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1784), pp 199, 126-32.

<sup>88</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1796), pp 145-6.

<sup>89</sup> Dickson, *Old world colony*, p. 426.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 382.

<sup>92</sup> *Accounts relating to barracks in Ireland, 1812-13*, pp 2-14, H.C., 1812-13 (237) vi, 709.

<sup>93</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 379. When listed in this report it is just referred to as Castletown.

Only one town – Newbridge in County Kildare (est. 1820) – became a post-town as a result of barracks being built after 1815.<sup>94</sup> Initially Lees refused the army’s request for Newbridge to become a post-town on the grounds that it was ‘contiguous to the already established post town of Kilcullen’ and that this additional post town would cost £20 a year to operate.<sup>95</sup> Having again refused a request in November that year<sup>96</sup>, Lees evidently relented as Newbridge became a post-town the following February (1821), with retired police Caleb E. Powell ‘Serjeant, Police Establishment’ appointed as postmaster with a salary of £20.<sup>97</sup> Newbridge’s gross takings in 1822 were £146 0s. 10½d. <sup>98</sup> It, however, was the exception.

Although defeat of the Napoleonic army in 1815 ended nearly two hundred years of direct army involvement in the expansion of the postal network in Ireland, the Post Office remained important to the army, carrying its dispatches and linking various barracks throughout the country and Dublin, whilst also conveying the private correspondence of individual soldiers and officers. The importance of communication with home for rank and file soldiers was recognised by an Act passed in the Westminster parliament in 1795 which allowed serving soldiers and sailors below the rank of commissioned officer to send and receive personal letters at a special postage rate of 1d.<sup>99</sup> The following year the Irish parliament passed a similar Act.<sup>100</sup> This 1d. rate was a significant bonus at a time when a single sheet letter from a Scottish soldier stationed in Cork, without the special rate, would have cost over 2s.<sup>101</sup> The cost would have been even greater for the many Irish soldiers serving with Wellington in Spain during the Peninsular War (1807-14).

As has already been explained, there were often multiple reasons why a town became a post-town, and this period was no exception. Dingle, County Kerry, is a typical example. When in August 1784 the merchants of Dingle set about seeking post-town status, they lobbied their local MP, Richard Boyle Townshend and the local

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<sup>94</sup> Edward Lees to Charles Grant, 6 Jan. 1820 (N.A.I., C.S.O.R.P., 1820/1451); Edward Lees to Charles Grant, 15 Jan. 1820 (ibid.). In 1819 a new barracks was being built at Newbridge. In January 1820 Lieutenant Colonel J. Kearney of the 2nd Dragoon Guards stationed at Newbridge wrote to Charles Grant, Chief Secretary (1818-21) requesting a Post Office in the town.

<sup>95</sup> Edward Lees to Charles Grant, 9 Nov. 1820 (N.A.I., C.S.O.R.P./1820/1461).

<sup>96</sup> Edward Lees to Lieutenant Colonel J Kearney, 9 Nov. 1820 (ibid., 1820/1462).

<sup>97</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 384.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 248-9.

<sup>99</sup> 35, Geo. III, c. 53 [G.B.].

<sup>100</sup> 36, Geo. III c. 11 [Ire.].

<sup>101</sup> A single-sheet letter in 1813 using the rates set in June of that year by 53 Geo. III, c. 58 [Ire.] would have been costed at Cork-Scotland rates – thus, Dublin-Cork (10d.) + Dublin-Donaghadee (9d.) + packet, Donaghadee-Portpatrick (2d.) + (depending where it was going to in Scotland) anything up to 1s. British rates were set by 52 Geo. III, c. 88 [U.K.] (1812). If a single-sheet letter were sent to Aberdeen, the total cost would have been 2s. 9s.

Church of Ireland bishop, William Pery of Limerick.<sup>102</sup> When the latter was visiting the town, they presented him with a petition which read

The inhabitants of the town of Dingle make an application, lately to Richard Boyle Townshend Esq. one of their representatives in Parliament to use his interest with the Post Master General to have a regular post established between said town and Tralee. The gentlemen of the Army & revenue now stationed in Dingle certified that such an Establishment is absolutely necessary for his majesties Service as well as for the benefit of the county at large.<sup>103</sup>

This petition was forwarded to the Lord Lieutenant who in turn forwarded it to the Post Master General. At that point, it most likely went to John Lees. On 11 March the postmaster-general submitted proposals for making Dingle a post-town to the Lord Lieutenant who gave his approval on 28 March 1784. The cost was to be ‘£15 per annum foot post twice a week Tralee to Dingle a distance of 22 miles Irish, office duty at Dingle £9.’<sup>104</sup> Dingle had a strong case. It was a base for army and revenue personnel; it had an active and influential cohort of merchants, and it had a recently elected resident MP.<sup>105</sup> Dingle became a post-town for the second time in 1786. It had been a post-town for a very brief period in the 1750s.<sup>106</sup> Westport in County Mayo, too, had a strong case, albeit on different grounds, since it was a ‘place of Considerable Business, a Port containing a Garrison.’<sup>107</sup> These two examples alone illustrate the range of forces (some of them entirely new) that drove this phase of rapid and wide ranging expansion of the postal network in Ireland between 1784 and 1830.

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<sup>102</sup> British Postal Museum and Archive, POST 15/154, Irish Post Office letter copy book available on microfilm N.A.I., M.F.A. – 43-Post Office film 1, Post 15. Richard Boyle Townshend was MP for Dingle from 1782 to 1795. The bishop did not sign his name on the letter. At that time, William Pery, later first Baron Glentworth, was bishop.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 381.

<sup>105</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1783), p. 52. He was elected in 1782.

<sup>106</sup> John Watson, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1759), p. 93.

<sup>107</sup> British Postal Museum and Archive, POST 15/154, Irish Post Office letter copy book available on microfilm N.A.I., M.F.A. – 43-Post Office film 1, Post 15: 154/5 entry no. 66.

## **The arrival of the mail-coaches and their role in modernising the Post Office and Ireland**

A significantly enhanced network of post-towns was not the only improvement overseen by John Lees. Another important and innovative contribution to the modernisation of the service was the establishment of the mail-coaches network and service which greatly accelerated the speed of the Post Office delivery and provided some security for the mail. John Palmer, a businessman from Bath, was the first to establish a very successful mail coach service in England in 1784. The following year the *Belfast News-Letter* called for a similar mail-coach service to operate between Belfast and Dublin; this would, it claimed, speed up the mails by as much as twelve hours.<sup>108</sup> It was not until 1789 that John Anderson established such a service. Anderson, like John Lees, was a Scotsman who migrated to Ireland in 1780 and became a successful merchant in both Cork city and county.<sup>109</sup> In 1789, through his connections within the Post Office, he along with two other Cork merchants, Bart O'Donoghue and Henry Fortescue, Cork's postmaster, acquired the contract to operate a mail coach service between Cork and Dublin.<sup>110</sup> This was not entirely surprising given his close relationship through marriage with four of the most influential men in the Post Office. Anderson's second son, John W., was married to Cornelia Shaw, the granddaughter of Robert Shaw, a wealthy merchant and accountant-general of the Post Office. Cornelia's aunt, Mary Shaw, was married to John C. Lees, the second son of John Lees, secretary of the Post Office. Consequently Anderson usually stayed in the secretary's house while in Dublin.<sup>111</sup> He was also connected through marriage to Henry Fortescue, a prominent businessman and postmaster of Cork. Henry in turn was related to Sir William Henry Fortescue who had been the last postmaster-general for Ireland prior to the foundation of the independent Irish Post Office in 1784. Anderson was also connected through marriage with Richard Hely-Hutchinson, first Earl of Donoughmore, who was one of the joint postmasters-general for Ireland in 1805-09.<sup>112</sup>

Regardless of the means by which he acquired the contracts, Anderson certainly pioneered a successful system. Having secured the contract to operate the Dublin-Cork mail coach he went on to develop several other routes, notably Dublin-Limerick,

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<sup>108</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 16 Sept. 1785.

<sup>109</sup> Niall Brunicardi, *John Anderson, entrepreneur* (Fermoy, 1987), p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> Many publications state that he also had the Dublin-Belfast contract; however, this was George Anderson of Newry.

<sup>111</sup> Brunicardi, *John Anderson*, p. 128.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 97-122

Dublin-Galway, Dublin-Waterford, and Dublin-Enniskillen. In 1793 he was also operating two cross-post routes (Cork-Limerick and Cork-Waterford).<sup>113</sup> He invested £25,000 in establishing the mail coach system, including outlay on improving the roads. However, the recession that followed the end of the Napoleonic wars hit Anderson hard and he was declared bankrupt in 1816.<sup>114</sup> At the same time as John and his partners began operating between Dublin and Cork, another Anderson (George) and his partner, Thomas Green of Newry, both merchants, began operating between Dublin and Belfast.<sup>115</sup> The service had a faltering beginning. The first mail coaches running on Dublin-Cork and Dublin-Limerick routes were scheduled to begin operating on 5 April 1789. However, it became evident that the roads were in too poor a condition to accommodate the mail coaches; as a result, the launch had to be delayed.<sup>116</sup> There is confusion about when the first mail coach arrived in Cork. The *Belfast News-Letter* reported that the service was running in February 1789<sup>117</sup> whereas in fact although a mail coach was operating on the Cork road, initially it only ran as far as Kilkenny. An advertisement in Finn's *Leinster Journal*, which appeared in six issues between 13 June and 1 July 1789, stated that the 'Munster Mail coach' service (note no mention of Cork) terminated in Kilkenny, and that the coach was 'running with Passengers from DUBLIN to KILKENNY ONLY'.<sup>118</sup> Between 8 July and 29 August, the following advertisement in *Finn's Leinster Journal* announced that the first mail-coach that ran all the way to Cork began operating on 6 July 1789.

#### ROYAL MAIL COACH

*To carry 4 inside & 1 outside Passenger*

The public are respectfully informed, that the CORKE MAIL COACH, with Guard, will Start from the Office. No 31 Fleet-street, Dublin. at half past 10 o'Clock, on MONDAY Evening the 6th July - and from Cork at 6 o'Clock on Tuesday evening the 7th.

#### FARE

To inside Passengers, 2 Guineas from Dublin to Cork, and one Guinea from Dublin to Kilkenny: 14lb. of luggage included, and all above that weight to pay 2½d. per lb. 2s to be paid for small Parcels, not exceeding 5l [£] Value, and all above to be entered and paid for accordingly. the outside Passenger to pay half price.

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<sup>113</sup> *An abstract of the contracts which have been made by His Majesty's postmasters general in Ireland with several persons engaged in conveying His Majesty's Mails in Ireland*, pp 2-13 H.C. 1818 (425) xvi, 443.

<sup>114</sup> Brunicardi, *John Anderson*, p. 106.

<sup>115</sup> *C.J.I.*, xiv, 94. The author has not been able to establish if George and John were related in any way.

<sup>116</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 July 1788.

<sup>117</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 24 Feb. 1789.

<sup>118</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 6 June 1789.

Places taken, and Parcels booked at the Mail Coach Office, No 31 Fleet-street, Dublin, the Wheat Sheaf Inn Kilkenny, and the Hotel Patrick-street Cork.<sup>119</sup>

A similar advertisement appeared in the *Cork Hibernian Chronicle*.<sup>120</sup> The Belfast mail coach service also commenced that same week. An advertisement in the *Belfast News-Letter* announcing the start of the Belfast service declared:

On Sunday morning the 5th July next, and every succeeding morning, (Saturday excepted) at the hour of nine o'clock, his Majesty's Mails will be dispatched from the Post Office of this town [Belfast] in the Mail Coach, under the charge of well appointed Guards, and will arrive in Dublin at six o'clock the following morning and on Saturday night the 4th next and every following night, at the hour of eleven o'clock, a coach with the Mail will also set out from Dublin, and arrive the following evening at seven o'clock. Passengers to apply for fares in said Coaches at the usual places. – the coaches upward will arrive at Newry at a quarter past three o'clock and set out for Dublin at quarter past four; – and the Coaches downward will arrive at Newry at forty minutes past eleven o'clock in the morning, and set out for Belfast at forty minutes past twelve --- For accommodation of passengers, a Coach will set out for Belfast to Dublin every Saturday morning and from Dublin to Belfast every Sunday night.

Belfast. 30th June, 1789.<sup>121</sup>

Thereafter, the system developed and expanded rapidly.

Meanwhile, with a lot less fanfare, a mail-coach had begun operating on 1 June between Waterford and Cork, a few days before the two more publicised services began. Finn's *Leinster Journal* congratulated the public-spirited merchants of Waterford 'by whose joint subscription it is carried into effect.'<sup>122</sup> The following August another mail-coach service was announced: it would run between Clonmel and Waterford, arriving in Waterford at twelve noon, 'and will be dispatched for Clonmel an hour after'.<sup>123</sup> The Dublin-Limerick mail coach began operating in June 1791.<sup>124</sup> By 1794 the mail-coach network linked most major cities on the island to Dublin. Watson's

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 July 1789.

<sup>120</sup> Brunnicardi, *John Anderson*, p. 18

<sup>121</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 July 1788.

<sup>122</sup> *Leinster Journal*, 25 Apr. 1789.

<sup>123</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Aug. 1789.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 June 1791.

*Almanack* stated that ‘The Cork, Limerick and Galway Mail Coaches with Guards, set off from the Mail Coach Office, in Dawson-street, at 10 every night except Sundays at 9, ..... Northern Mail Coach sets off from Belfast Hotel Caple-street at half past 10 every night.’<sup>125</sup> By 1798 the network extended to connect Cork with Youghal.<sup>126</sup>

Despite this impressive success, operating the service was not without its major challenges. The Dublin-Galway route, for instance, must have been problematic, particularly beyond Athlone. The first ‘official’ mention of this route appeared in Wilson’s *Directory* and Watson’s *Almanack* of 1795 when both advertised a mail coach service to Galway.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, this may even have been operating from as early as 1790 when the *Freeman’s Journal* (October 1790) stated that ‘The Mail Coach going the Connaught road, is reported to have met with an accident’ caused by a flock of geese.<sup>128</sup> However, as in the case of the Munster service, use of the term Connaught may be somewhat misleading since evidence indicates that the coach did not travel all the way to Galway, and certainly sometime between 1797 and 1799, it terminated at Ballinasloe.<sup>129</sup> In 1800 it only went west as far as Athlone and by 1803 the mail coach turned at Mullingar and terminated at Longford.<sup>130</sup> Mail destined for Galway would have been carried onwards from Mullingar, most likely on horseback. It was not until 1808 that a mail coach ran through to Galway again.<sup>131</sup> While the reasons for this poor service are unknown, the most likely cause was the bad state of the roads beyond Athlone. None of the mail coach road between Athlone and Galway were tolled this may explain why they were in such a poor state. Furthermore, responsibility for the maintenance of post-roads was in the hands of local grand juries who, on the whole, did not have a good track record in this regard.<sup>132</sup> It was not only the Galway mail coach that experienced serious difficulties. Many of the mail coaches running during the early 1790s had ceased operation by 1800. There is, for example, no record of the Dublin-Waterford, or the Waterford-Cork or the Dublin-Wexford mail coaches operating at that time. This may be owing to damage to coaches during the 1798 rebellion. In any case, by 1800 only four mail-coaches were leaving Dublin each day – the Northern mail

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<sup>125</sup> Samuel Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1794), p. 115.

<sup>126</sup> John Nixon *Nixon’s gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack for the year of our Lord 1797 [-1798]* (Cork, 1797-98), p. 42.

<sup>127</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1795); William Wilson, *Wilson’s Dublin Directory* (Dublin, 1795), p. 154.

<sup>128</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 Oct. 1790.

<sup>129</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1797), p. 154; idem, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1799), p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1800), p. 146.

<sup>131</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1808), p. 173.

<sup>132</sup> O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s principal roads*.



coach, the Longford mail-coach, and the Cork and Limerick mail-coaches.<sup>133</sup> The enhanced security was an important improvement that the mail-coaches brought to the Post Office's transportation of both letters and money. Previously, as highlighted in the previous chapter, robbery of post-boys was a regular occurrence. When they began operating, armed guards were employed by the Post Office to accompany all mail-coaches. Optimistic pronouncements appeared in the newspapers claiming that coaches would provide 'safe conveyance of correspondence.'<sup>134</sup> That optimism appeared well founded since no attacks on mail-coaches were reported in the newspapers during the first nine years of their operations, although post boys continued to be targeted.

The 1798 rebellion changed all. After the United Irishmen uprising exposed the vulnerability of the coaches, attacks and robberies on mail-coaches continued unabated until 1803. In the initial stage of the uprising, many of the attacks on coaches were politically motivated and the arms carried by the guards were invariably taken by the rebels. Numerous other attacks occurred (these will be examined in more detail later in the chapter) but few were successful. Thereafter these attacks continued, though not necessary for political reasons: that change was reflected in the newspapers' substituting the term 'bandit' for 'rebels' when reporting on mail coach robberies or attempted attacks, whether by individuals or a small band of men. Between 1800 and 1804 mail coaches were often robbed (the *Freeman's Journal* reported at least seven cases but also referenced several others in coverage of court cases).<sup>135</sup> Finn's *Leinster Journal* reported at least two robberies not mentioned in the *Freeman's Journal* together with numerous instances of shots fired at the mail coaches when they failed to stop.<sup>136</sup>

Details of fares charged for travelling on the mail coaches appeared in commercial directories. Wilson's *Directory* of 1795, for instance, provided the public with a comprehensive itemised list of rates for various stages on the twenty-one hour journey from Dublin to Belfast:

The Belfast mail coach with a Guard, starts from the Belfast Hotel, Capel-Street, Every night (except Sunday) at half past 10 o'clock for the following places at the rates mentioned, viz. Drogheda. 11s. Dunleer 13s. 9d. C.Bellingham 15s. 7d. Dundalk 18s. 4d. Newry 1l. 2s. 9d. Loughbrickland, 1l. 6s. 5d. Banbridge 1l. 7s.

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<sup>133</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1800), p. 146.

<sup>134</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 Dec. 1785.

<sup>135</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 7 Mar., 18 Apr. 1801, 26 Oct. 1802, 18 Jan., 11 Aug., 13 Sept. 1803.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 June, 30 Apr. 1801, 21 Oct. 1802.

4d. Dromore 1l. 10s. 1d. Hillsbrough 1l. 11s. 11d. Lisburn 1l 13s. 3½d. - outside half fare Arriving in Belfast at seven o'clock next evening.<sup>137</sup>

From its introduction in Ireland, the mail-coach service was quickly embraced by members of the political, military and ecclesiastical establishment, and particularly the middle class, the largest cohort of users. This was reflected in newspaper reportage on the service. Even before the coaches began operating, they were eagerly anticipated. As early as 1785 the *Belfast News-Letter*, under the heading, 'Remarkable events of 1784', announced 'new plans for the conveyance of the mail in stage coaches' as one of three remarkable events that occurred in August that year.<sup>138</sup> When John Palmer, who had introduced the mail-coaches in Britain, came to Ireland in July 1788, his visit was widely reported in the newspapers and used as a pretext to comment on the much anticipated mail-coach service soon to begin operating in Ireland. The *Belfast News-Letter* applauded Palmer for having established 'one of the greatest improvements England can boast.'<sup>139</sup> When commencement of the mail-coach service was postponed, the newspapers reported that there was widespread disappointment. The mail-coaches were built long before the roads were ready for them, and were launched six months before they were to begin running. The newspapers described how delivery of the first mail-coach was welcomed by the Lord Lieutenant, who had commissioned and paid for it, and reported on its launch in the Castle yard.<sup>140</sup> An article printed a few days earlier in the same paper stressed with pride that it was Irish-built by Mr. Hutton of Britain Street, and that the driver and guards were to be dressed in royal livery.<sup>141</sup> The newspapers reported that the full through service to both Belfast and Cork was eagerly anticipated and news of the first runnings of the mail-coach, and subsequent first runnings of new routes, was enthusiastically announced. Mishaps were also reported, but blame was seldom if ever apportioned to the driver or Post Office; instead, the fault was usually attributed to the poor state of the road or to the weather. In March 1792 and postmaster-general reported that the, because of the state of the road between Dublin and Limerick or in all the incoming mails were held up, in January 1794, due to very heavy fall of snow held up the mail coaches, a regular occurrence in winter.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Watson's *Dublin directory* (1795), p. 159.

<sup>138</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Jan. 1785.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 July 1788.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 30 Sept. 1788.

<sup>142</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 28 Mar. 1792; *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Jan. 1794.

### **The role of the Post Office in driving the improvement of Ireland's roads**

The introduction of mail-coaches travelling at unprecedented speed over long distances marked a major step forward for the Post Office in Ireland. From this point onwards, optimising the speed of delivery became an increasingly important goal in the operation of the postal system. The first advertisement concerning the Dublin-Cork service which appeared in almanacs cited the time of departure from both cities but not the time of arrival; as yet, the latter was evidently uncertain. This remained the norm until 1808. It is, however, possible to ascertain the duration of runnings. For example, the advertisement announcing the introduction of the mail-coach service between Belfast and Dublin in July 1788 stated that the journey would take twenty-one hours.<sup>143</sup>

Coinciding with the introduction of the coaches at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Irish Post Office assumed an important role in developing the country's main roads.<sup>144</sup> Prior to 1789 the Post Office was only interested in the measurement and connectivity of the country's roads; their condition was largely irrelevant. This is reflected in the fact that neither the 1711 Act nor the 1784 Irish Post Office Act made any provision for maintenance of the roads.<sup>145</sup> However, with the introduction of mail-coaches, the Post Office's priorities changed as evidenced by the passing of six Acts by the Irish parliament; four concerned specific roads while the other two referred to mail coach roads in general.<sup>146</sup> These aimed to ensure that post-roads were in sufficiently good condition to accommodate mail-coaches. Yet, even then, the Post Office was only interested in the small percentage of the Irish roads on which it endeavoured to introduce this new form of transportation.<sup>147</sup> In order for the system to work efficiently, better roads were required. It was this need which drove the Post Office to insist on higher standards of road maintenance. In Scotland (with the exception of the south) the mail coach network remained small and underdeveloped and the Post Office had little input into the design of roads. The same was true of Wales, except on the Holyhead route where some work was carried out to accommodate mail

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<sup>143</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 3 July 1788.

<sup>144</sup> For a more detailed account of the development of Irish roads see Broderick, *The first toll-roads*; O'Keefe, *Ireland's principal roads*.

<sup>145</sup> 4 Anne, c. 6 [Ire.] (1705); 9 Anne, c. 9 [Ire.] (1710); 1 Geo. II, c. 13 [Ire.] (1727); 33 Geo. II, c. 8 (1759). As highlighted in chapter three, a clause in the 1711 Act, which also applied to Ireland, authorised the Post Office to measure and keep a record of the length of roads. A similar clause was included in the 1784 Irish Post Office Act.

<sup>146</sup> 32 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire.] (1792) An Act for improving and keeping in Repair the Post Roads of this Kingdom. 35 Geo. III, c. 38 [Ire.] An Act further improving the Post Roads of this Kingdom.

<sup>147</sup> There was much activity concerning roads with many parliamentary inquiries and resulting Acts particularly in the 1820s and 30s. For a more comprehensive work on Irish roads the reader should consult the three volumes published by Peter O'Keefe.

coaches during the late 1700s.<sup>148</sup> In England, unlike in Ireland, an extensive network of roads fit for mail-coaches existed prior to their introduction there in 1784. Thus, the Post Office never played the same role in road design or maintenance in England as it did in Ireland.

In Ireland, when the mail-coaches were introduced, there was an extensive road network in place. In 1777, just eleven years before the mail coaches began operating, two cartographers, Alexander Taylor and Andrew Skinner surveyed over 8,000 Irish miles of road; of this, the Post Office travelled approximately 1,600 miles. These appear to have been in good condition.<sup>149</sup> However, Arthur Young commented that while in general, the state of the roads was good, the toll roads ‘must be excluded as they are as bad as the bye roads are admirable’<sup>150</sup>. For the most part, it was the toll roads (Dublin-Cork, Dublin-Belfast and Dublin-Limerick routes) on which the first mail-coaches operated. The poor or variable standard of roads reflected the fact that two different authorities were responsible for many roads – turnpike trusts and grand juries. Whereas the former could borrow money and repay it from the tolls collected, most roads were maintained by grand juries in each county through the rather inefficient and slow presentment system.<sup>151</sup> In many cases where a post road ran through a county and did

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<sup>148</sup> As late as 1828 Edinburgh has seven mail coaches only departing daily only two going north one to Sterling and the other to Aberdeen – see *The Edinburgh Almanack, Or Universal Scots and Imperial Register* (Edinburgh, 1828) p. 63.

<sup>149</sup> An assessment of how good or bad the Irish roads were depended on who was using them and the required speed of travel. Most contemporary travel accounts suggest that roads were in relatively good condition. Three visitors to Ireland during the last quarter of the eighteenth century commented favourably on them. Dr. Richard Twiss in his otherwise very uncomplimentary book about Ireland, *Tour in Ireland*, remarked ‘The roads are almost universally as good as those about London.’ Charles Topham Bowden travelled throughout the country in 1790, sometimes on horseback, other times in a post-chaise carriage. In his book *A tour through Ireland* he gave an account of his travels but rarely mentioned the roads except to comment on how good they were; only once did he complain about the bad condition of a road. (A post-chaise is not to be confused with a mail coach. It was a carriage used for long distance travel and usually carried between one and three passengers. It was called a post-chaise because it was the most common vehicle to be seen on the post roads in England and likely in Ireland too.) Arthur Young (1741-1820), agricultural reformer and writer who travelled throughout Ireland in the years 1776 to 1778, was also positive: ‘everywhere I found beautiful roads without break or hindrances ... in a few years there will not be a bad piece of road except turnpikes in all Ireland.’ Of course these were all travellers or visitors who were sightseeing and for whom speed was not a significant factor. Furthermore, many were travelling on horseback or in small carriages. By contrast, for those travelling the roads on a regular basis, in wider coaches, working to a timetable and for whom speed was an important factor, a higher standard of road was required. See Richard Twiss, *A tour in Ireland in 1775* (London, 1776), p. 54. See Charles Topham Bowden, *A tour through Ireland* (Dublin, 1791), p. 141; Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland: with general observations on the present state of that kingdom* (Dublin, 1780), pp 150-60, 151; C. J. Woods, *Travellers’ accounts as source-material for Irish historians*. Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History no. 15 (Dublin, 2009), no. 21 (Twiss), no. 34 (Bowden), no. 25 (Young).

<sup>150</sup> Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland: with general observations on the present state of that kingdom* (Dublin, 1780), pp 250-1.

<sup>151</sup> Under the presentment system, any person could apply to the local grand jury to build or repair a road. At an assizes session, usually the Spring session, that person applied to fix a section of road and presented his proposals together with a statement of the cost. The grand jury would either reject or accept this

not connect two towns in that county, the grand jury was reluctant to tax local ratepayers for its upkeep: this often resulted in sections of many main post roads falling into bad repair. For instance, the road from New Ross to Waterford was ‘bad and hilly’ according to the *Report of the Select Committee on Post Communications with Ireland* because ‘it is at the end of Co. Kilkenny and that county has no interest in it.’<sup>152</sup> The presentment system caused many delays and frustration for the Post Office; the Irish parliament passed several Acts in attempts to speed up repair of the roads.<sup>153</sup> The last Act passed before the establishment of the independent Irish Post Office allowed the grand juries to levy money on the whole barony in order to maintain existing roads and bridges or build new ones was passed.<sup>154</sup> This 1765 Act laid down specific measurements: roads were to be fourteen feet wide and constructed of stone and gravel. No reference was made to the post roads; nor did the Post Office have any input into the legislation. However, it transpired that these roads were too narrow to allow two fast moving mail coaches to pass safely when they were introduced some twenty-five years later.

Although the mail-coaches began running in April 1789 it was not until June of that year that they became fully operational. While coach owners blamed the delay on the poor state of the roads, in reality, only *some* sections were in bad condition. The contractors for the Dublin-Cork route, Bart O’Donoghue, John Anderson and Henry Fortescue, on 15 April 1789 (the day a partial service began) petitioned the Irish parliament to explain the difficulties they were experiencing. This petition is revealing about the state of the roads and the beginnings of the mail coach service.

The Petitioners have entered into a contract for the Conveyances of His Majesty's Mails between Dublin and Cork on ... and in order to carry out same into effect have gone to very considerable expense providing coaches, horses and other Necessaries. That the Petitioners intended to commence running said coaches on the 5th April inst. in the full hope that by that time

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tender. The applicant then had to carry out the work at his own expense until the next assizes sitting by which time the work had to be completed. He then presented his receipts and was paid. As a result, only small sections of a road were completed as under the presentment system, the grand juries could only build what they could afford to pay for during that year. This was an inefficient system which resulted in repairs being piecemeal.

<sup>152</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communications with Ireland*, p. 237, H.C. 1831-32 (716) xvii, 1.

<sup>153</sup> In 1705, 1710, 1727 and 1759.

<sup>154</sup> 5 Geo. III, c. 14 [Ire.]. In 1729 the first two Irish turnpike Acts were passed by the Irish parliament. These concerned the roads between Dublin and Kilcullen bridge in County Kildare, and the Dublin to Navan road. Although the Post Office did use these roads, again there was no Post Office involvement in preparing the legislation. At this time the mail was carried on horseback or by foot and not by wheeled vehicle – hence the state of the road was of little interest to the Post Office.

the Trustees of the different turnpikes would be in compliance with his Excellency, the Lord Lieutenant's circular letter to the different to the different High Sheriffs, issued last summer, have caused the roads to be completely repaired. That upon a last minute inspection of the road, particularly between Kilkenny and Clogheen the Petitioners are much disappointed to find the necessary repairs have been neglected and in many instances they continue so bad and so extremely narrow as to render it impossible for two carriages to pass even by daylight without utmost danger of one being overturned into deep trenches on each side. That upon Application to the Turnpike Boards the Petitioners were given to understand that they had not sufficient funds for accomplishing the repairs so essential to the success of the Undertaking. That under these difficulties the Petitioners have too great cause to fear that the establishment of so great a public utility will be entirely without aid and Interposition of Parliament. In Confirmation of these facts the Petitioners humbly beg leave to refer to a report of the present state of the post roads to the Post Master General and therefore praying relief.<sup>155</sup>

A similar petition was presented on behalf of 'George Anderson, and Thomas Green of Newry, Merchants' who operated the Dublin-Belfast mail-coach on 25 April 1789.<sup>156</sup>

Parliament acted quickly. By the end of the year, two new turnpike Acts relating to post-roads were passed in quick succession. These were the Dublin to Dunleer Act (29 Geo. III, c. 23 [Ire.]) which allowed the directors to borrow up to £3,000 for repairs to the road and later the Act (29 Geo. III, c. 24 [Ire.]) concerning the city of Dublin to Malahide road.<sup>157</sup> Although these did not specifically mention the mail-coaches or Post Office, their intention was to improve the mail-coach post-roads. Evidently these proved ineffectual as another Act 'for improving and keeping in Repair the Post Roads of this Kingdom' was passed in 1792. It stipulated that such roads as were intended to facilitate mail coaches 'were to be 42 to 52 feet wide'.<sup>158</sup>

In essence, this Act attempted to force grand juries to improve those post-roads under their control to a point that mail-coaches could operate with ease on those routes. Upgrade activities included 'lowering of any hills, or the filling up any hollows, or both on any of the road aforesaid, leading directly from one post-town to another post-town

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<sup>155</sup> *C.J.I.*, xiv, 74.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94. The author cannot establish if George and John Anderson were related in any way.

<sup>157</sup> 29 Geo. III, c. 23 [Ire.] (1789); 29 Geo. III, c. 24 [Ire.] (1789).

<sup>158</sup> 32 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire] (1792) An Act for improving and keeping in Repair the Post Roads of this Kingdom.

for the purpose of rendering such roads more safe and convenient for carriages.<sup>159</sup> However, the Act only had limited success for a number of reasons. It did not compel the grand juries to repair the roads straight away; nor was money provided to carry out the necessary work. Rather, the upgrade was to be carried out in the normal way by the existing inefficient presentment arrangement. A further impediment to progress was a reluctance on the part of the grand juries to increase the rates exacted from local tenant farmers and land owners who sat on the grand juries. This was reflected in a later post road Act titled an ‘Act further improving the post roads of this kingdom’, passed in 1795.<sup>160</sup> Primarily concerned with finance, it stipulated that a presentment could now be made for a larger section of road at one assize, and the sum could be paid over a period of six years instead of by the next assize, six months later. Furthermore, the preamble to this Act is revealing in relation to the unsatisfactory state of the roads for mail coaches in the mid-1790s, and its implications for Ireland’s commercial development, claiming that ‘many of the post roads in this kingdom are too narrow, hilly, and incontinent for coaches to travel on with the mails, and a speedy conveyance of the mails by coaches is productive of many benefits in a commercial country ...’.<sup>161</sup> These two Acts, therefore, present categorical proof that Ireland’s roads were unfit to accommodate the mail coaches, and that the necessary upgrade was going to take time and involve significant expense. This money would eventually come from central government funds, but not for another ten years. In this way, the Post Office became the driving force behind improving the main roads in Ireland from the 1790s, facilitating easier, safer and more efficient movement of goods and services on the roads, thereby contributing significantly to the modernization of the country.

### **In defence of the state: the role of the Post Office in gathering intelligence during the political crisis of the late 1790s**

During the 1790s and particularly in 1798 the Post Office did the British state administration its greatest service through its intelligence-gathering operations. Although by no means the only source of intelligence, it played a vital role in the Castle’s surveillance and espionage activities. Its complex, fast and regular communication system, and more importantly its network of local postmasters who

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<sup>159</sup> 32 Geo. III, c. 30, clause xiv. Hills seem to have been common features of Irish roads and were often commented on by travellers such as Charles Topham Bowden: see *A tour through Ireland*, p. 143.

<sup>160</sup> 35 Geo. III, c. 38 [Ire.].

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

possessed knowledge of individuals and associations, was invaluable to the Castle authorities in the drive to discover and suppress insurgency. Use of the Post Office for gathering intelligence in England and Europe throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is well documented; its use in Ireland up to this time has been highlighted in this thesis.<sup>162</sup> However, it was not until the 1790s that we have incontrovertible evidence that such activity was occurring on a regular basis in the Irish Post Office and that Secretary John Lees approved the practice. As a result, the Post Office played an indispensable role in curtailing the activities and obstructing the plans of the United Irishmen.

As indicated, from the foundation of the Post Offices in England and Ireland, mail had been both legally and illegally opened by Post Office staff for intelligence-gathering. John Lees appears to have been especially adept in this regard. In 1775, the year after he first became secretary, Lord Lieutenant Harcourt wrote to Lord Rochford, one of the Secretaries of State at Westminster, 'Requesting a warrant to the Postmaster-General in Ireland for opening and copying letters when desired by his Excellency.'<sup>163</sup> This request was made in April. Three weeks later, when a warrant was dispatched from London to allow certain letters be opened, it was suggested that changes be made to the law so as to allow the Lord Lieutenants sign such warrants.<sup>164</sup> Even before the 1790s letters were being opened on a grand scale.<sup>165</sup> By the mid-1780s Prime Minister William Pitt was in receipt of copies of the letters written by James Napper Tandy, later a leading United Irishman.<sup>166</sup> Lees, unlike most Post Office secretaries in London (apart from Anthony Todd), played a very direct role in the espionage.

During the 1790s while Castle officials had an overall impression of revolutionary activity countrywide, grassroots level intelligence was vital. This was often supplied by sub-postmasters, many of whom possessed knowledge about suspected subversives and organisations in their area and were willing to supply Lees with this information. Lees certainly ensured that the Irish Post Office operated as the

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<sup>162</sup> Marshall, *Intelligence & espionage*; Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century*; for a European example, see Karl De Leeuw, 'The Black Chamber in the Dutch Republic during the War of the Spanish Succession and its aftermath, 1707-1715' in *Historical Journal*, 42, no. 1 (Mar. 1999), pp133-56.

<sup>163</sup> Lord Lieutenant of Ireland George Viscount Townshend to the Earl of Rochford, 7 Apr. 1775 in *Cal. Home Office papers*, iv 1773-1775, p. 337.

<sup>164</sup> Copy of warrant from Secretary of State to the postmaster-general of Ireland for opening letters, 15 May 1775 in *Cal. Home Office papers*, iv 1773-1775, 346.

<sup>165</sup> *Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons on the Post Office*, 1844 (583); Ellis, *The Post Office in the eighteenth century*.

<sup>166</sup> *Revolutionary Dublin, 1795-1801: the letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle*, ed. Thomas Bartlett (Dublin, 2004), p. 15.



eyes and ears of Dublin Castle, positioning trusted persons in strategically important posts, among them, Thomas Whinnery. The latter was originally postmaster in Newry, and on the recommendation of the local magistrate, Richard Johnson, Lees transferred him to Belfast. Writing to Lees about the position in Belfast, Johnson stated: ‘If such a man as Whinnery was there in that important situation as times now are, you may rest assured there would not be a movement among the people but you or government would be made acquainted.’<sup>167</sup> Whinnery was appointed deputy postmaster to the Belfast office on 18 June 1785. Almost immediately he began sending Lees valuable information about local United Irishmen.<sup>168</sup> It was probably he who intercepted Napper Tandy’s letters (see above). In October 1796 Whinnery informed Lees about a robbery of gunpowder in Belfast, sent him papers that he has intercepted, and informed him that ‘the hatched rebellion may burst forth any moment.’<sup>169</sup> He also enclosed a list of ‘dangerous people’. In addition, Whinnery was responsible for intercepting the letters of United Irishmen Henry Joy McCracken and Thomas Russell.<sup>170</sup> He was rewarded for his services. The unusual nature of his reward became evident in 1829 when he gave evidence before an inquiry into the Post Office. Asked about his salary of £250, he explained that £50 ‘was given to me by the Government at a particular period; and does not go to my successor’.<sup>171</sup> Given that the committee asked no further questions concerning this extra payment suggests that they were aware of what it was for. Whinnery was not exceptional. Another Post Office official, William Fortescue, received a ‘masked pension’ for service during this period when he held the position of resident surveyor in the Post Office.<sup>172</sup>

Among local postmasters who supplied information was George Holdcroft, postmaster in Kells, County Meath. He kept Lees informed about subversive events in that county and also in County Monaghan.<sup>173</sup> Another County Meath postmaster who supplied information was James Kellett of Dunshaughlin, and in County Cork, John

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<sup>167</sup> See Chatham papers U840/0146/24/1 (Kent History and Library Centre).

<sup>168</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 240.

<sup>169</sup> Thomas Whinnery to John Lees, 29 Oct 1786 (N.A.I., Rebellion papers 620/25/197); Thomas Whinnery to John Lees, 13 Sep. 1796 (ibid., 620/25/57); Thomas Whinnery to John Lees, 10 Feb. 1797 (ibid., 620/28/249); Thomas Whinnery to John Lees, 30 March 1797 (ibid., 620/29/131); Thomas Whinnery to John Lees, 25 May 1797 (ibid., 620/20/30/194).

<sup>170</sup> Thomas Bartlett, ‘The secret history of the 1790s re-considered’ in Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798: a bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), p. 409.

<sup>171</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 931.

<sup>172</sup> Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800*, iv, 215.

<sup>173</sup> George Horlcroft to John Lees’, 12 Apr. 1797 (N.A.I., Rebellion papers 620/29/246); see also Thomas J. Barron, ‘A poitin affray near Ballybay in 1797’ in *Clogher Record*, 8, no. 2 (1974), pp 182-93.

Carey in Rathcormack forwarded details about activities in that county.<sup>174</sup> Edward Moore, postmaster of Aughnacloy, County Tyrone, opened letters and divulged their contents to Lees.<sup>175</sup> William Ellis, who was postmaster of Phillipstown King's County (Daingean, County Offaly) in 1810, supplied information during the 1790s.<sup>176</sup> However, undoubtedly the most important conveyor of intelligence was Thomas Whinnery, postmaster of Belfast.

As well as opening letters of suspected United Irishmen, the correspondence of influential men who had no involvement in revolutionary actions was also intercepted. These included the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, John Troy, whose letters to and from the papal nuncio Charles Erskine were inspected.<sup>177</sup> This was done in an attempt to pressurise Troy to ensure that the Catholic priests of Dublin remained loyal to the state administration. Besides intercepting letters and sending copies to Dublin Castle, Lees also kept the authorities in London well informed about the situation in Ireland. The many letters in the Auckland papers in the British Museum reveal the large amount of information he passed to Auckland. Auckland (as William Eden) had been Chief Secretary in Dublin Castle at the same time as Lees was second secretary; the two were friendly and remained so long after Eden left. By 1798 Eden had been raised to the British peerage as Lord Auckland of West Auckland and was one of the joint postmasters-general of Great Britain. Eden was close to William Pitt and regularly advised him on Irish matters.<sup>178</sup> Much of the information and advice that he supplied to Pitt originated from Lees, who was ideally positioned to gather sensitive information.

The United Irishmen, including Wolfe Tone, suspected or knew that letters were being opened in the Post Office. In a letter to his friend, George Knox, Tone wrote 'any letters directed immediately to you will certainly not go unopened through the Post Office'.<sup>179</sup> Writing to Thomas Russell in 1795, Tone confided: 'I sent it haphazard by the post office and therefore it may probably never reach you, at least unless the Irish Post Office has exceeding improved its morality since I left Europe; but not having the

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<sup>174</sup> John Carey to John Lees, May 1798 (N.A.I., Rebellion papers 620/37/8).

<sup>175</sup> David W. Miller, 'Presbyterianism and "Modernization" in Ulster' in *Past & Present*, no. 80 (Aug. 1978), pp 66-90, 83; *Ninth Report*, p. 82.

<sup>176</sup> William Ellis to John Lees, 17 Nov. 1796 (N.A.I., Rebellion papers 620/26/56); *Nineteenth report*, p. 240.

<sup>177</sup> *Letters of Francis Higgins to Dublin Castle*, ed. Bartlett, p. 16 n. 17; W. J. Fitzpatrick, *Secret service under Pitt* (London, 1892), p. 188.

<sup>178</sup> Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'Eden, William' in *The Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<http://dib.cambridge.org> by IP 192.168.60.239, accessed 29 Oct. 2015].

<sup>179</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone to George Knox, 30 May 1795 in *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-98*, ed. T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell and C. J. Woods (3 vols, Oxford, 1998-2007), i, 535.

opportunity of a private hand, I hope what I am about to write may come safe.’<sup>180</sup> In the same letter, when asking for the latest news from Ireland, he told Russell to send it ‘by the first safe conveyance the post office being always excepted and forbidden’. In a postscript to the letter he gave instructions about where his letters were to be sent, warned him ‘to take care’, and cautioned Russell ‘to transmit them, by private hands’.

The use of the Post Office by the Castle authorities and the administration in general to gather intelligence was vindicated by the volume of information collected and its usefulness in suppressing the rebellion. Interestingly, no reference to the practice of opening letters featured in the 1784 Act that established the Irish Post Office; whether this was an oversight or a deliberate omission is open to conjecture. In the final analysis, however, this worked in the favour of the Castle authorities since under the terms of the 1784 Act, opening letters without a warrant was not technically unlawful and Lees and his ‘agents’ could carry on as they wished in the knowledge that they were not breaking the law. The Castle authorities ensured its tight control of the Post Office through John Lees. The intelligence he supplied was important as it provided a countrywide picture. While the Post Office was not the only channel through which the administration gathered information, it served as a vitally important instrument within its intelligence operations.

The fastest and safest means of conveying intelligence to Dublin Castle during the 1790s, no matter how it was obtained or from what source it was acquired, was on board the Post Offices’ mail-coaches. Thomas Pakenham in his book, *The Year of Liberty: the bloody story of the great Irish rebellion of 1798*, describes the mail-coach system on the eve of the 1798 rebellion thus:

The mail coach system, surprisingly well run by Lord Auckland’s crony, John Lees, was much more than a postal service. It was a finely spun web of communications that held the country together. Apart from the odd military express all government messages went by mail coach: as S.O.S. from a beleaguered magistrate, a reassuring reply from the Castle, a peppery general order from military headquarters, a spy report from Wexford, an ultimatum from the Privy Council and so on.

Destroy the Mail coaches and you would not only spread panic in the garrison towns; you would paralyse the government.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone to Thomas Russell, 1 Sept. 1795 in *The writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, ed. Moody, McDowell & Woods, ii (2001), 11.

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: the bloody story of the great Irish rebellion of 1798* (London, 1972) p. 124.

## The adverse effects of the 1798 rebellion on the mail-coach service

The rebels' attacking and stopping the mail-coaches served three purposes. First, it signalled to those beyond Dublin that the rebellion had begun in the capital. Secondly, such attacks served to temporarily cripple the Dublin Castle communications system. Thirdly, these disruptions generated unease and confusion among provincial government officials. On 23 May 1798 an attempt was made to prevent mail-coaches from leaving Dublin. The Northern (Belfast) mail was burned by rebels at Santry in north County Dublin. The same night, the Cork mail-coach was first attacked at Clondalkin in west County Dublin but continued on its journey before being captured at Naas and burned. Meanwhile the Galway coach was attacked at Lucan but proceeded on its way, and the Limerick and Enniskillen coaches were missed completely at Clondalkin in west Dublin and Dunboyne in County Meath.<sup>182</sup> There is some confusion regarding the Connaught mail-coach; contemporary accounts claim that it was destroyed between Lucan and Leixlip.<sup>183</sup> However, modern historians state that only two mail-coaches in total were destroyed.<sup>184</sup> By the time the mail-coaches were attacked, the rising had already been quashed in Dublin as a result of intelligence-gathering aided in no small way by the Post Office. Two days after the coaches were attacked in Dublin, another going from Cork to Dublin was set upon by rebel forces. The only person on board, a Lieutenant Giffard, was taken off and killed, and the coach continued on its way.<sup>185</sup>

Just how heavily the military relied on the mail-coaches is acknowledged in a letter published in early June 1798 by the *Freeman's Journal* in which Major General Sir James Duff told Lieutenant General Lake 'I hope to be able to forward this to you by mail coach, which I will escort to Naas.'<sup>186</sup> To protect the mails and the dispatches they contained, coaches that were thought to be vulnerable were provided with military escorts. As the *Freeman's Journal* reported in July 1798 'The Limerick and Cork mails arrived yesterday between one and two in the afternoon, escorted by a strong guard of cavalry and infantry – the infantry [being] in jaunting cars &c. The Limerick and Cork

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<sup>182</sup> Richard Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, from the Arrival ...* (2 vols, Dublin and London, 1802), i, 266; Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 rebellion in north Leinster' in *1798: a bicentenary perspective*, ed. Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh & Whelan, pp 123-24.

<sup>183</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 2 June 1798.

<sup>184</sup> Musgrave, *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, from the Arrival ...* i, 266, states that three were burned out. Liam Chambers, 'The 1798 rebellion in north Leinster' in *1798: a bicentenary perspective*, ed. Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh & Whelan, pp 123-24

<sup>185</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 2 June 1798.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

mail coaches were dispatched yesterday ... they were escorted by a strong detachment consisting of about 100 men ...'.<sup>187</sup> This deployment of substantial military resources during the rising demonstrates how the authorities prioritised the upkeep of the mail-coach service since it was Dublin Castle's only conduit for liaising with its personnel beyond Dublin.

The mail-coach was valued and targeted by Castle authorities and rebels respectively for more than the mail and intelligence it carried. It was used to convey signals to both sides about the state of play at various stages during the disturbances. When the mail-coach arrived, it simultaneously reassured loyalists that the rising was under control and signalled to the rebels that their rising had not succeeded in Dublin. Conversely, its non-arrival generally signalled to rebels that plans had gone awry in the capital and that they should stand down until further notice. For example, the *Belfast News-Letter* reported in late May:

Yesterday, only two of the mails arrived in town from the country. The Cork and Limerick mail coaches have not arrived today. It is concluded that they have been stopped by the insurgents. The rest of the mails have regularly come in and bring no disagreeable accounts.<sup>188</sup>

Inevitably attacks on mail-coaches disrupted timetables. In an effort to curtail this, the coaches were dispatched at six in the morning, instead of at ten in the evening, in order that they could travel in daylight: consequently, the post from Cork arrived in Dublin at 10 o'clock at night.<sup>189</sup> This timetable was still in operation in November 1799; in fact the service did not return to normal hours until October 1800 when the *Cork Advertiser* announced 'that the mail-coaches will [resume] their normal hours of departure and travel by night as well as by day and will be escorted by dragoons.'<sup>190</sup>

Rebel attacks on mail-coaches therefore certainly had a major impact on the network. The Waterford-Cork mail-coach was replaced by a post-boy who was robbed in September 1798.<sup>191</sup> The Derry mail-coach was also replaced by a post-boy; he too was robbed in April 1899.<sup>192</sup> Samuel Neilson, a leader of the United Irishmen, is credited with the plan to stop the mail-coaches leaving Dublin on the night of 23 May

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<sup>187</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14 July 1798.

<sup>188</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 28 May 1798.

<sup>189</sup> *Freeman's Journal* 14 July 1798.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1800.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Sept. 1798.

<sup>192</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 Apr. 1799.

1798<sup>193</sup> although at the time, it was thought that William (John) St. John, a United Irishman who worked in the Post Office in Dublin, may have been responsible.<sup>194</sup> There was also growing concern among many of the merchant class that attacks on mail-coaches were having adversely impacting business. In December 1798 *Finn's Leinster Journal* stated that the government should be

immediately appointing a small detachment of cavalry to escort the coaches through that part of the country where attacks have been made. – It will be difficult to persuade an English merchant, that this kingdom is in a state of peace, while his majesty's mail coaches can be stopped with impunity.<sup>195</sup>

The 1798 rebellion thus had a detrimental affected on the mail-coach service and, by extension, on Irish trade and commerce. Between May and December 1798 at least fifteen attacks were recorded in the newspapers, with reports often stating that the coaches were damaged, although information on the extent of the damage is seldom given. Even after the rebellion had been suppressed, the newspapers reported ongoing attacks on the mail-coaches throughout 1799 and 1800. Arising from this disruption, by 1800 only four mail-coaches routes were operating – Dublin-Belfast, Dublin-Cork, Dublin-Limerick mail, and Dublin-Athlone.<sup>196</sup> The other routes on which mail-coaches had operated (Dublin-Waterford, Dublin-Wexford, Dublin-Enniskillen, Dublin-Galway, Waterford-Cork and Cork-Limerick) reverted to horse post or walks.

Yet, notwithstanding this serious setback for the country's nascent mail-coach service, the Post Office network, under the direction of John Lees, continued to grow at an impressive rate. Even during the period of greatest instability (1798-1803), the

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<sup>193</sup> Chambers, 'The 1798 rebellion in north Leinster', pp 122-35, p. 123.

<sup>194</sup> His name was William St. John. In the newspaper article reporting his arrest in London, he was referred to as 'John St. John' (*Freeman's Journal*, 10 Nov. 1803). St John was taken prisoner in London in 1803 and one of the charges made against him was that he had devised the plan for burning and attacking the mail coaches (ibid.). It was also said at the time that St. John 'was a person in the letter department of the post office in Dublin. St John used to have care of searching suspicious letters.' He had at one stage also been body-guard to Lord Edward Fitzgerald. However, at the time of Lord Edward's arrest, he fled and may have changed sides providing information to Dublin Castle. This comment was made by a London informer. See also Kevin Whelan, 'Introduction to section V' in *1798: a bicentenary perspective*, ed. Bartlett, Dickson, Keogh and Whelan, p. 389, n. 50. However, there is much confusion about St. John. Thomas Addis Emmet, Robert Emmet's brother, who only knew him as Johnson, believed him to be a spy on the Government side see Thomas Addis Emmet, *Memoir of Thomas Addis and Robert Emmet with their ancestors and immediate family* (2 vols, Dublin, 2003), ii, 49, 65, 72, 83. Helen Landreth agrees in *The pursuit of Robert Emmet* (Dublin, 1949), pp 116, 148, 161, 292, but all evidence cited is circumstantial. No such claim is made by modern historians of the 1798 rebellion and in his biography in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Sylvie Kleinman is silent on this claim – see <http://dib.cambridge.org> by IP 192.168.60.239, accessed 29 Oct. 2015.

<sup>195</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 5 Dec. 1798.

<sup>196</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1800), p. 146.

number of post-towns rose from 241 to 266, an increase of twenty-five or just over 10%.<sup>197</sup> By the last quarter of the eighteenth century the Post Office was operating as an indispensable and highly visible element of the British ‘composite state’ apparatus.

### **Fashioning an image of a modernising state: Dublin Castle’s use of the mail-coach for propaganda purposes**

Dublin Castle clearly retained very effective control of the Irish Post Office after it separated from the British Post Office in 1784, but it also endeavoured to capitalise on the achievements of the Post Office mail-coach service in order to create a favourable impression of the administration among the public at large. One means by which Dublin Castle did this was through branding, the brand or image used by the Post Office being the royal coat-of-arms. Use of the royal crest rather than the crowned harp of the Irish state ensured that the public associated the new Irish Post Office with the Castle administration and not the Irish parliament, to whom its profits were directed during the period of independence. When the announcement about the establishment of the ‘new’ Irish Post Office appeared on the front page of the *Freeman’s Journal* in July 1784, it was headed by the king’s coat-of-arms. It was the first time an image other than Hibernia, which always appeared in the masthead on the front page of this newspaper, was used.<sup>198</sup> This practice continued throughout the lifetime of the Irish Post Office. The royal crest was also used on posters produced by the Post Office announcing a new service as well as on reward posters.<sup>199</sup> However, this clever use of the crest on mail-coaches which travelled the country’s main roads and passed through many towns and villages several times a week, was a potent method of associating the popular Post Office with the British state. Even before their official launch, the Castle administration was associating itself with the latest mail-coaches. As mentioned, in September 1788, amidst much pomp and ceremony, the new mail-coach made its début in the grounds of Dublin Castle. On the Tuesday before the launch, it was announced in the *Freeman’s Journal* that the coach ‘will be drawn by an elegant set of grey horses, and the driver and guard in the royal livery.’<sup>200</sup> After the event, the *Freeman’s Journal* described the mail coach:

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<sup>197</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1799), pp 145-7; Samuel Watson, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1804), pp 143-44.

<sup>198</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 20 July 1784.

<sup>199</sup> Ferguson & McGuinne, *Robbery on the road*.

<sup>200</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 30 Sept. 1788.

the ground in the body is dark red, coated by a blue border studded by gilt shamrocks. The King's Arms, well emblazoned, showing the word "Mail" over them, occupy some of the door panels and the elbow leathers are the four stars of the Order of St. Patrick.<sup>201</sup>

The Lord Lieutenant, George Nugent-Temple-Grenville, Marquis of Buckingham, presided. Dublin Castle took steps to further associate itself with this modern and popular service by presenting each of the contractors with a mail-coach. The *Freeman's Journal* at the time reported that 'His Excellency we understand has complimented the contractors to Cork and Belfast, each with a pattern carriage.'<sup>202</sup> In the two-volume *History of the city of Dublin*, written some thirty years later in 1818 by Warburton, Whitelaw and Walsh, it is stated that 'A desire to extend the important benefits derivable from mail coaches, induced the late Marquis of Buckingham, during his vice-royalty ... purchased two coaches in London one of which he gave to Mr. Anderson and the other to Mr. Griens, ...'<sup>203</sup> Not only did the coaches, which were owned and operated by private companies or individuals, display royal coat-of-arms rather than the logo of the owners, the guards and the drivers were also decked out in royal livery.<sup>204</sup> These guards' smart uniforms and those worn by letter carriers, messengers and door porters were all supplied by the Post Office, and although they did not always wear them, they were expected to do so as was made clear in the 1810 report.<sup>205</sup> The annual cost of maintaining the coat-of-arms and uniforms was high; in 1809 a total of £973 2s. 9d. was paid to tailors and £129 6s. was spent on 'Care of Mail Coach Arms.'<sup>206</sup> The fact that the Treasury never questioned this expenditure is strongly suggestive of the Castle administrations' determination to be associated in the public eye with this progressive, modern and increasingly popular service.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Oct. 1788.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1788.

<sup>203</sup> John Warburton, James Whitelaw, and Robert Walsh, *History of the city of Dublin: from the earliest accounts to the present times* (London, 1825), p. 1004. There is a discrepancy between the two accounts as the newspapers of the time stated that they were built by the Irish coach builders Hutton.

<sup>204</sup> Even though the *Freeman's Journal* states that the driver and guard were in royal livery, it is possible that only the guard wore livery. The Post Office certainly supplied uniforms to some of its workers but mail coach drivers' clothing were never mentioned. The drivers were employed by the contractors, not the Post Office.

<sup>205</sup> *Ninth report*, pp 22, 33.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>207</sup> Even though the 1810 report queried the amount spent, it did not question the legitimacy of the practice – see *Ninth report*, p. 22.



**Fig 4.1 The royal coat-of-arms and the coat-of-arms of the Irish parliament as used by the Irish state lottery**



**Source:** *Freeman's Journal*, 20 July 1784. The royal coat-of-arms as it appeared in a notice featured in the *Freeman's Journal* announcing the establishment of the Irish Post Office.

Dublin Castle also carefully orchestrated its involvement in decision-making on matters relating to the Post Office. It was the state authorities, in the person of the Lord Lieutenant, which officially and in the eyes of the public, managed the Post Office. However, in reality, it was the secretary, John Lees, who exercised real control over the institution. Similarly, almost forty years later, in 1821, it was to Earl Talbot, the Lord Lieutenant (1817-1821) that Waterford chamber of commerce addressed their petition in protest at proposed changes to the mail-coach service to their city.<sup>208</sup> These and many more such incidents recorded in the Chief Secretary's Office registered papers in the National Archives of Ireland illustrate how the Castle administration, in contrast with other departments within the state apparatus (the army, revenue, law courts and police), was regarded as a benign and increasingly relevant service in everyday life for every community across Ireland.<sup>209</sup>

That propaganda was especially timely as during the 1810s there were 2,271 soldiers stationed in 104 different locations throughout the country 'for the purpose of assisting officers of excise in seizing unlicensed stills': this did nothing to endear either the police or army to the local civilian population. For example, Raphoe in County Donegal had nine soldiers stationed there, Listowel in County Kerry had thirty soldiers

<sup>208</sup> Petition of Waterford chamber of commerce opposing proposals to alter route of Dublin-Waterford mail coach (N.A.I., C.S.O.R.P., 1821/663, 675 and 812).

<sup>209</sup> Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers in the National Archives of Ireland, Bishop Street, Dublin [<http://www.csorp.nationalarchives.ie/index.html>, accessed 17 Apr. 2014].

billeted, and Oughterard in County Galway had thirty-four.<sup>210</sup> By contrast, the mail-coaches with their royal emblems, uniformed guards, and drivers were welcomed across the country. It was in Dublin Castle's interests to associate itself in the public eye with this force which was so much to the fore in driving the modernisation of Irish society during this period.

### **Discovering the extent of maladministration within the Irish Post Office**

However, behind all the success, progress and positivity associated with the Irish Post Office, much of which is attributable to the dynamism and commitment of John Lees as secretary, the institution was in fact grappling with significant problems arising from maladministration during his term. It would be 1810 before the full extent of these inappropriate practices would be exposed by parliamentary commissioners and remediate action taken. Between 1784 and 1800, while the Irish Post Office was answerable to the Irish parliament, unlike in England, no committee reports or investigations were commissioned.<sup>211</sup> The precise reasons for this are unknown. It may be the result of the Post Office falling between two stools – the Irish parliament and Dublin Castle. The parliament's lack of interest may in part be explained by the fact that the Post Office, although technically answerable to it, was (as has been shown) in fact under the control of Dublin Castle. Alternatively, the Irish parliament may have had little interest in investigating the Post Office at a time of political instability when the intelligence-gathering service that Lees provided was too valuable to jeopardise. For reasons that would become apparent, Lees had a vested interest in discouraging any inquiry into his running of the Post Office.<sup>212</sup>

After the Act of Union and disbanding of the Irish parliament, the Irish Post Office, as part of the Irish administration, came under the control of and was answerable to the Westminster parliament, although significantly it remained separate and independent of the British Post Office. In time, Westminster instigated an array of changes to the governance and administration of all parts of the new United Kingdom of

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<sup>210</sup> *Returns to an order of the Honourable House of Commons, dated 23d February 1816; for a return of the troops now cantoned, quartered, and employed, for the purpose of assisting officers of excise in seizing unlicensed stills, and in performing other parts of their duty; and also of the costs attending the troops so employed in the different out quarters and places in Ireland; from the 1st of August 1813, until the 1st February 1816; distinguishing each year, and also the counties and baronies wherein such services were performed*, pp 1-3 H.C. 1816 (181) ix, 403. This document gives a breakdown of the number of soldiers stationed in each town for this purpose for the years 1814-1816.

<sup>211</sup> *The Tenth report of the commissioners appointed by an Act of parliament, to enquire into salaries, fees, gratuities, perquisites and emoluments ...* H.C. 1806 (309) vii, 1.; *Seventh report from the Select Committee on finance, &c. Post Office ...* reprinted 1803... H.C. 1806 (309) vii, 1.

<sup>212</sup> See *Ninth report*.

Great Britain and Ireland. As R. B. McDowell states in *The Irish administration, 1801-1914* 'The Union marks the beginning of an epoch in Irish administrative history ...'. He observes that since the end of the American War of Independence, 'the archaic and expensive British administration had been severely scrutinized by the enemies of corruption and the advocates of economy,' and that 'after the Union the Irish administration was to come under this severe scrutiny.'<sup>213</sup> That scrutiny was manifest in the proliferation of parliamentary committees of inquiry and commissioners appointed to examine a multiplicity of practices and problems throughout the former 'composite state' that exercised the attention of the Westminster parliament, including aspects of the administration in Ireland. One set of commissioners was appointed to inquire into the 'fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland'. Their ninth report, published in 1810, concentrated on the Irish Post Office.<sup>214</sup>

Comprising ninety-three pages, the report concerned itself with the management of the Irish Post Office since 1784 and was a damning indictment of the institution. Grave concern was expressed about the loss of money to the state through both fraud and waste in the Irish Post Office at a time when this revenue was badly needed to fund Britain's war with France. The commissioners discovered that there were no checks and balances to prevent ongoing embezzlement by staff. Furthermore, there was a complete lack of records of any type in the institution. The accountant sent in to examine the books found that no bills or receipts had been kept and consequently he could only produce estimate figures for the period between 1785 and 1809, that is, during John Lees's term as secretary.<sup>215</sup> The commission examined the roles of all personnel employed in the Dublin office, from the Postmaster General down to the letter carriers. Among the practices criticised by the commissioners was payment of Irish mail coach contractors for Sunday work: this was not the norm in Britain.<sup>216</sup> One of the main beneficiaries from this arrangement was John Anderson, the largest mail coach contractor who (as already stated) was related to John Lees through marriage.<sup>217</sup> Another problem identified by the commissioners was the amount of money owed by

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<sup>213</sup> R. B. McDowell, *The Irish administration, 1801-1914* (Westport Connecticut ed., 1976), p. 19.

<sup>214</sup> See *Ninth report*.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>217</sup> Brunnicardi, *John Anderson*, p. 129.

provincial postmasters to the Dublin office. For example, the postmaster in Cork owed £931 10s. 4d., while the Belfast postmaster owed £683. In total in January 1809, a sum of £17,859 13s. 7d. was owed by country postmasters.<sup>218</sup> Also criticised was the unnecessary expenses claimed by the Post Office solicitor and the riding surveyors. It was recommended that the law agents of the Public Office should be paid as far as practicable in salaries and fixed allowances rather than reimbursement for expenses.<sup>219</sup> Vast amounts of money were going astray.<sup>220</sup> Some of this loss could be attributed to mail-coach robberies. However, the committee concluded that much of it was down to ‘embezzlement of Letters by the Officials of the Post Office.’<sup>221</sup> These are just a fraction of the faults and frauds detailed in the report which demonstrated how, at all levels within the Post Office, there were ample opportunities for staff to commit fraud, whilst only rarely stating that the crime had actually occurred. In the supplement to the 1810 report published later that year, the commissioners highlighted fraud relating to the lucrative circulation of newspapers in particular, declaring that the ‘fraud imputed to these Officers [the clerks of the roads] consists in their not having truly accounted for the profits derived from the exercise of their privilege of circulating Newspapers’.<sup>222</sup>

There are many reasons why the Irish Post Office was in such a bad state. In 1784, when the Irish Office was established, its practices and systems differed little from its British equivalent; indeed, it was in better shape and more advanced than its Scottish counterpart.<sup>223</sup> Importantly, however, in 1784 the British Office was on the verge of change and between 1790 and 1797 several parliamentary inquiries recommended changes that were implemented.<sup>224</sup> These changes, along with the input of men such as Palmer who introduced the mail coaches there, and Sir Francis Freeling who was a long serving and reforming secretary, brought about significant modernisation of the British Post Office in little over ten years.

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<sup>218</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 12.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 23-4.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>222</sup> *Supplement to the ninth report of the commissioners on fees, gratuities, ...*, p. 1, H.C. 1810 (366) x, 95.

<sup>223</sup> A. R. B. Haldane, *Three centuries of Scottish Posts* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp 74-102.

<sup>224</sup> See *Seventh report*.

### **Judging John Lees as secretary of the Irish Post Office**

During his term as secretary of the Irish Post Office, John Lees took full advantage of the free rein allowed him by the Irish parliament and Dublin Castle. Although as this chapter has shown he initiated major changes, he appears to have done little or nothing to eradicate fraud and embezzlement within the Irish Post Office. Indeed, he himself is believed to have engaged in such practices particularly during the latter years of his term as secretary since he went from being a man of modest means when he first arrived in Ireland in 1767 as private secretary to the Lord Lieutenant to having a large fortune and a substantial residence on the sea shore in Blackrock, County Dublin by the time of his death in 1811. John Lees was an enigma. Details of his life are scattered in many archives across Ireland and Britain. He merits a footnote in many histories of the 1798 rebellion and in many studies of the Irish parliament or Dublin Castle administration during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. He was a silent servant of the British state administration of Ireland, a gatherer of information, a source of valued advice to high-ranking officials within the British establishment (such as Lord Auckland), a trusted messenger for a succession of Lord Lieutenants, and the operator of a successful espionage ring using Post Office staff. In short, he was a loyal and trusted servant of Dublin Castle. Apart from a 'diary', virtually no personal papers appear to have survived. His diary covers the years 1777 to 1797 and for the most part concerns money lent by him, property he invested in, and other incomes he received.<sup>225</sup> Some years indicate an income from the state lottery (possibly tickets sold through the Post Office), although this is not clear. He was certainly in partnership with Robert Shaw who was an agent for the Irish national lottery. An entry in Lees's diary, dated 24 June 1781, stated

W[illiam] Eden [Chief Secretary] having met with some difficulty with the bankers in setting up his plans for a lottery and raising the lone. He desired I should be as active as possible in selling the subscriptions independently of the bankers – concerning the scheme to fair and just between the Government and the public I put down my own £6,500 to the Lone, £10,000 to the lottery at the same time.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> See Diary of John Lees. It consists of a single notebook and no entries for many months at a time. It is not a diary in the strict sense. There is very little personal information in it, although he does record major events in his life, including his dismissal from his position as second secretary at the C.S.O. in 1781. It is for the most part a financial ledger, though not a proper double-entry financial ledger, but merely notes money lent to different people and monies paid back.

<sup>226</sup> Diary of John Lees [post-1781]. In 1781 the Irish Government, in an effort to raise funds, established a state lottery. It was organised by the aforementioned William Eden, who was the Chief Secretary (1780-

This suggests that Lees was investing and speculating in the government lottery. The following year his diary records a substantial income from the lottery, the largest payment being £1,031 on 20 October 1782.<sup>227</sup> He also engaged in lucrative property speculation, especially around Blackrock in south County Dublin. One such property he rented to the duke of Leinster for a yearly rent of £200.<sup>228</sup> However, as already revealed, the 1810 Post Office report cast a long shadow over his professional conduct and character,<sup>229</sup> listing many faults with the management of the Irish Office.<sup>230</sup> It commented in particular on the exceptionally high overheads it incurred. For instance, stationary for the year 1809 alone cost £6,443 19s. 7d. Not only was the stationary overpriced; bag-makers and ironmongers were all paid hefty fees. As highlighted, robbery of money from the post was another serious abuse which negatively impacted the reputation of the service. Moreover, the committee discovered that the ‘clothing for the Letter Carriers, messengers and Mail Coach Guards, is supplied by contract at rates that appear to us to be unreasonable.’<sup>231</sup> These contracts would have been awarded by Lees and it is likely that in the course of the tendering process he was accepting bribes. While it is impossible to ascertain how much of this money that was going astray was appropriated by Lees, he certainly became a very wealthy man and this he could not have done on the strength of his Post Office salary. On the other hand, he did speculate on property and may have made much his money in this way. The small number of scholars who have written about Lees to date have tended to conclude that he was engaged in dubious dealings involving Post Office finances and have as a consequence been quite severe in their assessment of his conduct.<sup>232</sup> However, it is equally true that they have tended to judge him and his conduct in isolation from his contemporaries, many of whom engaged in similarly opportunistic practices in other offices. Furthermore, these scholars did not have access to Lees’s diary which, if forensically, examined may reveal more about his financial acumen and reveal a more informed assessment of his handling of Post Office finances. (Such a study lies beyond the scope of this thesis.)

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82) at the time, and later first Baron Auckland, and lifelong friend of Lees. Eden was having difficulty raising funds and turned to Lees for help.

<sup>227</sup> Diary of John Lees, 20 Oct. 1782.

<sup>228</sup> Diary of John Lees, 1 May 1790.

<sup>229</sup> See *Ninth report*.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>232</sup> Beatrice Bayley Butler, ‘John and Edward Lees: secretaries of the Irish Post Office, 1774-1831’ in *Dublin Historical Record*, 13, nos 3-4 (1953), pp 138-50.

Undoubtedly the most remarkable display of his wealth was his aforementioned house at Blackrock which he had constructed even though as secretary of the Irish Post Office, he was provided with a residence beside the G.P.O. building in College Green. He began building Blackrock House in August 1785, the year after he became secretary of the Post Office, when his official salary was quite modest (£433 plus monies from the distribution of the English newspapers).<sup>233</sup> The house was so grand it was used by the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Rutland, as a summer residence in 1785 and 1786, being renamed Rutland House, or the Lord Lieutenant's Lodge, while the Lord Lieutenant was living there.<sup>234</sup> By 1782 Lees estimated his worth at £14,722.<sup>235</sup> When he died, his assets are thought to have been worth between £100,000 and £250,000.<sup>236</sup> He left to his eldest son, Harcourt, the second baronet, a clergyman and political pamphleteer, enough money to enable him to remain independently wealthy and concentrate on his political activities without any visible means of income for the rest of his life.<sup>237</sup>

In 1804 (significantly six years before the publication of the commissioners inquiry into the Irish Post Office), John Lees's service was acknowledged when he was created a baronet.<sup>238</sup> By that stage, he had served the Dublin Castle administration for twenty years, first as one of its valued under secretaries and later as secretary of the Irish Post Office. He focussed on providing the administration with an efficient communications network that traversed the whole country and he deployed its network of country postmasters as an intelligence-gathering service in support of the Castle at a critical point. Lees also ensured that the Post Office operated under the control of the Castle administration rather than the Irish parliament. In these respects, he was successful. Although ostensibly it was the Lord Lieutenant and his officials who made decisions concerning the Post Office, in fact it was Lees who had the final say. Likewise, while Anderson may have been the public face of the new mail coach service,

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<sup>233</sup> Diary of John Lees, 21 Aug. 1785.

<sup>234</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9 July 1785, 28 July 1786; Bayley Butler, 'John & Edward Lees', p. 140. Whereas Lees's diary states that he began building a house on the site in August 1785, the *Freeman's Journal*, 9 July 1785 stated 'The Duke and Dutchess [sic.] have taken up residences for the bathing season, at Me. Lee's, Blackrock.' indicating that there was already a house on the site when he acquired it.

<sup>235</sup> Diary of John Lees, 1 July 1782.

<sup>236</sup> In 'John & Edward Lees: secretaries of the Irish Post Office' Bayley Butler claims that John Lees's will was lost but that in it, he left a sum between £100,000 and £250,000. However, she does not cite her sources for this information. In fact, Lees's will is available in Trinity College Dublin (T.C.D. MS. 9876 I) and no amount of money is specified.

<sup>237</sup> Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'Lees, Sir Harcourt' in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009) [<https://www.dib.cambridge.org>, accessed 12 May 2013].

<sup>238</sup> Letter of appointment of John Lees as baronet, 30 May 1803 (T.C.D. MS. 9876 II).

it was Lees who made the important decisions.<sup>239</sup> His decisions were always based on the financial viability of a project.

### **Conclusion: the contribution of the Post Office to modernising Ireland**

The 1780s marked an important watershed in the evolution of the Post Office in Ireland as from that point onwards, Ireland's burgeoning commercial sector assumed an ever increasing role in driving the modernisation of the service. Of course the state administration, which had taken the lead down to then, benefitted from and encouraged the unprecedented expansion and improvement of the network infrastructure and the increased frequency and accelerated speed of mail deliveries, particularly from the early 1790s. The wider and more extensive the network and the faster the mail travelled, the easier it was for the Dublin Castle administration and the Irish parliament to conduct business efficiently and to access up to date information from across the country and from abroad. Moreover, the range of groups within the modernising British composite state who were relying on the post for the conduct of business and, by extension, for the advancement and prosperity of the state, continued to expand during this period.

While the Post Office in Ireland may not have undergone the significant reforms that its British counterpart did, and despite serious problems within the institution, during this phase and indeed the rest of the lifetime of the Irish Post Office, the service was modernised on an unprecedented scale and at an exceptional pace that is best exemplified by the introduction of mail-coaches and the resultant accelerated speed of the mails which benefitted both the state administration and the country's expanding trade and commercial sectors. This faster, increasingly efficient service contributed to the modernisation of large sections of the country by bringing rural areas into more frequent and immediate contact with Dublin. Furthermore, as the mail coaches increasingly ran to a schedule and as the roads improved, regularity of arrival and departure at provincial towns and villages became the norm and timetables became central to the running of the mail coaches system. Thus, the standardized of time throughout Ireland is attributable not, as is often claimed, to the railway service, but rather to the mail coach service.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Diary of John Lees, 16 Sept. 1785. As early as 1785, four years before their introduction to Ireland, he travelled to London to consult the postmaster-general about the 'plan lately adopted in England for the conveying the mails in Mail Coaches.'

<sup>240</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 619, 663. Timetables were synchronized with the locked carriage clock carried by the mail guards who were also required to keep time sheets recording the time of arrival and departure of coaches. The timepieces worked from a single clock in Dublin, most likely the one on the G.P.O.



Following the Act of Union, the Post Office in Ireland was once again under the control of and answerable to the Westminster parliament, although it remained independent of the British Post Office. It would be a decade before the full ramifications of that change would register in the General Post Office in Dublin. When John Lees died on 3 November 1811, he was succeeded by his son, Edward, who had been acting secretary since 1803. Whereas John had thrived under the old regime in which nepotism, pluralism, cronyism, lax regulation, poor record-keeping and little or no transparency were the norm, Edward had to contend with an unprecedented level of scrutiny from Westminster as he sought to manage the newly configured Post Office in Ireland during the post-Union era.

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building and each local postmaster had to organise his work schedule to coincide with the arrival and departure of the mail coach.

## Chapter four

### The onset of reform and rapid modernisation: readying the Irish Post Office for serving the United Kingdom, 1803-31

This chapter begins in 1803 when John Lees's son, Edward, became *de facto* head of the Irish Post Office and ends with his enforced retirement and the reunification of the Irish and British Post Offices in 1831. During that period Westminster's *laissez-faire* attitude towards the actual running of the Irish Post Office gave way, particularly from 1831 onwards, to a much firmer, interventionist and more tightly regulatory approach. This chapter will show how the modernisation of the post during those years (notably the doubling in the number of post-towns and the unprecedented speed of the service, especially at sea) was achieved despite mismanagement and widespread corruption within the Post Office. It will also illustrate how in the wake of the Act of Union (1800) the Post Office in Ireland played a vital role in helping the Westminster and Dublin Castle administrations transition from the British 'composite state' framework and achieve the goal of more integrated, efficient and effective governance of Ireland within the evolving new institutional framework for government of the United Kingdom. This complex and large-scale process was facilitated by ensuring the communications infrastructure between London and Dublin and the provinces was improved on an ongoing basis. It was merchants, traders and retailers who led the way in driving the modernisation of the post and their requirements were now recognised as being as important as those of state administration – hence, the duke of Richmond, postmaster-general's boast in 1834 that the Post Office 'in all its operations is more closely connected with the interests, accommodations, and personal feelings of every class of his Majesty's subjects, than any other branch of the state'.<sup>1</sup>

Given the widening pool of service users in this period, the attitudes and expectations of the Irish public in respect of the Post Office are surveyed. As in previous chapters, the forces that drove the growth of the post, specifically in terms of the mileage covered, the mushrooming of new post-towns, and accelerated speed of the service (especially between 1805 and 1831), are identified. The process whereby the Post Office came to be regarded as a visible and acceptable department of state is traced. In this context, particular attention is devoted to the opening of the massive new G.P.O. premises on Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street), Dublin in 1814 and to highlighting the manner in which the state administration in Dublin Castle consciously

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<sup>1</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 9, 1834 [48] xlix, 407.

capitalised on the popularity of the Post Office to project a favourable image of itself in the eyes of the Irish public.

During this second part of the independence interlude, there were two distinct phases in evolution of the Post Office in Ireland – 1803-15 and 1815-31. In the first phase, immediately after the Act of Union, Westminster was preoccupied with the financing the war against France. So long as the Irish Post Office provided the service expected of it and a much needed financial contribution towards the cost of the war, it was largely left to run its own affairs. It operated much as it did before, continuing to serve Dublin Castle in its conduct of business and, when necessary, accessed sensitive information for Castle authorities by intercepting letters and informing the Castle of their contents. The second phase began after the Battle of Waterloo and ended with the reunification of the Irish and British Post Offices. Following the defeat of Napoleon the Westminster parliament could devote more resources to restructuring the state administration, including the Irish Post Office, to serve the newly instituted United Kingdom. This new-found attention gave rise to a succession of inquiries and published reports replete with commentary on the multiple abuses and inefficiencies that had for decades been deeply engrained in the mentality, culture and operations of Irish Post Office personnel.

The momentum of the advances made during John Lees's term as secretary was maintained during his son's time in office. Between 1803 and 1831 the number of post-towns increase from 281 to 427.<sup>2</sup> Although there are no figures for the scale of the increase in the volume of letters carried, the average number of letters passing through the Dublin office in the month of August 1821 was 13,702 (7,267 from Dublin to the country and 6,416 from the country to Dublin).<sup>3</sup> The increase in the income of the Irish Post Office and the rise in the number of people employed by it reflect an increase in the volume of letters processed in the system. Furthermore, the Post Office gross revenue increased by 109% from £118,435. 8s. 8d. in 1805, to £247,711 in 1831.<sup>4</sup> The number employed in the Post Office in Dublin in 1797 was 125; by 1823 this had

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<sup>2</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1803), pp 139-40; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1830), pp 68-72.

<sup>3</sup> *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post-office revenue, United Kingdom: part II. Ireland*, p. 7, H.C. 1829 (353), xii, 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Nineteenth report ...*, p. 352; *First report from the Select Committee on postage; ; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, p. 511, H.C. 1837- 38 (278) xx, pt. i.

increased to 310.<sup>5</sup> The number of mail-coaches operating increased dramatically from just four in 1803 to fourteen and the number of Penny Post receiving offices in Dublin rose from thirteen (for city mail) and twelve (for country mail) to fifty-one city and forty-two country.<sup>6</sup> During this era, especially up until 1815, the Post Office's supply of revenue to the state was important when war with France was reaching an expensive climax: its importance was reflected in the introduction of four postage rate increases between 1805 and 1814.

When Edward Lees began running the Irish Post Office from 1803, he attempted to do so in the style that his father before him had done. However, by 1810 it was clear that this would no longer be possible in an era of vigorous monitoring which was followed by a drive for reform of the institution. Unfortunately no personal papers have come to light thus far concerning Edward Lees. Unlike his father who corresponded with prominent figures such as Auckland and whose name therefore regularly appears in state papers, Edward appears not to have done. Equally, no private letters seem to have survived. All available information about him is therefore derived from newspaper reports, parliamentary reports or commentary featured in C. P. O'Neill's 1831 publication.<sup>7</sup> His time as secretary coincided with many major improvements, most notably the speed at which the mails were transported, and significant expansion in the network in both Dublin and the provinces, although how much of an input Edward had in achieving these advances is impossible to ascertain owing to the dearth of source material. He never received bad press; quite the opposite, in fact. In 1831, when news of his dismissal was announced, the newspapers expressed regret. Yet, notwithstanding his popularity, in his capacity as secretary he was involved in corruption, the most notorious instance involving the so-called Suspension fund.

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<sup>5</sup> *Nineteenth report ...*, pp 418-21; *First report from the Select Committee on postage*, pp 200-37.

<sup>6</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1803), p. 141; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1830), pp 72-3.

<sup>7</sup> C. P. O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831 when Sir Edward Lees was removed from the establishment in a letter to ... Lord Melbourne* (Dublin?, 1831). This publication has to be read with some caution. O'Neill held a position in the Post Office but was sacked by Lees in 1826. In 1831 when Edward Lees was sacked from the Irish Post Office, a pamphlet entitled *The General Post Office in Ireland* was published. This pamphlet was an attempt to clear the good name of Edward Lees and was believed to have been published by Lees himself. O'Neill published a rebuttal – a blistering attack on Lees – and revealed much of the inner workings of the Post Office. It may be conceived as being impartial and biased. However, O'Neill backed up all his facts with evidence taken directly from parliamentary reports. He possessed local knowledge (unavailable to the commissioners) about the Lees' roles within the Post Office and about the close relationship between the Drapers and the Lees.

### Edward Lees as secretary and parliamentary investigations of the Irish Post Office

Edward (b. 30 March 1783) was the fourth son of John Lees and his wife, Mary. Unlike his five brothers, he did not go to university; instead he began working as his father's assistant in the Post Office in 1801 at the age of eighteen. Ten years later, he officially and automatically succeeded his father as secretary, proof that the nepotism that had long existed in the Post Office was still at work.<sup>8</sup> For the first year after he entered the Post Office he worked in various departments including the inland and sorting branches at the Dublin office.<sup>9</sup> In 1802 he spent several months in Belfast working under the supervision of postmaster Thomas Whinnery (sometimes Whiney), one of John Lees's most valued spies.<sup>10</sup> The following year he returned to Dublin and alongside his father took on the position of joint secretary of the Post Office, having been appointed by letter patent on 25 March 1801. Since the terms of the patent conferred a benefit of survivorship, Edward continued as secretary following the death of his father in 1811: by then he was twenty-eight.<sup>11</sup> Like his father, Edward treated the Post Office almost as a family business. He employed family and friends, paying them exorbitant wages often disguised as expenses, he moved his mistress into the G.P.O., and provided his brother, Harcourt, with an office at public expense, also in the G.P.O.<sup>12</sup>

Like his father, Edward appears to have been an able administrator who presided over an expanding, improving service. Whereas there is some doubt about how John Lees made his fortune, whether through shrewd investments and or corruption, in Edward's case, it is certain that he was engaged in corrupt practices. Compared with his father who presided over an independent Irish Post Office and in practice answered to no one, Edward operated in a very different milieu. He was answerable to the Westminster parliament which appointed a succession of parliamentary commissioners to enquire into fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments associated with the Post Office in Ireland. These commissioners produced two lengthy and damning reports, the first (already discussed) published in 1810, another in 1829, and a shorter report which appeared in 1817. This highlighting of many inefficiencies rectified in the British Post Office years earlier which persisted in the Irish Office, and exposed several additional abuses. Remarkably, Edward survived the first two reports. It was not until the 1829

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<sup>8</sup> *Ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland. General Post-Office (Ireland)*, p. 459, 1810 (5) x, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 459.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office*, pp 48-54.

report was published that the full extent of Edward's misconduct and mismanagement was exposed and he was retired from the Post Office in Ireland.

A second important factor that changed the environment in which Edward operated was the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 and the subsequent diminution of military threats to Britain via Ireland. Furthermore, the embers of the United Irishmen had been snuffed out following Robert Emmet's failed rising in 1803. Whereas during the crisis of the late 1790s John Lees rendered good service to Dublin Castle through his intelligence gathering, during the subsequent peacetime coinciding with Edward's tenure, the authorities were not so reliant upon his services: they were certainly no longer willing to turn a blind eye to his questionable administrative practice as they had done to John's in the past.

The first inkling of how bad the Lees' management of the Post Office since the mid-1780s was came in the *Ninth report of the commissioners appointed to enquire into the fees, gratuities, perquisites, and emoluments, which are or have been lately received in certain public offices in Ireland; and also, to examine into any abuses which may exist in the same; and into the present mode of receiving, collecting, issuing, and accounting, for public money in Ireland* and its supplement in 1810.<sup>13</sup> Its damning findings in respect of John Lees's management have already been discussed in the previous chapter. It is striking that in the medium term, this hard-hitting report had little impact within the Post Office in Ireland. This was in sharp contrast with the fallout from the 1829 report. Why this was so? There were a number of contributory factors. As already stated, while Britain was preoccupied with the war against France, Westminster parliament had no desire to tackle problems in the management of the Irish Post Office. Furthermore, two new Postmaster Generals were appointed in 1807 – Charles Henry St John O'Neill, first Earl O'Neill and Richard Le Poer Trench, second Earl of Clancarty (later first Marquess of Heusden) – and it may have been hoped that their planned reforms would work. Indeed, it is clear from the *Ninth report* that Trench had set about implementing changes:

... the present Postmasters General of Ireland soon after their appointment,  
... appear to have directed their earnest attention to the system of  
management existing in the General Post Office, and with a view to

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<sup>13</sup> Supplement to the *Ninth report*, 95.

correcting its defects, they propose to assimilate it in practice to that of Great Britain.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, Trench's term of office was short-lived: he had left by 1809 and his departure ended any attempt at reform.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Edward, who had been acting secretary for less than six years when the *Ninth report* was released appeared to be doing a very good job. The mail coach network was being rebuilt. The Dublin penny post network, which had been in decline, was expanding; so too was the provincial network of post-towns. During that time the number of post-towns also increased by fifty-seven compared with twenty in the previous six years. Hence, the commissioners who carried out the investigation may have had the impression that the entire postal system was about to be reformed for the better and may have been prepared to allow Lees continue his work.<sup>16</sup> Another explanation for the lack of progress in implementing reforms is intimated in the opening to the 1784 Act which was intended, 'For the better support of your Majesty's government'. It will be remembered that John Lees had been created a baronet, in 1804, for services to the state, principally espionage. Much of the infrastructure of his espionage ring which relied upon Post Office personnel was still in place a decade later. One of most important spies, Thomas Whinnery was still postmaster in Belfast: he would remain so for many years to come, as did several others.<sup>17</sup> That infrastructure was needed. Robert Emmet's attempt at a rising a few years earlier (1803) was still fresh in the minds of contemporaries, as indeed was the 1798 rebellion. The French war was still ongoing and Napoleon was at the height of his power. For these reasons the Westminster parliament was reluctant to interfere with the Post Office in Ireland which was fulfilling its espionage function at a time when Britain was vulnerable to attack from France via Ireland.

Although implementation of the *Ninth report's* recommendations was deferred for over twenty years, a review of these reveals much about how the Leeses ran the Post Office. Among the areas identified as in need of improvement were accountancy

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<sup>14</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> The reason why his term as postmaster-general (1807-09) was so short is unknown. Richard Trench was much respected within Westminster parliamentary circles. Later he served as postmaster-general in England and then became a successful diplomat who played an important role at the Congress of Vienna (1814-15). He was elevated to an English peerage and became Viscount Clancarty in 1823. Trench was replaced as postmaster-general by Lawrence Parsons, second Earl of Rosse –see G. Le G. Norgate, rev. H. C. G. Matthew, 'Trench, Richard Le Poer, second earl of Clancarty (1767–1837)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27703>, accessed 30 Oct. 2015]).

<sup>16</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 379-86.

<sup>17</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 73; *Nineteenth report*, p. 931.

practises and governance. In relation to the latter, it was proposed that three individuals should hold the office of postmasters-general in Ireland and not two as in England. There, the two postmasters-general formed the board of management, and the signatures of both were necessary 'to complete an order.' In Ireland, there were also two but since one and often the two was always out of the country, there was no proper signing off on important decisions. The commissioners recommended that a third person be empowered to sign, and that the signatures of any two would be required in order to complete an order. However, like almost all their recommendations, this too was ignored. As a result Edward Lees was to continue as secretary of the Irish Post Office, almost completely unsupervised, until his transfer to Edinburgh in 1831. During his time as secretary he managed the Post Office in Ireland as though it was his own private company. It was not until the publication of the *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain* in 1829 that the extent of his mismanagement corruption was exposed.

In 1817 a second report concerning the Irish Post Office was produced. Unlike the 1810 and 1829 reports, this was not specifically about the Post Office; rather, it was a small part of a much larger ongoing report titled *The fifth report of the commissioners for auditing Public Accounts in Ireland* which examined how public money in general was being gathered and spent in Ireland.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the commissioners had such a wide remit may explain why once again there was no follow-up on recommendations made in this report.<sup>19</sup> These were the same commissioners who had attempted to produce statistics for the 1810 report but found it impossible due to the absence of records. It is clear that by 1817 some kind of order had been imposed on the accounts, and certain checks and balances had been put in place. Yet, the commissioners questioned many expenses claims, including one for £2,803 5s. 2d. paid to the mail-coach contractors for carriage of a second guard. However, despite the fact that bills were received and receipts were issued, the commissioners were dissatisfied with them.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the legitimacy of a tradesman's bill for £428 for locks and repair of such items was questioned. Furthermore, in the limited number of instances when recommendations made in the 1810 report were implemented, these too were unsatisfactory. Thus, while the 1810 commissioners had commented on the high 'Law

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<sup>18</sup> *The fifth report of the commissioners for auditing public accounts in Ireland*, H.C. 1817 (116) viii, 133.

<sup>19</sup> This report was so well buried that in 1837, when the Select Committee on postage was compiling its *Indexes to parliamentary reports and papers related to the Post Office and postage: 1735-1839*, H.C. 1840 (10) xlii, 1, it was missed altogether.

<sup>20</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 173.



Costs' and recommended a change in practice, and this came about, it happened in a way that favoured the solicitors; the same was true in relation to the handling of 'Surveys and Attendances'.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, Edward Lees's own expenses and vouchers were also questioned. In short, the 1817 report showed that very little progress was being made in reforming practices and that pervasive corruption and maladministration continued. In particular, the commissioners reiterated the recommendation made in the 1810 report concerning governance: 'Among the checks the most important is, the signature of the Postmaster General [Ireland] for the close of year 1809 to 1810, and since 1812 of both, to all warrants of payment for the various services and departments.' This insistence upon having two signatures strongly suggests poor adherence to the regulations as highlighted in the 1810 report. The commissioners also warned against claims for 'useless and unnecessary expenses'.

The last inquiry into the Irish Post Office resulted in the publication of the *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain*. Even though the examination began in 1824, it took nearly five years to complete and its recommendations were not published until 1829. The report was thorough in its examination of the Irish Post Office and even more revealing and damning than the previous two. Post Office officials were brought over from London to compare the British and Irish Offices, and gave evidence to the commissioners. The commissioners examined in detail each position within the Dublin Office and were critical of almost everyone in authority. In total, their report ran to 951 pages, including 838 pages of evidence.<sup>22</sup> Over sixty witnesses were called to give evidence. Not only were the heads of the different departments examined, so also were many of the minor officials, revealing much animosity between management and staff. Many of the latter believed that heads of departments, who were often appointed by patent, were being paid for work that they (the staff) were doing: this proved to be true. For example, in the Accountant General's department, Robert Shaw was accountant general. However, his chief clerk, George Dallas Mills, claimed that he did most of the work since Shaw was incapable of doing it.<sup>23</sup> A similar situation obtained in the important Inland Office, which was overstaffed due to bad work practices, absenteeism and poor supervision. The *Nineteenth report* recommended changes in every department and urged that practices be brought into line with those in London. At

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp 39-48.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp 612-15.

the upper echelons it laid bare the animosity that existed between the earl of Rosse and Earl O'Neill who jointly held the position of Postmaster General of Ireland. So serious was the situation that upon the arrival of the commissioners in Ireland, the Lord Lieutenant requested that they involve themselves in the dispute between Rosse and O'Neill 'which had attracted considerable attention on the part of the Government'.<sup>24</sup> No one could recall the two men ever being in the same room at the same time.<sup>25</sup>

The *Nineteenth report* also exposed how Edward Lees was abusing his position by providing his eldest brother, Sir Harcourt, with facilities and the service of staff in the GPO for his own personal use. Harcourt Lees was a clergyman and political pamphleteer, a staunch Orangeman and ardent anti-Catholic.<sup>26</sup> He was the driving force behind the Orange publication *The Antidote or Protestant Guardian* which first appeared in 1822; he also published many anti-Catholic pamphlets.<sup>27</sup> Much of this work may have been prepared in the G.P.O. in an office known as the writing office, which was staffed by two clerks, John Lee and George Irvine: there was no equivalent office in the London G.P.O.<sup>28</sup> This writing office was established in 1820 'for the purpose of effecting a check on the heavy expense incurred for the numerous documents' used by the Post Office. However, the previous year Sir Harcourt had founded the publication *The antidote, or Nouvelles à la main*, which controversially argued against full religious toleration. At the same time as the office was opened, three new staff were hired – the two previously mentioned clerks, Lee and Irvine, at very high wages (£97 10s. and £70 respectively) and a messenger, Robert Gilmore.

C. P. O'Neill, a disgruntled ex-employee, claimed in his book, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831 when Sir Edward Lees was removed from the establishment in a letter to lord Melbourne*, that the copying office was indeed Harcourt's personal office and that the two clerks based there worked for him.<sup>29</sup> O'Neill was probably correct since both clerks admitted to the commissioners that before

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Harcourt Lees, second baronet, was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and Cambridge University. A clergyman, he served in the diocese of Cashel and Clogher before resigning in 1806 to concentrate on politics as his independent means allowed him to do. Staunchly anti-Catholic, he was a defender of the Protestant ascendancy. He was arrested and put on trial for a speech he delivering, urging Ulster Protestants to rise up against their Catholic neighbours. He lived in the house his father had built in Blackrock in south Dublin. Since he was not attached to a diocese he had neither parish office nor presbytery; hence is need of the office in the GPO: see *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009; online edn., Nov. 2009)

[<http://dib.cambridge.org/quicksearch.do>, accessed 15 Oct. 2014].

<sup>27</sup> D. H. Akenson, *The Orangeman: the life and times of Ogle Gowan* (Toronto, 1986), p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office*, pp 41-3.

joining the Post Office, they had often worked for Harcourt Lees and sometimes continued to do so, but not while working at the Post Office.<sup>30</sup> Clearly suspecting that something was amiss, the commissioners asked John Lee whether he had done clerking work for Harcourt whilst working in the GPO. However, he continually denied working for him while being paid to do Post Office work.<sup>31</sup> It was a similar story with Irvine<sup>32</sup> The commissioners suspected that Harcourt was using the writing office as his personal office and O'Neill confirmed this, claiming that Harcourt visited the office almost daily and often met people there.<sup>33</sup> Although the report stopped short of making a direct accusation, the commissioners hinted that they believed the office was being abused, and like the earl of Rosse, suggested it be closed.<sup>34</sup> In a further instance of abuse of position, Edward Lees franked all of Sir Harcourt's letters and pamphlets for him so that they could be carried free by the post. His paper *The Antidote* received special treatment from the Penny Post. Its supplements were carried free by the Penny Post on unstamped paper signed by Edward or by his brothers, the chief clerk Thomas Orde Lees.<sup>35</sup>

If conduct and conditions at the top of the Post Office hierarchy were bad, at the bottom they were even worse. Although he did not take part in the compilation of the *Nineteenth Report*, the duke of Richmond, postmaster-general, described how in 1831

The system that has grown up in Dublin is this; they have appointed persons whom they call probationers, at a salary of £48 a-year, and these probationers are persons that do the duty principally, because the clerks are absent. Many clerks are allowed to give a certain sum per day to others to do their duty; these persons are called probationers, and receive no salaries at all, but there are rooms given them to sleep in, in the Post Office building, and they crowd round the doors of the Post-office (like beggars at the door of a convent) to get employed at 3s. 6d. per day.<sup>36</sup>

The commissioners examined in detail the work practices of the thirteen different departments and those of many senior-ranking officials. As in previous generations, double-jobbing was common. The receiver-general Graves Chamney Swan also had a

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<sup>30</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 703.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 702, 707.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 704; O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office*, pp 41-3.

<sup>34</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 62, 450.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 744- 5. All newspapers and pamphlets had to a tax mark / stamp applied: this entitled them to travel through the post free.

<sup>36</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on reduction of salaries*, p. 36, 1831 (322) iii, 445.

large land agency business. His first secretary, a Mr. Symes, simultaneously worked for the Bank of Ireland<sup>37</sup> while Mr. Donlevy, President of the Inland Office (an important supervisory position) ‘also held a situation in the Bank of Ireland which [he] occupies from ten o’clock till three’ each day.<sup>38</sup> Absenteeism too was a significant problem. One employee, William Herron, was returned absent for 291 days in 1822. Whilst also holding a senior position in the Customs, he was in receipt of an annual salary of £200 from the Post Office. Herron devolved his duties onto a junior colleague to whom he paid just fifty-two guineas a year.<sup>39</sup> This was by no means exceptional: Heron was one of seven taxing clerks who behaved in a similar way.<sup>40</sup>

One practice not mentioned in the 1817 report which was subjected to much scrutiny in the other two reports was the longstanding abuse of the Post Office franking privilege. This problem was not unique to Ireland. Prior to the establishment of the Irish Post Office in 1784, many inquiries aimed at curtailing this abuse were commissioned by the Westminster parliament, but to no avail. During the period 1784-1800, when the Irish Post Office was answerable to the Irish parliament, the latter made little effort to monitor use of the franking privilege. Before the establishment of the Irish Post Office abuse of the privilege had reached a point that it was having a major effect on the Office’s profits. As a result the 1784 Act establishing the Irish Post Office set down rules that were even stricter than those governing the practice in Britain.<sup>41</sup> The Act included a list of person who were officially entitled to avail of the privilege, such as MPs and named members of the administration, including ‘his majesty’s chief governor or governors ... principal secretary of state ... the chief secretary ...’ and some senior officials in the Irish Post Office. This list was extended each year when the Post Office Act was renewed, so much so that by the time the *Nineteenth report* was compiled, almost all the staff in the G.P.O. claimed to have the privilege.<sup>42</sup> Also about twenty-five charitable societies had originally been allowed to send letters free or at a special rate; by the 1820s this too was being abused.<sup>43</sup>

Among those legally entitled to frank letters who abused that right was Graves Chamney Swan, a barrister, and a partner in the firm of Stewart and Swan Agents (land

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<sup>37</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 85-8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 85-6.

agents). Appointed receiver-general in 1809, he continued in office until 1831.<sup>44</sup> Swan's abuse of the system did not amount to fraud, but equally his conduct could not be said to have been in the spirit of the law: he exploited a loophole to the full. Under the Act 23 & 24 Geo., III c.17 [Ire.] (1784) the receiver-general of the Irish Post Office was allowed the 'privilege' in relation to his Post Office business or personal letters but not letters relating to his business. As a land agent he ran many large estates in Ireland and therefore sent and received numerous business letters on a daily basis.<sup>45</sup> He admitted to the commissioners that he received between three and fifteen letters a day concerning his business, all of which required acknowledgments.<sup>46</sup> Swan admitted under oath that free postage was worth £100 per year to him.<sup>47</sup> Rough calculations based on the number of letters he dispatched demonstrate that the privilege was worth at least twice that amount and probably much more, and this was on top of his £600 salary.<sup>48</sup> Soon after the duke of Richmond became postmaster-general of the united Post Offices in January 1831, he dismissed or replaced many of the old officials, Swan was most likely one of these.<sup>49</sup> He had certainly left the Post Office by December of that year.<sup>50</sup>

The *Nineteenth report* exposed the fact that that everyone who worked in the Post Office, from the letter carriers up to the postmaster-general, 'or those of their friends', availed of free postage.<sup>51</sup> Not only did officials abuse their franking privilege, forging the signatures of those who legitimately enjoyed the privilege was also a problem. The 1784 Irish Act stipulated that the penalty to be handed down to any person on their third conviction for such an offence was seven years' deportation.<sup>52</sup> One such case was reported by *Finn's Leinster Journal* in 1828. It was stated that a 'Dr. Halloran .... [who] was transported for forging a frank to a letter, appears to be highly respected in the Colony [New South Wales]'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> John Watson Stewart's *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1809-29); for more information on this firm see Desmond Norton, *Landlords, tenants, famine: the business of Irish land agents in the 1840s* (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 606; see also Norton, *Landlords, tenants, famine*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 606.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 606.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 607.

<sup>49</sup> In 1823 it was decided that two postmasters-general in Britain were no longer needed and that one would suffice. The duke of Richmond held the position from 1830 to 1834. He was sworn in as postmaster-general for Ireland in January 1831 – see *Report from the Select Committee on reduction of salaries*, pp 35-6, 38, H.C. 1830-31 (322) iii, 445.

<sup>50</sup> C. Hope, *Watson's or the gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1832), p. 66. The 1832 directory would have been prepared in December 1829. Swan was replaced as accomptant general by Anthony Lyster.

<sup>51</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 37-8.

<sup>52</sup> 23 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.], clause xxviii.

<sup>53</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 30 July 1828.

The *Nineteenth report* also exposed Edward's mismanagement and hinted at his corruption. Read in conjunction with P. C. O'Neill's *Brief review of the Irish Post Office* one gains an insight into how corrupt Edward was.<sup>54</sup> While O'Neill's work must be read with caution as he had been dismissed by Lees, in his favour, he backed up all his facts with evidence taken directly from the parliamentary reports. He also had 'local' knowledge that the commissioners would not have had; for example, he was aware of who within the Irish Post Office was related to Lees through marriage, and the precise relationship between the Drapers and the Lees. This was important information since so many of Lees' relations and friends held well-paid positions within the Irish Post Office. Among these was his brother, Thomas Orde, who as chief clerk was second only to Edward in the hierarchy of the Post Office. He deputised for Edward whenever he was absent and in 1823 he was in receipt of a very substantial salary (£1,160 5s. 5d.).<sup>55</sup> Robert Shaw, Edward's brother-in-law, was the accountant general of the Irish Post Office (1820-34).<sup>56</sup> Robert's father, John, had previously held this position of comptroller from 1784 to 1794 and was one of the men whom Edward's father, John had promoted when he became secretary in 1784.<sup>57</sup> Edward's cousin, William Armit, and at least two of his relations through marriage, Peter Alma and Anthony Lyste, were also employed in the Post Office. After only four or five years' service, Peter Alma received a pension of £70 *per annum* which he enjoyed until he died in 1826.<sup>58</sup> Anthony Lyester, a brother-in-law of Sir Harcourt Lees, had a meteoric rise through the ranks of the Post Office. In 1812 he was a junior clerk in Edward's office, earning a salary of £70.<sup>59</sup> The following year this had risen to £85 and by 1817 to £182 10s. 0d. In addition to his salary, he claimed £72 19s. 0d. in surveying and travelling expenses in 1812 alone.<sup>60</sup> One Mr. Clarke, a relation of Edward's wife, was appointed clerk of the ship-

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<sup>54</sup> When Edward Lees was removed from the Irish Post Office in 1831 a pamphlet entitled *The General Post Office in Ireland* was published. Unfortunately this author has not been able to locate a copy. This pamphlet was an attempt to clear the good name of Edward Lees and was believed to have been published by Lees. P. C. O'Neill, who had held a position in the Post Office and was sacked by Lees in 1826, published a rebuttal titled, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831 when Sir Edward Lees was removed from the establishment in a letter to Lord Melbourne*. This stinging attack on Lees revealed much of the inner workings of the Post Office.

<sup>55</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 30 May 1820; *Nineteenth report*, p. 609; John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1834), p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> Diary of John Lees, 1 Aug. 1783; Hope, *Watson's or the gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1796), p. 147. John's brother Robert was a Dublin banker and lord mayor of the city in 1815-16.

<sup>58</sup> *Fifth report*, P. H.C., 1817 (116) viii, 133.

<sup>59</sup> *Sixth report of the commissioners for auditing public accounts in Ireland*, 1818 (154) (Ire.), pp 146, 171, 191,

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

letter office with a salary of £70.<sup>61</sup> When the list of employees working in the Post Office in 1829 is consulted, one William E. Lees is found listed as a riding surveyor. He reported directly to the secretary's office, had no fixed salary (only expenses), and only worked 'when called on'.<sup>62</sup> Yet, he was awarded expenses amounting to £2,673 11s. 0d. between 1817 and 1823.<sup>63</sup> These are just some of Edward Lees's relations working in the Post Office; the number and identity of other acquaintances whom he employed are impossible to ascertain. One couple with whom Lees certainly did have a close if rather strange connection was Stephen Draper and his wife, Anne. O'Neill implied that Anne Draper was Edward's mistress.<sup>64</sup> Stephen Draper was employed to supply wherries to the Post Office.<sup>65</sup> The Post Office outlay on these sailing boats was £49 4s. 6d. per month whereas it ought to have been the normal rate of £29 10s.<sup>66</sup> In 1814, following the death of the old housekeeper in the G.P.O. on College Green, Anne, though still married to Stephen, moved in as the new housekeeper and proceeded to introduce many changes. A disgruntled O'Neill recounted how:<sup>67</sup>

Officers who had bed-chambers in the eastern and southern squares of the building, were turned out to afford the housekeeper a more extensive suit of apartments; and what created some merriment among the wags that frequented the building, was the ingenuity of the Housekeeper in breaking a door through the middle wall, in order to facilitate the communications between her residences and the apartments of the Secretary.<sup>68</sup>

In 1818 she moved into the most extensive apartments, lavishly furnished at the Post Office's expense, in the new G.P.O. building on Sackville Street.<sup>69</sup> There, she had eight housemaids, who were paid £40 *per annum*, at her disposal.<sup>70</sup> Not only did Anne and Stephen Draper do well out of the Post Office, so also did their son, John L. When he came of age in 1819 he was appointed superintendent of the Ship-letter Office, with a

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<sup>61</sup> O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831*, p. 46; *Nineteenth report*, p. 327.

<sup>62</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 222, 266.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 276, 320.

<sup>64</sup> O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831*, p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 21. Wherries were small sailing boats sometimes used to carry express mails between Dublin and Holyhead or to transport ordinary mails when the normal mail boats could not sail due to unfavourable winds.

<sup>66</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831*, p. 48.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 228.

salary of £70. The fact that this office was abolished by the postmaster-general in 1823 on the grounds of its questionable usefulness is further proof of the waste, inefficiency, obfuscation and abuse that was ongoing in the Post Office during Edward Lees's secretaryship. However, John L. was well catered for. He was transferred to the British Mail Office and given an increase in salary: by 1829 his annual salary was £410 17s. 10d.<sup>71</sup> – the equivalent of several salaries from Post Office positions bundled together.<sup>72</sup> According to O'Neill such was the level of the Drapers' overcharging for the hire of their boats that between 1796 and 1830, Stephen and John L. were overpaid by £27,818 7s. 6 ¾ d.: this does not include John L.'s wages in the British Mail Office or so-called 'Travelling allowances compensations, Moorings Perquisites &c.'<sup>73</sup> This and the many other similar incidences of overpayment for services and goods leads one to suspect that Edward may have been in receipt of bribes in return for awarding such lucrative contracts. He was certainly implicated in one of the major scandals concerning mishandling of Post Office money at this time – the so-called Suspension Fund affair.

The Suspension Fund, to which only Edward and his brother Thomas had access, came in for much scrutiny in the 1829 commissioners' report which described the fund in the following terms:<sup>74</sup>

This is a rather extraordinary fund, and the disposal of its produce in payments for extra duty, and rewards and charitable donations, seems to have been too much of a discretion. Much of its receipt has been the deductions from officers' salaries when absent from duty, but that could not occur under the establishment of the inland-office as we have suggested. The fines upon mail contractors give rise to some doubt; there is not a provision in all the contracts for levying fines on them. [The fund] gives an opportunity for the exercise of rather arbitrary power.<sup>75</sup>

The commissioners made valiant efforts to analyse this fund and ascertain how it functioned, the amount of monies that passed through it and so on, but to no avail. No proper records or accounts of any description had ever been kept and the only payments made out of it were by Edward or Thomas. Even one of the postmaster-generals, the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp 262-3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp 262-3.

<sup>73</sup> O'Neill, *A brief review of the Irish Post Office from 1784 to 1831*, p. 99.

<sup>74</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 88-90, appendix; evidences of Edward Lees, pp 527-32, evidences of Thomas Lees, pp 568-9, evidences of Mr. Burrowers, pp 584, 588-602.

<sup>75</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 114.



Earl of Rosse, stated that he knew little about it, although he admitted that he occasionally requested payments from the fund.<sup>76</sup> As with many of the other concerns outlined in the 900+ page (1829) report, the commissioners were careful to make no direct accusations in relation to this fund; however, hints of irregularities abounded. The report exposed many others questionable practices in which Edward was directly involved and his corrupt conduct was hinted at in comments about how abuse *could* happen.

In addition to nepotism at the higher levels of Post Office management, the practice was also common among middle-ranking management. In 1823 a Mr. De Joncourt was first president of the Inland-Office; his son was junior vice-president of that office.<sup>77</sup> The above mentioned Mr Symes also seems to have employed his family to carry out his work in the Post Office.<sup>78</sup> It is impossible to ascertain how much time these relatives spent at the Post Office or whether they, like their peers, subcontracted the work to junior colleagues at a reduced salary. What is clear is that certain family names recur. The 1829 report shows at least three Harrisons working in the Post Office – Thomas G was ‘senior clerk’ as well as ‘first taxing clerk and second of the express papers’; ‘Robert S’ was ‘second clerk in the receiver-general’s office’, and ‘Robert’ was ‘sixth taxing clerk’ in the Inland Office. In the latter, two Thompsons and two Henrys (Robert and William) were employees.<sup>79</sup>

Although the 1829 report did not overtly apportion blame for these unsatisfactory practices in the Irish Post Office to any individual, reading between the lines it is clear that the commissioners believed the appalling state of the Irish Post Office was the result of mismanagement and maladministration by Lees who was able to manipulate his position as secretary to suit himself. While much of the evidence taken was reported in the press, interestingly most of the criticism featured in the newspapers was levelled at the Postmasters General, Lords Rosse and O’Neill, rather than at Edward Lees. The *Leinster Leader* ran a long editorial, reprinted in the *Freeman’s Journal*, defending ‘Sir Edward Lees and his able and efficient assistant.’<sup>80</sup> The guild of merchants of Dublin wrote an open letter to the *Freeman’s Journal* in his defence, declared he ‘had always given the most effective facilities to our mercantile interests’ while another editorial referred to ‘The upright and honourable manner in

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp 254-72.

<sup>80</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 17 Oct. 1829.

which this exemplary public official has for a series of years discharged his important duties.’<sup>81</sup> Lees’s popularity may explain why he was not dismissed but transferred to Edinburgh instead. When O’Neill was dismissed in September 1830 the response of the *Freeman’s Journal* was unambiguous: ‘The removal of Earl O’Neill we are far from regretting: all we are sorry for is, that Lord Ross has not been dismissed also. They are a pair of lazy indolent men who were only active when quarrelling with each other.’<sup>82</sup>

Not surprisingly the 1829 report concluded that the Irish Post Office was a shambles. The duke of Richmond, who since January 1831 was postmaster-general of the united Post Offices, when appearing before the Select Committee on reduction of salaries, summed the situation up as follows:

The Irish Post-office I conceive to be a disgrace to any country. It is impossible for me to say how strongly I feel [about] the abuses in that office. I have removed the gentleman who was secretary in Dublin [Edward Lees] to Scotland, and I have done it because I thought he was not the responsible officer in that office.<sup>83</sup>

Lees was lucky to have been retained at all (he was transferred to Edinburgh) given that Richmond abolished many senior positions and fired between sixty and seventy other officers.<sup>84</sup>

The fact that the Irish Post Office was found to be in such a deplorable state, it could be argued, played into the hands of the Westminster parliament. The first thirty years of the nineteenth century was a time of gradual assimilation of Ireland into the new United Kingdom. The Irish and British military finances and ordinances were consolidated immediately after the Act of Union.<sup>85</sup> In the 1820s many Irish institutions were being absorbed into their larger British counterpart, such as Customs and Excise in 1823.<sup>86</sup> In 1825 the two currencies were also amalgamated.<sup>87</sup> Soon after, in 1827 two

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Jan., 8 Feb. 1831.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Sept. 1830.

<sup>83</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on reduction of salaries*, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> R. B. McDowell, ‘Administration and public service, 1800-1870’ in Vaughan (ed.), *New history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, p. 540.

<sup>86</sup> 4 Geo. IV, c. 23 [U.K.] (2 May 1823). An Act for consolidating several boards of Customs and several boards of Excise in Great Britain and Ireland

<sup>87</sup> 6 Geo. IV, c. 79. [UK] (27 June 1825). At the same time there was an attempt to change Irish miles to imperial measure and for the Irish Post Office to charge accordingly. The Post Office rates published that year used English miles but this attempt at standardisation was abandoned within two years. The Post Office in Ireland continued to use Irish miles right up to the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840.

stamp offices were amalgamated,<sup>88</sup> soon the independent Irish Post Office would also cease to exist. The fall-out from the 1829 report was dramatic – in 1831 the Irish and British Post Offices were united as the Independent Irish Post Office was absorbed into the British Office. There was now only one postmaster-general in London and he was responsible for managing the Post Office in Ireland. The findings of the parliamentary report provided more than enough ‘grounds for recommending that the Departments of England and Ireland, should with respect of management be consolidated’ – an end that the Westminster parliament was anxious to achieve in its drive to develop a fully integrated set of departments and standardised procedures for governance of the United Kingdom.<sup>89</sup> Under two new Acts of parliament (1831, 1832)<sup>90</sup> the Irish Post Office was duly absorbed into that of Great Britain, ending almost a half century of dominance and maladministration by the father and son, John and Edward Lees.

During the period 1803-31 the 1810, 1817 and 1829 reports were the most important of the many parliamentary reports or papers that dealt with various aspects of the Irish Post Office. Others commented on the mail-coach service, the number of staff employed in the Dublin office, the packet boat service and, there was an almost annual inquiry or report relating to the London-Dublin connection.<sup>91</sup> Although the above three undeniably paint a very poor picture of the Irish Post Office, there was a much brighter side to the history of the Irish Post Office during this period as exemplified by the highly successful mail-coach system, network and service.

### **The expansion and modernisation of the network, system and service**

Notwithstanding his questionable administrative supervision and leadership, Edward Lees did oversee a Post Office network and infrastructure that was continually improving. One such thriving branch was the Dublin Penny Post. In 1805, soon after he took over as full-time secretary, Edward reorganised and enlarged this network. At that time, the city’s network had almost fallen apart; in 1805 it consisted of only ten city and

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<sup>88</sup> 7 & 8 Geo. IV c. 55 [U.K.] (2 July 1827). An Act to consolidate the boards of \stamps of Great Britain and Ireland

<sup>89</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> 1 Will. IV, c. 8 [U.K.] (1831) *An Act enabling His Majesty to appoint a postmaster-general for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*; 2 Will. IV, c. 15 [U.K.] (1832) *An Act to enable His Majesty’s postmaster general to extend the accommodation by post, and regulate the privilege of franking, in Ireland; and for other purposes relating to the Post Office*.

<sup>91</sup> Parliamentary commissioners and committees also oversaw the postal connection between Dublin and London, including the construction of the post roads from London and Holyhead, and the Irish Sea crossing. A parliamentary committee supervised the construction of a post road between Howth and Dublin. These advances will be examined in a later chapter.

twelve country receiving houses.<sup>92</sup> However, Edward was to transform the system. In January 1810 an advertisement appeared in the Dublin newspapers stating that ‘it was the intension to have a Receiving House in each of the under-mentioned street and place [sixty in number] within the Circular Road, as also Thirty in the country parts taking in a circuit of four miles from the General Post Office.’<sup>93</sup> By 1812 Lees had almost realised his ambitious plan. There were fifty-two receiving houses within the city and a further thirty in the country area,<sup>94</sup> and the number of deliveries within the city’s circular roads had increased from twice a day to four times daily.<sup>95</sup> Edward also oversaw an expansion in the country postal network. Between 1803 and 1810 the number of post-towns increased from 281 to 355. 9 (Map 4.1) By 1820 there were 400 and when he left office in 1831 there were 428 post-towns in Ireland – in all, an increase of 147.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1808), p. 44.

<sup>93</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Jan. 1810.

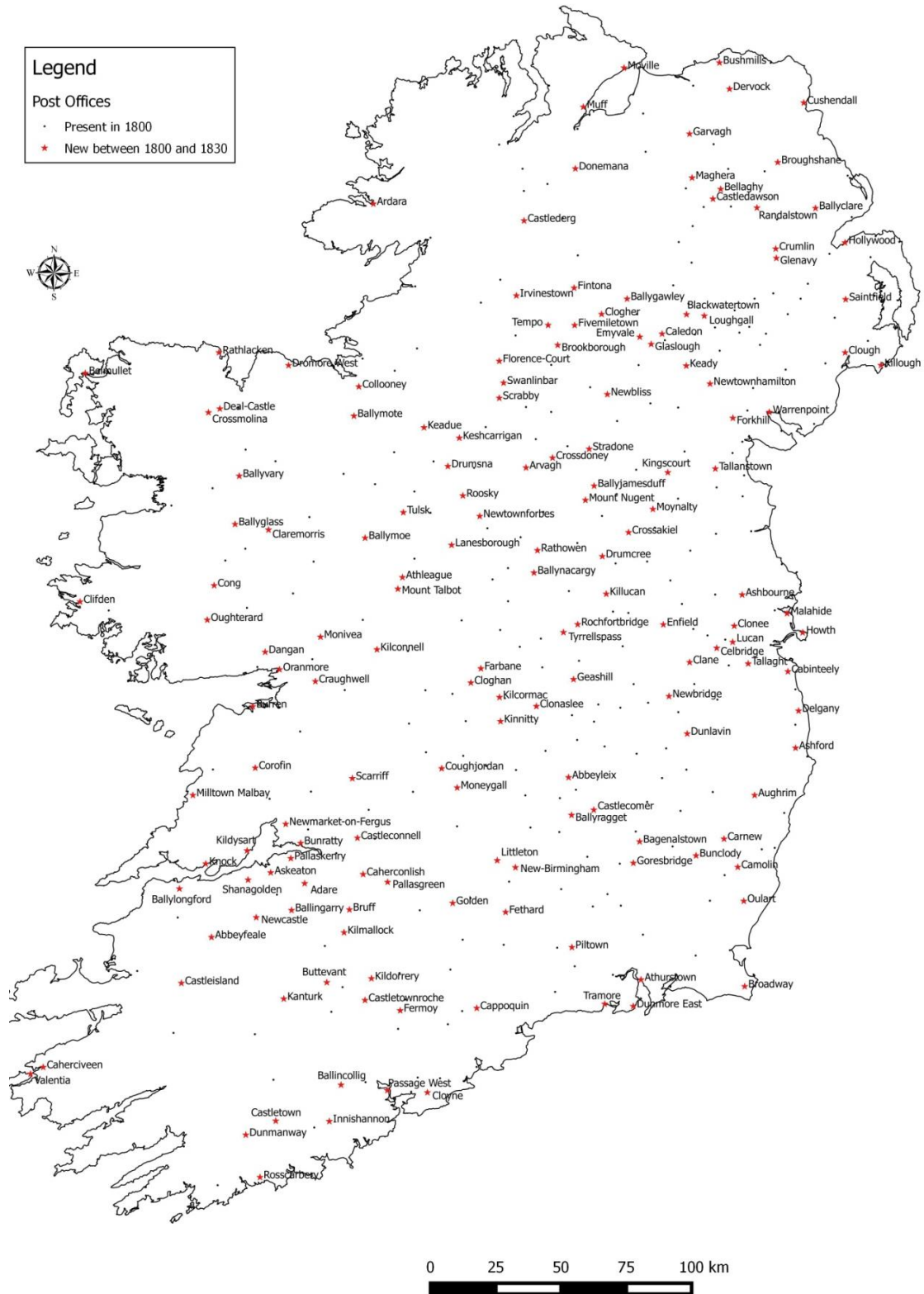
<sup>94</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1813), p. 76.

<sup>95</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1805), p. 145; idem, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1813), p. 76.

<sup>96</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1805), pp 139-40; *Ninth report*, pp 78-83; Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1820), pp 72-6; John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1831), pp 68-72.

**Map 4.1 Post-towns of Ireland, 1800-1830**

**Post Offices in Ireland 1800 - 1830**



**Sources:** Data from Watson Stewart's Gentleman's and citizen's almanacks (Dublin, 1800-30)

**Table.4.1 The increase in Post Offices (1800-30) in five-year intervals**

Year	Number of new offices at five yearly intervals	% increase in five year intervals	Total Number of post-towns
1800			258
1800-1805	34	13%	292
1805-1810	53	18%	355
1810-1815	34	9%	390
1815-1820	12	3%	402
1820-1825	23	5%	425
1825- 1830	4	1%	429

**Sources:** Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1800), pp 143-5; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1805), pp 157-8; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1816), pp 76-80; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1820), pp 72-5; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1836), pp 70-74; idem, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1831), pp 68-72.

Although Edward had little input into developing the important Dublin-London connection, its continual improvement had a positive knock-on effect on the postal system. The introduction of Post Office steam packets on the Irish Sea in 1821 was a major innovation and although again Lees had little involvement, he strongly supported this initiative and could bask in its reflected glory. Edward did, however, preside over the building of the new G.P.O. on Sackville Street in Dublin. The construction of this, the first major public or state building since the Union, was keenly anticipated as reflected in regular reports on its progress in the press. At a time when London had yet to build its G.P.O., this fine new building was a source of pride for citizens of Dublin. Furthermore, the construction of Dublin's first proper harbour at Howth which began in 1807 was very much a Post Office project. All of these initiatives reflected well on the Irish Post Office and its secretary, Edward Lees. How much direct input he had in these improvements is impossible to ascertain. However, he was at the helm of the Irish Post Office when they were carried out and these impressive projects helped conceal the ongoing abuses within that institution from the public, and even helped deflect criticism away from both it and Edward Lees.

Where there were very obvious problems with the service, such as mail-coach robberies and attacks on post boys, Lees blamed the state authorities for not providing adequate protection to those transporting the mails.<sup>97</sup> The Post Office usually offered a

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<sup>97</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 30 Oct. 1812.

reward of between £30 and £50 for information on the attack on a post-boy and up to £100 when a mail-coach was robbed.<sup>98</sup> In the case of another very visible defect in the system – embezzlement and the disappearance of money from the post – the former could be blamed on low-ranking or temporary officials. The newspapers regularly carried stories of court cases concerning embezzlement from the Post Office. However, it is striking that neither the Post Office itself nor its senior management ever came in for criticism in such cases. The Post Office solicitor always prosecuted cases involving fraud from or by postal officials and offered rewards for information leading to arrest and conviction.<sup>99</sup> On rare occasions Post Office officials found guilty of embezzlement were severely punished: in 1800 the deputy postmaster from Carlow, Arthur Wallace, was hanged for stealing from the mail.<sup>100</sup> Although many prosecutions failed, the management of the Post Office was seen to be doing its part in preventing theft and embezzlement and thereby presented itself to the general public as forward-looking and committed to providing a reliable service. Although its systems and way of doing business were outdated and below the standard expected of its British counterpart, certain sections of the Post Office, notably the mail-coaches division, were up to date and progressive, and appeared committed to providing a service that responded to the needs of its customers.

### **The re-animation of the mail-coach service: speed and security**

As already established, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the mail-coach system has almost collapsed and the number of routes had contracted from eight to just four (Dublin to Belfast, Cork, Limerick and Longford). In 1803 a major reform and reorganisation of the service was instigated and in the years that followed, significant advances were made.<sup>101</sup> In 1804 two new mail-coaches began operating out of Dublin to Enniskillen and Londonderry; also, all mail coaches now had two armed guards. The following year a mail-diligence travelling between Carlow on the Waterford was added.<sup>102</sup> The diligence was replaced in 1810 by a mail-coach and the Enniskillen mail-coach continued on to Sligo.<sup>103</sup> On 5 April 1810 a second mail coach routed via Cashel

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<sup>98</sup> Ferguson & McGuinne, *Robbery on the road*.

<sup>99</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 29 June 1812.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 18 Aug. 1800.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Dec. 1803.

<sup>102</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1804), p. 145; *idem*, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1805), p. 159. A mail diligence was a two-wheeled car pulled by one or two horses that only carried three passengers.

<sup>103</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1808), p. 173.

was added to the Cork connection.<sup>104</sup> A new Dublin-Wexford mail coach also began operating the same year.

In 1810 the *ninth report* stated that ‘eight Mail Coaches are dispatched every night from the General Post Office, besides which several cross-roads coaches have been established.’<sup>105</sup> The same report recommended extending the system.<sup>106</sup> Soon after, routes were subject to change: in 1811 Sligo got its own mail coach service which was routed via Mullingar, Longford, Carrick on Shannon and Boyle.<sup>107</sup> At the same time the Dublin-Galway mail-coach, originally routed via Mullingar, now turned at Kinnegad, going via Kilbeggan and Moate before joining the old route at Athlone. Some of the cross posts routes, including the Limerick-Cork route, ran mail-coaches. In 1812, when many of the mail-coaches in England were withdrawn, the mail-coach network in Ireland continued to grow.<sup>108</sup> By 1828 there were eleven mail-coaches leaving Dublin each day and seventeen cross mail connections.<sup>109</sup> At the time of the amalgamation of the two Post Offices in 1831 the mail-coach network reached its zenith with twelve coaches leaving and arriving in Dublin each day and eighteen cross post mail-coaches operating (See Appendix 4).

In 1832 mail-coaches covered a total of 2,207 single English miles, travelling 4,414 miles each way every day, at an average speed of almost seven and a half miles per hour.<sup>110</sup> At the same time in Scotland there were only eleven mail-coach routes covering 789 miles. However, few new mail-coach routes were established after 1831 and the arrival of the railways in Ireland in 1834 (the Dublin-Kingstown line opened that year) heralded a slow disintegration of the mail-coach network as the mail-coaches could match neither the speed nor the security provided by rail transport.

Ironically, speed and security were precisely the important attributes that the mail-coaches had brought to the Post Office in the decades prior to rail travel. In fact, in 1832 the 395-page report of the Select Committee on postal communication with Ireland was entirely concerned with the speed of the mails between Britain and Ireland

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<sup>104</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Jan. 1810.

<sup>105</sup> *Ninth report*, p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1810), pp 48-9; *idem*, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1811), pp 86-7.

<sup>108</sup> Joyce, *The history of the Post Office*, p. 355.

<sup>109</sup> Watson Stewart, *Gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1830), pp 12-14.

<sup>110</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on postal communication with Ireland: with minutes of evidence and appendix*, p. 183, H.C. 1832 (716) xxi, 1. The use of Irish and English miles can give rise to confusion. The Post office in Ireland reverted to using Irish miles soon after the failed attempt to replace them in 1827. However, all the parliamentary reports used English miles after 1827. The map that accompanied the report featured two scales at the bottom, using Irish miles when showing the distance from Dublin beside each town.



and not just the London-Dublin link.<sup>111</sup> Minimising the time it took between the posting and delivery of a letter was a recurring theme in the many parliamentary reports and newspapers articles of the early 1800s.

The previous chapter discussed how the mail-coaches accelerated the movement of the mail and highlighted how although the departure time of the mail-coaches was always stated, the time of arrival at their destination was not advertised. Soon after the reorganisation of the mail-coach system, time became an important issue and in 1809 arrival times began being to feature in almanacs, allowing us to calculate journey times and to track improvements in this regard. Thus, in 1810 it took the Cork coach thirty-one hours to reach Cork: it left Dawson Street ‘at quarter before eight every night, [and proceeded] through Naas, Kilkullen, Castledermot, Carlow, Kilkenny, Clonmel, Clougheen, Fermoy to Cork.’ By 1813 that time had been reduced to 25½ hours.<sup>112</sup> Fourteen years later, in 1827, the journey time was just twenty-one hours.<sup>113</sup> This dramatic improvement in the speed of the service is also evident on the Dublin-Cork line. In 1809 a second mail-coach commenced operating between the two cities. The so-called *Cork Mid-Day Mail Coach* left the Royal Mail Coach Office at 12 Dawson Street at ‘seven in the morning, [and proceeded] through Kilkullen, Athy, Stradbally, Abbeyleix (where Passengers dine and sleep), Durrow, Johnstown, Littleton, Cashel, Cahir, Mitchellstown, and arrive at Cork in like manner at Cork, the second morning to breakfast’: in total, the journey took two days.<sup>114</sup> The following year the sleepover in Abbeyleix had been cut and the mail-coach travelled nonstop to Cork, taking twenty-six hours.<sup>115</sup> By 1813 the journey took just twenty-five and a half hours.<sup>116</sup> In 1830 the time had been further reduces to twenty-two hours and fifteen minutes.<sup>117</sup>

We have seen how the first Belfast to Dublin mail-coach on 5 July 1789 set out every morning at nine o’clock and was scheduled to arrive in Dublin at six o’clock the following morning, taking twenty-one hours in total; the return trip took twenty-four hours.<sup>118</sup> By 1830 the two daily mail-coaches departed from 17 Upper Sackville Street. The evening coach left at a quarter to seven and on Sundays at a quarter to six. It passed through Ashbourne in County Meath and arrived in Belfast at eight o’clock the next

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<sup>111</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on postal communication with Ireland*, H.C. 1832 (716) xxi, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1813), p. 77.

<sup>113</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Oct. 1827; Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1830), p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1810), p. 48.

<sup>115</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1811), p. 86.

<sup>116</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1813), p. 77.

<sup>117</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1831), p. 13

<sup>118</sup> Watson’s *Dublin directory* (1795), p. 159.

morning. It then left Belfast at five o'clock in the evening and arrived in Dublin at six o'clock the next morning.<sup>119</sup> The day mail train left Dublin at seven o'clock in the morning and arrived in Belfast at eight o'clock in the evening – a journey of thirteen and a quarter hours.<sup>120</sup>

It was a similar if more dramatic story in terms of improvements to the Dublin-Galway route. Whereas in 1810 this journey took twenty-four and a quarter hours, by 1832 it took just sixteen.<sup>121</sup> In 1810 the Sligo mail-coaches left the Hibernian Hotel in Dawson Street, Dublin at a quarter to eight in the evening and arrived 'to dinner' (evening time) the next day. The following year 'To dinner' was changed to 'Five o'clock in the Afternoon'; the total journey time was just over twenty-one hours.<sup>122</sup> In 1830 the Dublin-Limerick journey took fifteen hours and the trip to Sligo took sixteen.<sup>123</sup> Just how fast this travel time was can be gauged by comparing mail-coach journey times with those of other coaches at this time. For example, in 1802 the Limerick Day Coach, which carried only passengers and luggage (no mail), took around thirty-six hours to travel from Dublin.<sup>124</sup>

This reduction in travel time achieved by the mail-coaches was reflected in advertisements for contractors to carry the mails. In 1817 the advertising for contractors to carry mail between Belfast and Sligo stated it was to be carried 'at the Rate of Five Miles per hour'.<sup>125</sup> A similar advertisement in 1825 for the Dublin to Waterford route specified 'a rate of Six, or Six Miles and a Half per hour'.<sup>126</sup> The following year, when contracts were up on the Dublin-Derry, Dublin-Wexford, Belfast-Derry and Belfast-Donaghadee routes, the advertisement required the mail to be transported 'in coaches of four Houses, and travelling at the rate of Eight miles per Hour carrying *four* inside and *four* outside Passengers.'<sup>127</sup> There were two main reasons for this remarkable increase in speed, namely advances in coach design, and improvement in the country's roads: both advances were primarily driven by the demands of a modernising Post Office. (The connection between the Post Office and the roads will be examined in detail later in the chapter.)

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<sup>119</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1830), p. 12.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *The Post Office annual directory* (Dublin, 1832), p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1810), p. 48; *The Post Office annual directory* (Dublin, 1811), pp 27, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1810), p. 48; *The Post Office annual directory* (1811) p. 28.

<sup>124</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Nov. 1802.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1817.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31 Oct. 1825.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Sept. 1827.

As part of the reorganisation of the postal system that took place in 1803 a second and sometimes a third guard was placed on board the mail-coach in order to prevent robberies that had become common after the 1798 rebellion.<sup>128</sup> These guards were armed with a blunderbuss and a brace of pistols.<sup>129</sup> This measure was cited in all advertisements concerning the mail coaches after 1803 in order to reassure the public. Often the mail coaches were provided with military escorts when travelling through areas considered to be dangerous.<sup>130</sup> Some contractors went to extreme lengths to protect their passengers: *Finn's Leinster Journal* of July 1807, for instance, stated that 'the pannels, sides, &c.' on a new mail coach, just commissioned by the Dublin-Waterford route, 'are of sheet iron, bullet proof'. These measures proved effective as between 1803 and 1810 attacks on mail-coaches appear to have ceased whereas private and day coaches that were seldom protected by armed guards were regularly targeted. In fact the two most 'exciting' events concerning mail-coaches which were reported during the early 1800s in the *Freeman's Journal* were the accidental discharge of a guard's blunderbuss while he was 'sitting in a public-house' at College Green in 1804 and the shooting of a Trinity College student by a guard when rioting students stoned the mail-coaches by in 1806.<sup>131</sup>

It was not until November 1810 that the next reported mail-coach robbery occurred. This attack on the Dublin-Cork mail-coach took place near Cashel, at the Grange turnpike gate, in County Tipperary. It featured widely in the newspapers and the subsequent trial was reported verbatim.<sup>132</sup> This was the first in a new spate of attacks and robberies on mail-coaches. The following year the *Freeman's Journal* reported five attacks, at least three of which were successful for the thieves.<sup>133</sup> In one particularly successful robbery of the Newry coach at Drogheda in October 1812, the highwayman escaped with £2,000.<sup>134</sup> Another two robberies were reported in 1816 – one on the Enniskillen mail-coach in February, and the other on the Galway mail-coach in April.<sup>135</sup> None was reported between 1817 and 1819 and only one in each year between 1819 and 1822. There was a slight recurrence in 1823 with four robberies but this quickly petered out with none in 1825 and only one in 1826. In 1827 *Finn's Leinster Journal* reported two mail-coach robberies, both carried out by the same gang, the first at Gormanstown,

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<sup>128</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1813), p. 77.

<sup>129</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, H.C. 1832 (716) xxi,1, p. 84.

<sup>130</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 17 Aug. 1815.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 June 1804, 3 June 1806.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 Nov. 1810, 11 Feb. 1811.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Feb., 11 Mar., 26 Apr., 22 June 1811.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Oct. 1812.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Feb., 18 Apr. 1816.

County Meath, on the Dublin-Derry mail-coach and the second on the Dublin-Belfast mail-coach at Duleek, also in County Meath. Between then and 1831 there appears to have been no further attack.

While newspapers and other contemporary commentary might lead one to believe that robberies of mail-coaches were commonplace, this was not the case. In fact, apart from 1798, when the attacks on mail-coaches were (as has been highlighted) politically motivated, the worst year for attacks on the mail coaches was 1823, when four such incidents were reported. This needs to be viewed in a context in which there were up to twenty-four coaches leaving or arriving in Dublin each day, totalling in excess of 8,000 journeys each year. On the other hand, attacks on unprotected private and stage coaches were often carried out. Thus, there were in fact very few attacks, proving that the mail-coaches did provide a secure service, although this did not mean that the Post Office or the travelling public were complacent about the threat of attack.

Robberies of mail coaches were perceived by many as attacks on the state. As highlighted in chapter three, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the increasingly visible mail-coaches were regarded as benign symbols of the state. In the eyes of the authorities and of some perpetrators of the crime, staging an attack or opening fire on mail-coaches was tantamount to attacking the state. This is borne out by the fact that spates of attacks on mail-coaches tended to coincide with periods of agrarian unrest.

Certainly attacks on mail-coaches were seen by the middle and upper classes as attacks on the establishment. This was reflected in differentiated coverage featured in contemporary newspapers. When day coaches or private coaches were robbed, these episodes were reported in a line or two in the newspapers, or mentioned in court cases. By contrast, robberies of mail-coaches often took up inches of newspaper columns and trials of those highway men involved were usually sensationally reported. One such example was the trial of John Magrath and his accomplices who, while robbing the mail-coach in April 1801 at Cherry-Hill between Monasterevin and Kildare, wounded a Mr. Blood, an attorney, who later died from his wounds.<sup>136</sup> Magrath was caught the following June, when attempting to pass off some of the notes robbed from the mail-coach.<sup>137</sup> His trial and that of his co-accused was covered in many newspapers, as was their hanging.<sup>138</sup> Robbing a mail-coach was a hanging offence, and the sentence was always carried out near the spot where the offence was committed. In January 1802

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1801.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1801.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1801, 6 Aug. 1801, 22 Dec. 1801.

there were three hangings for mail-coach robbery: James Mathews was hanged on the Dublin-Wicklow road where he had robbed a mail-coach. Brothers Patrick and John Mooney were executed for stopping and robbing the mail-coach at Knocknagee, County Kildare: they were hanged at the spot where the robbery was committed, near Col. Bruen's wall, on the road to Carlow.<sup>139</sup> The fact that in contrast with other hanging offences which were often commuted to transportation, those condemned for mail-coach robberies did not have their sentences commuted illustrates how seriously the authorities viewed this crime.

In the years 1800 to 1830 there were several instances where although shots were fired at mail-coaches and their escort, no attempt was made to stop or rob the coach.<sup>140</sup> Such attacks may reflect growing popular discontent or frustration with government or authority among the lower classes over their living and employment conditions. A shot at a mail-coach (decorated with royal insignia) which was likely speed up at the sound of a shot, could be interpreted as a means of venting that frustration, be it political or personal. Highwaymen were often looked up to by the lower classes as heroes and were eulogised in poems, songs and folklore. One such song, still popular today, is *Brennon on the moor*. Whilst a familiar sight in their daily lives, the contents of mail-coaches would have been alien to the labouring population who had little or no recourse to the postal service. When they travelled, the lower classes tended to use the day coaches or the new 'bians' (named after Charles Bianconi) which were cheap and began making their appearance in 1815. These bians were also used by the Post Office to carry mail on many cross routes: they will be examined in more detail later.<sup>141</sup>

The mail-coach service in Ireland differed in many ways from that in England. In Ireland, with the exception of the Waterford route on which contractors paid a toll, all tolls were paid by the Post Office.<sup>142</sup> In England the mail coaches were exempt from tolls until 1812.<sup>143</sup> In 1818 the Irish Post Office paid a total of £7,444 19s. 0¼d. on tolls, including £3,229 7s. 2¼d. to John Anderson for tolls on the Clonmel to Cashel road, and £158 3s. 5d. for those charged to the Enniskillen mail-coach.<sup>144</sup> The most expensive toll was charged on the Dublin-Cork road via Clonmel (£1,186 5s. 0d.) and

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 2 Jan. 1802; *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 Jan. 1802.

<sup>140</sup> *Finn's Leinster Journal*, 9 Mar. 1803; *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Mar. 1811, 8 Nov. 1814.

<sup>141</sup> Mrs. Morgan John O'Connell, *Charles Bianconi: a biography, 1786-1875* (London, 1878), p. 75.

<sup>142</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on mail coach exemption*, p. 27, H.C. 1810-11 (212) iii, 502.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> *Sixth report of the commissioners for auditing public accounts in Ireland*, p. 502.

the cheapest was on the Dublin-Mullingar route (£19 15s. 5d.).<sup>145</sup> Five bridges were also tolled, including Ringsend bridge in Dublin.<sup>146</sup> Mail coach contractors like Anderson often had shares in toll roads on which their mail-coaches travelled. William Bourne, who in partnership with Anderson, operated the Dublin-Limerick mail coach, was also 'joint Proprietor on the tolls of the road between Naas and Limerick.'<sup>147</sup> In Ireland, one contractor usually held the contract for the entire route. For instance, David Wait had the contract for the Dublin-Derry route (113 4/8 miles).<sup>148</sup> By contrast, in England the practice of contractors bidding for sections of the road led to compaction between contractors, driving down the price. In another important difference, in Ireland the contractor supplied the horses, coach and driver whereas in England the coaches were the responsibility of the Post Office, and the contractors supplied the horses and driver only. In both countries, the guard was employed by the Post Office.

Irish mail-coaches were designed differently to those in England. In 1791 Finch Vidler acquired a monopoly on supplying mail coaches in England.<sup>149</sup> His contract also included the maintenances of the coaches which were serviced nightly in London.<sup>150</sup> By contrast, in Ireland those contracted to carry the mails had to supply and maintain their own coaches, many of which were built by John Hutton of Summerhill in Dublin, who built the first Irish mail coaches.<sup>151</sup> The mail coach system and network in Ireland was proving to be very successful operation.

None of the many parliamentary reports questioned the usefulness of the mail-coach network or system in Ireland; in fact extending the network was recommended.<sup>152</sup> However, the cost of operating the service was questioned as was the need for two guards, and the outlay on their guns, ammunition and uniforms.<sup>153</sup> Commissioners also queried the amount paid out on tolls, and the fact that the contracts for carrying the mails seemed to favour the contractors but never the Post Office. This implies that the broadly speaking, Government authorities in both Dublin and London were satisfied

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<sup>145</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 418-21.

<sup>146</sup> *Sixth report of the commissioners for auditing public accounts in Ireland*, p. 147.

<sup>147</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on mail coach exemption*, p. 26, H.C. 1810-11 (212) iii, 502.

<sup>148</sup> *An abstract of the contracts which have been made by His Majesty's postmasters general in Ireland with several persons engaged in conveying His Majesty's mails ... 1818 (425) (Ire.)*, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Robison, *The British Post Office*, p. 230; *Report from the Select Committee on mail coach exemption*, pp 16-18, H.C. 1810-11 (212) iii, 502.

<sup>150</sup> Swift, *Journal to Stella*, ed. Aitkin.

<sup>151</sup> Jim Cooke, 'John Hutton and Sons, Summerhill, Dublin, coachbuilders, 1779-1925' in *Dublin Historical Record*, 45, no. 1 (Spring 1992), pp 11-27.

<sup>152</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, pp 25, 64, 145, 25, 437, 486, 726, 811.

<sup>153</sup> *Ninth report*, pp 16, 17, 21, 20, 33, 84, 85.

with the quality of the service, costly though it was. As the mail-coach network in Ireland grew, so also did the cost. The following are the earliest statistics for the cost of the mail coach system, dating from the year ending 5 January 1809:<sup>154</sup>

	£.	s.	d.
Mail coach contractors.....	10,360	- 3	- 1
Mail guards.....	7,350	- 11	- 0 including second guard and Sunday mails
Tolls.....	5,387	- 13	- 3
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,097</b>	<b>- 17</b>	<b>- 4</b>

By 1826 the mail coaches were covering ‘About 2,900 single Irish miles, about equal to 3,500 British.’<sup>155</sup> (A single mile in Post Office terminology meant a mile that is travelled over once a day in one direction only. This became a double mile when travelled over a second time, usually in the opposite direction. For example, Mullingar was thirty-eight Irish miles from Dublin. As it was travelled over twice a day, to and from Dublin, the total distance was seventy-six miles. However, the Post Office used the term thirty-eight ‘double miles.’)

	£.	s.	d.
Mail coach contractors....	18,704	- 0	- 9
Mail guards.....	5,201	- 2	- 7 including second guard and Sunday mails
Tolls.....	6,703	- 10	- 11
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>30,608</b>	<b>- 13</b>	<b>- 3</b>

Early public interest in the mail-coaches did not wane and their popularity continued. The state sought to harness that popularity to project a positive image of itself in the eyes of the public, consciously using the mail-coaches for propaganda purposes at the annual king’s birthday parade in Dublin.<sup>156</sup> (This had been the practice in London since 1791.<sup>157</sup>) The custom did not begin in Ireland until 1809 when mail-coaches were first used as part of George III’s jubilee celebrations, in October of that year. One of the main events of these celebrations was ‘the Illuminations’ held on Thursday 26 October, which included a parade and the dressing up of Government buildings in Dublin.<sup>158</sup> The mail-coaches played a central role in the pageantry. The Cork mail-coach led the parade, decorated with a large portrait of the king on one side,

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., pp 16, 20, 84-5.

<sup>155</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 908.

<sup>156</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 June 1810.

<sup>157</sup> Charles George Harper, *Stage-coach and mail in days of yore; a picturesque history of the coaching age* (London, 1903), p. 17. For description of this parade see Sir Walter Gilbey, *Early carriages and roads* (London, 1903), pp 95-100.

<sup>158</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 23-28 Oct. 1809. There were many articles in the paper concerning this event during the week.

‘on the off side the Union Arms; [and] in front was Britannia ...’.<sup>159</sup> The other six mail-coaches were decked out in similar style. This was a blatant example of the authorities harnessing the instantly recognisable, successful and popular mail-coaches to portray itself in a good light in the eyes of thousands of Irish people. Such was the perceived interest in the mail-coaches that the order in which they were to process was printed in the newspapers a day or two before, and occasional comments on how well they looked appeared the next day.<sup>160</sup>

After the success of the jubilee celebrations the mail-coaches parade became an annual feature of celebrations for the king’s birthday from 1810 onwards. It was for this occasion that new and very expensive uniforms were issued. There was pride in the fact that from the outset, the coaches were Irish-made and each innovative feature was reported. One commentator describing the king’s birthday parade of 1810 in the *Freeman’s Journal* recounted how ‘The new Cork coach was particularly grand, and the brass socks on the wheels were much admired, and more so, on account of being Irish manufactured.’<sup>161</sup> Here, the newspapers were reflecting the pride that the establishment and the middle class took in the mail-coach and its thriving network. These coaches were the flagship symbol of the Post Office and provided it with some much needed good publicity at a time when its senior staff were coming under severe criticism for ineptitude and corruption. In that context, it may be no coincidence that the first parade coincided with the release of the first of these highly critical parliamentary reports in 1810.

A by-product of the thriving mail-coach service was the construction of several new main roads, with a result that by 1831 many roads in Ireland were in better condition than those in England. This also allowed easier and swifter conveyance of consumer goods in wagons around the country, though the latter was not as fast as mail-coach transport. However, some shopkeepers did use the mail-coaches to supply goods to their customers. For example, in 1808-09 John Saurin, a fishmonger in Dublin, advertised that ‘he had contracted with the Proprietors of the Waterford Mail Coach to forward to him, and not any other Fishmonger in Dublin all kinds of fresh fish ... in 15 hours from Fishery.’<sup>162</sup> Millineries and booksellers also used the mail-coaches to deliver

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 28 Oct. 1809.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 4, 5 June 1810.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 5 June 1810.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 1 Sept. 1809.



their wares quickly and safely.<sup>163</sup> While roads would have eventually improved, at that time it was the mail-coaches that provided the stimulus.

Unlike in other countries where the mail-coaches are fondly remembered, in Ireland the important part that they played in the country's modernisation is all but forgotten today, a reflection of the lack of scholarly study of the history of the Post Office. Given that the Post Office (and by extension the mail-coach system) were viewed as a very successful arm of the British state, it is unsurprising that after 1921 there was little interest in studying that system. For this same reason, John Anderson is almost forgotten today; yet, Charles Bianconi is fondly remembered. Whereas Anderson ran a service that served the state and was affordable for only a minority in Ireland, Bianconi is fondly remembered as his service catered for the less well-off majority.<sup>164</sup>

### **Circulating mail in the provinces: bye routes, cross routes and Charles Bianconi's 'bians'**

The mail-coach network routes served as the main arteries through which the mail was transported. Connected with these was another network of cross and bye-post routes which facilitated mail distribution onwards to the smaller towns and villages across most of the country. Along these roads the post was carried by mail car, on horse-back, or in a sack carried by a man walking. A bye post connected post-towns located off the main post roads such as Mountmellick in King's County and Blessington in County Wicklow. In the case of Mountmellick, in 1830 a horseman was paid *3d.* per double mile or *1s. 9d.* per journey to ride to Emo and back, a distance of five miles and four furlongs. He departed each evening at seven o'clock and arrived in Emo at ten to nine. The Limerick-Dublin mail coach passed through Emo at ten past one in the morning when mail for Dublin was put on board. Letters going south were placed on the Dublin-Limerick mail coach that passed through Emo at a quarter past twelve in the day.<sup>165</sup> Blessington was connected to the Dublin-Cork mail coach road by a six-mile walk to Naas, County Kildare.

A cross post-road was a road that connected two main mail routes or two towns usually close together but on different mail coach post roads. An example of a cross post was the connection between Wexford and Waterford. Previous to the setting up of

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1808, 11 Nov. 1809.

<sup>164</sup> Before 1921 the official colour of pillar boxes was red; after independence they were painted green.

<sup>165</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 344; *Post Office directory for Dublin and its vicinity* (Dublin, 1834), p. 374.

this cross post, mail between these two cities was conveyed via Dublin. Another cross post was the mail car route between Ballinasloe, County Galway, and Kilkenny city that went via Eyrecourt, Banagher, Parsonstown and Roscrea. An example of a cross post connecting two towns located in close proximity but on different main post-roads was that which connected Trim, the county town of County Meath, and Athboy. Four post roads ran through County Meath, namely the Dublin-Galway, Dublin-Enniskillen, Dublin-Derry and Dublin-Belfast routes. Trim in the south of the county was close to the Dublin-Galway route, to which it was connected by mail car via Maynooth.<sup>166</sup> However, this left Trim isolated in a postal sense from the rest of the county. The result, as a Select Committee stated, was that a ‘foot-post from Trim to Athboy was specially applied for, for the purpose of keeping up the communication between the county town and that side of the county of Meath’. It cost £15 a year to operate.<sup>167</sup> There were many of these bye and cross posts throughout the country. Foot posts were normally established on request. The two longest foot posts in 1832 ran between Crossmolina and Belmullet in County Mayo and between Oughterard and Clifden in County Galway: both routes were twenty-six miles long. However, the postman only had to walk the fifty-two mile round trip three times a week.<sup>168</sup>

In 1830 Clifden and Belmullet were two of only forty-two towns that had a three-day week postal service: the other 385 received their mail six or seven days a week.<sup>169</sup> The mail cars, like the mail coaches, paid tolls whereas horse posts and foot posts did not. The Acts of parliament that established the Post Office all stipulated that the posts should travel free of tolls. As mail cars were private enterprises that carried the mail as a side line, they were not exempt from tolls. Thus, the contractor, not the Post Office, paid; the same was true of almost all mail-coaches. Because the horse man only carried the mails, he was exempt from paying tolls. Like the mail-coach guard, he carried a horn to alert the gatekeeper on the toll-gate that he was approaching and that the gate was to be opened.<sup>170</sup> How these cross and bye post routes functioned in their early years was a matter of little concern to the Post Office authorities in Dublin. It was left to the local deputy postmaster to organise and operate these routes and he usually sub-contracted the task out to the lowest bidder in an effort ‘to get his contract

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<sup>166</sup> Map attached to *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*.

<sup>167</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 230.

<sup>168</sup> See map attached to *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*.

<sup>169</sup> *Post Office directory* (Dublin, 1832), p. 69.

<sup>170</sup> The post horn, the symbol of the Post Office in many countries to this day, was used to alert the turnpike gate keeper to open the gate for the post rider.

performed as cheaply as possible, without reference to public convenience.’<sup>171</sup> These contractors had the option to use a mail car or horse.<sup>172</sup> Whoever eventually carried the mail was bound by the Post Office oath and timekeeping was important and, generally speaking, good.<sup>173</sup> Horse posts were usually paid £6 per double mile *per annum*, although in a few cases, payment was as high as £9 2s. 6d. Typically they were required to travel at four Irish miles per hour. The 1829 report recommended that the practice of having deputy postmasters operate these routes should ‘cease and the duty of providing the cross post should be imposed upon the District Surveyor’.<sup>174</sup> By the time the 1832 *Report of the Select Committee on post communications with Ireland* appeared, this change was well in hand.

One man who held mail car contracts for many of the cross and bye posts, and who witnessed the changes that took place, was Charles Bianconi. He began his business in 1815 and from the outset he seems to have carried mail on his ‘Bians’. Not long before his death in 1875, he dictated his biography to his daughter: in it he describes his dealings with the Post Office:

At the commencement of my establishment in 1815, which was principally confined for several years to the south of Ireland, the conveyance of the cross mails was confided to local postmasters, who generally farmed them out, and the duty was performed by men who rode on horseback, or else walked. On the 6th of July 1815, I had the pleasure of being the first to establish the conveyance of the cross mails by cars, having undertaken to carry the Cahir and Clonmel mail for the postmaster of Cahir, for half the amount he was himself paid for sending it, by a mule and a bad horse alternately. I subsequently became a contractor for the conveyance of several cross mails at a price not exceeding half the amount the Government had paid the postmasters for doing this duty; and it was not until Lord O’Neill and Lord Ross ceased to be Postmasters-General of Ireland, and that the Duke of Richmond became the Postmaster-General of the United Kingdom [1830], under the Government of Lord Grey, and that the local postmasters were no longer

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<sup>171</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 316.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>174</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 82.

appointed exclusively from one section of the community, that the conveyance of all the cross mails was set up to public competition, to be carried on the principle of my establishment. It is impossible to over-estimate the advantage derived by the public from this change; for the local postmasters, who dared not report their regularity of their own contractors in the performance of their duty, became extremely strict in seeing that the new contractors performed their duties regularly, and by this new system the public received their letters upon an average of nearly thirty per cent, saving of time.<sup>175</sup>

The third Postmaster General's annual report, delivered to parliament in 1857, included a brief history of the Post Office in Ireland, written by Anthony Trollope who worked as a surveyor in the Post Office in Ireland from 1841 to 1859. Trollope tells a similar story to Bianconi, but includes a number of additional details:

In 1815 Mr. Bianconi first carried his Majesty's mails in Ireland, but he did so for many years without any contract. He commenced in the County Tipperary, between Clonmel and Cahir, and he then made his own bargain with the postmaster, as he did for many subsequent years. The postmaster usually retained one moiety of the sum allowed as his own perquisite, and Mr. Bianconi performed the work for the remainder. The sum that Mr. Bianconi received was thus very small, and therefore he could not, and would not, run his cars at any hours inconvenient to his passenger traffic, or any faster than was convenient to himself. From 1830, when the English and Irish Post Offices were amalgamated under the Duke of Richmond, the public, as Mr. Bianconi says, got something like fair play, and he and others were allowed to carry the mails by direct contract with the Post-office.<sup>176</sup>

These two extracts reveal much about transportation of mail across Ireland at this time. Trollope makes it clear that unlike the mail coaches, whose principal objective was carrying the mail, the mail cars catered mainly for passengers. By 1838 Bianconi was operating forty-five routes, running two cars on each route. This service covered 3,000

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<sup>175</sup> O'Connell, *Charles Bianconi*, p. 72.

<sup>176</sup> *Third report of the postmaster general, on the Post Office...* 1857 (1) [2195] p. 61.

miles daily, transporting the mails on eighteen cross or bye post routes.<sup>177</sup> Although not the only contractor in the country, Bianconi was and is the best known. The fact that his mail cars operated between local towns may partly explain this. Equally significant was the fact that Bianconi was a Catholic and a staunch supporter of Daniel O’Connell, both of which would have endeared him to the majority the population.<sup>178</sup>

The mail cars were uniquely Irish; there was nothing comparable in England or Scotland. In Britain the cross posts and bye posts were operated by the Post Office authorities in London. The mails on these routes were carried by Post Office employees in vehicles called mail carts that were prohibited from carrying passengers ‘on ground of security’ and because a heavy tax was imposed on carriages that carried fee-paying passengers.<sup>179</sup>

**Table 4.2 The mileage covered by the different forms of transporting mail in 1832**

	Mileage covered	Average speed m.p.h.
Mail coach	2,207	7.5
Mail cars	4,115	6
Horse post	955	5
Foot post	339	4

**Source:** *Report of the Select Committee on post communications with Ireland* (716) 1832, pp 338-49 and map attached to said report.<sup>180</sup>

### **Improving standards of mail-coach roads**

One interest common to Charles Bianconi, the mail-coach contractors and the Irish Post Office was the condition of the roads, or at least those on which their vehicles travelled. The first phase of the Irish Post Offices’ input into developing the Irish road network has been discussed in the previous chapter. The second phase began when Westminster passed, in 1805, an Act ‘... for improving and keeping in repair the Post roads in Ireland’.<sup>181</sup> Though not specifically stated in any legislation at this time, a commercially thriving Ireland was important to the new United Kingdom government. Such a country

<sup>177</sup> Charles C. Hamilton, *Leigh’s new pocket road-book of Ireland containing the direct and cross roads together with descriptions of remarkable places* (London, 1835), pp 108-11.

<sup>178</sup> His daughter Mary Ann, the only one of his three children to survive him, was married to Daniel O’Connell’s nephew, Morgan John O’Connell.

<sup>179</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on postage together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index* (658) 1838 appendix p. 225 and same report in minutes of evidence, p. 267.

<sup>180</sup> This table is cannot be 100% accurate as routes were in a constant state of flux. Some of the horse posts shown on the map that was attached to the report were mail-car routes. For example, lists on pp 338-49 of the foot posts, horse posts and mail-cars do not match the circulation map attached to the report (Appendix 4).

<sup>181</sup> 45 Geo. III, c. 43 [U.K.] (17 May1805).

was less likely to cause trouble for Westminster, and a successful economy would not be a draw on the Exchequer; rather, it could in fact contribute to it, and a good road network facilitating ease of communication was vital to such economic development. Also by 1805 there were Irish MPs sitting at Westminster who were pressing for such improvements. Good roads were also important to the military, allowing troops to be moved about the country quickly as and when the need might arise, particularly in a context in which the memory of the 1798 uprising was still fresh. Its importance for the military was demonstrated in Scotland during the mid-1700s. There, the military built nearly 2,000 km of roads through the highlands between 1720s and 1767: these roads were vital to the exercise of military control over the highlands, helping the authorities pacify the Scottish clans.<sup>182</sup> Similarly, it was the building of the military road through the Wicklow mountains (1800-09) by the Post Office's chief surveyor / engineer, Alexander Taylor, that brought about eventual pacification of that county. Many of the 1798 rebels had taken refuge in the Wicklow mountains, among them Michael Dwyer. The construction of this road was likely one of the reasons for his surrender in 1803. The attempted French landing at Bantry Bay in 1796 and the actual invasion under General Humbert at Killala, both far from Dublin, also demonstrated the army's need for good wide roads.

The preamble to the 1805 Act comments on the state of the roads and hints at how little work had been completed in the previous ten years:

Whereas many Parts of the Roads in Ireland are too narrow, hilly or otherwise inconvenient for the speedy Conveyances of His Majesty's Mails in Coaches or other Carriages: And Whereas the Laws at present in force are insufficient for the effectually improving and amending same.<sup>183</sup>

In actual fact the 1805 Act ceded too much control of the mail roads from the grand juries to the Post Office. The 1806 Act was an amending Act which compromised on some of the earlier Act's measures, for instance allowing the right of appeal by grand juries if they did not agree with a Post Office survey for repairing or building a new road.<sup>184</sup> The 1805 Act was specific about what was to be done. Section three authorised the Post Office to employ as many surveyors as was necessary to survey all the post

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<sup>182</sup> Magnus Magnusson, *Scotland: the story of a nation* (London, 2000), pp 575-78.

<sup>183</sup> Preamble to 45 Geo. III, c. 43 [U.K.] (17 May 1805).

<sup>184</sup> 46 Geo. III, c. 134 [U.K.] (22 July 1806).

roads. The surveyors were required to supply maps to both the Post Office and the grand juries, outlining the necessary improvements, along with estimates of the costs involved. Alexander Taylor, who was already working for the Post Office, was appointed to the new post of principal engineer.<sup>185</sup> Alexander was a brother of George Taylor, was one of the authors of the *Taylor and Skinner's Maps of the roads of Ireland surveyed in 1777*. He had served in the British Army as a surveyor and held the rank of major at the time of his appointment.<sup>186</sup> He also had a keen interest in some of the toll roads, including the Dublin-Kilcullen turnpike road.<sup>187</sup> Taylor employed at least six assistants including William Larkin, Sir Charles Coote, William Duncan and his own nephew, George, son of the George just mentioned. Between 1806 and 1822 Taylor and his fellow surveyors surveyed 2,068 miles of post roads.<sup>188</sup>

Until the passing of the 1805 Act, the tolls on the toll roads had not generated enough money to allow the trustees to borrow the large amounts necessary to bring their roads up to the required standard. Under the terms of the 1805 Act, for the first time money was made available by central government for repair of the roads. Section xxvi allowed the grand juries to draw down the money from the Consolidation Fund over six years. Taylor and his fellow surveyors estimated that it would cost £1,934,782 to carry out the required improvements. Such was the enthusiasm for this initiative, by 1822, £103,955 17s. 0d. had already been drawn down from the Consolidated Fund for Ireland.<sup>189</sup> Seven years later, the sum had risen to £448,439 13s. -½d.<sup>190</sup>

As evidenced by this sustained increase in expenditure, despite many obstacles, the Post Office did carry out significant improvements, albeit it at a painfully slow pace and on a piecemeal basis. Many hills were bypassed or cut through and many new roads constructed. County Sligo and the Dublin-Sligo mail route was a typical example. James McParlan in his 1801 report, *Statistical survey of the county of Sligo*, described how

Ten miles of mail-coach road, very broad and level, and directed towards Boyle, so as to avoid hills, are already made. The remainder of the line to Boyle is presented and paid for. The mail-coach undertakers, after it is

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<sup>185</sup> O'Keeffe, *Alexander Taylor's roadworks in Ireland*, p. 132.

<sup>186</sup> Lees's evidence in *Nineteenth report*, p. 534.

<sup>187</sup> 38 Geo. III, c. 83. Alexander and George Taylor along with John Anderson are named in this Act.

<sup>188</sup> *Sixth report of the Select Committee on the roads from London to Holyhead; and into the regulations for carrying His Majesty's mail between Dublin and the interior of Ireland, &c.*, p. 3, H.C. 1822 (513) vi, 241.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59, H.C. 1822 (513) vi, 241.

<sup>190</sup> *Nineteenth report*, p. 432.

finished, will no doubt vie in contracting for the keeping horses and even accommodation for running a mail-coach from Dublin to Sligo.<sup>191</sup>

However, no mail coach ran on this road until 1809. One notorious hill – Gallows Hill in Sligo town – remained problematic.<sup>192</sup> This last part of the road was surveyed and re-surveyed by the Post Office surveyors in 1810.<sup>193</sup> A new road that avoided traversing this hill was recommended. Fíona Gallagher in her book, *The Streets of Sligo*, speculates that this road may have taken some time to build as it was under construction in 1814 and there is no reference to its existence again until 1824. The official name of the road to this day is Mail coach road.

Since becoming a post-town in the 1600s, Sligo had received its Dublin mail via Mullingar, Athlone, Roscommon and Boyle, on horseback.<sup>194</sup> In 1807 Sligo's mail was re-routed and connected to the Enniskillen-Dublin mail coach route at Cavan 'from where a Diligence with Mail runs through Florence-Court and Manor-Hamilton'.<sup>195</sup> Two years later, Sligo got its own mail-coach which set out from the 'Royal Mail Coach Office 12 Dawson St ... through Leixlip, Maynooth, Conard, Kinnegad, Mullingar, Rathowen, Edgeworthstown, Longford, Roosky-bridge, Drumsna Carrick-on-Shannon, Boyle, Cloony, and arrives in Sligo to dinner.'<sup>196</sup> The last section, which had been constructed in the 1790s, was that mentioned by McParlan in 1801. Progress on the rest of this route continued to be slow.

Seventeen years after the 1805 Act was passed, many mail-coach roads were still in poor condition, as evident from the 1822 Select Committee report on the road from London to Holyhead. It featured a detailed account of fifteen roads over which the twenty-one the mail coach services travelled at the time.<sup>197</sup> The condition of each section of road was recorded, together with the name of the responsible authority. The difficult circumstances in which the Post Office service operated were highlighted, and the case of the Dublin-Sligo route exemplified those challenges. This route came under

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<sup>191</sup> James McParlan, *Statistical survey of the county of Sligo with observations in the means of improvement drawn up in the year 1801 for the consideration and under the direction of the Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1802), p. 75.

<sup>192</sup> Fíona Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo: urban evolution over the course of seven centuries* (Sligo, 2008), p. 415.

<sup>193</sup> O'Keeffe, *Alexander Taylor's roadworks*, p. 134. The original survey maps are in National library of Ireland.

<sup>194</sup> *The inland posts, 1392-1672*, ed. Stone, pp 272-3; Legg family archives (B.L., Add. MS. 63091); reproduced and published by the Postal History Society as special series no. 5 *A general survey of the Post Office*, ed. Bond, pp 69-70.

<sup>195</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1808), p. 174.

<sup>196</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1810), p. 48.

<sup>197</sup> *Sixth report of the Select Committee on the roads from London to Holyhead ...*, pp 28-33, H.C. 1822 (513) vi, 241.



the control of six different authorities. The Kinnegad to Sligo section was described under a heading 'General State the road' as being 'in the County of Longford From Rathowne very bad road a very narrow surface and large gripes with some very dangerous bridges between Edgeworth's Town and Longford.'<sup>198</sup> Under the heading 'State of Road For Twelve Months past' the same road was described thus;

Part of this road has been in excellent condition but some parts are in a wretched state. Through county of Leitrim from Rusky, surface smooth, but heavy with bad material. From Drumsna to James Town County of Roscommon for twelve months the road was very bad, scarcely travelling at a walking pace; from thence to Carrick so bad, that passengers are obliged to walk, and carriage scarcely, even empty, able to draw by the horses from Carrick to Sligo. Boundary road in fair condition, and through that county to the town of Sligo, it has always been well kept.<sup>199</sup>

The main reason for the variable condition of the road was that the Post Office had to deal with six different authorities who had different agendas and worked at different speeds. In the report no mention was made of the section of road from Dublin to Kinnegad which was controlled by a turnpike trust, established in 1731 under the Act 5 Geo. II c. 16. This turnpike road was extended to Mullingar in 1733 under the Act 7 Geo. II, c. 16. The section from Mullingar to the Westmeath-Longford border was the responsibility of Westmeath grand jury. From there, the road was the responsibility of four different grand juries, namely Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon and Sligo. Thus, the report stated that the section in County Sligo 'has always been well kept,' echoing the remark in the aforementioned 1801 *Statistical survey of the county of Sligo*.<sup>200</sup> By contrast, the central section was in bad condition and poorly maintained. The report estimated that it would cost £32,214 11s. 2d. to bring it up to the required mail coach standard.<sup>201</sup> It was little wonder then that progress was slow when the Post Office had to deal with so many different authorities.

Dealing with local grand juries could be problematic as they often held views on how the roads ought to be maintained that differed from those held by the Post Office. This was illustrated in the difference of opinion between the Post Office and the

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 31, H.C.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 30, H.C.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

Monaghan grand jury.<sup>202</sup> The road from Drogheda to Derry was surveyed by William Larkin in 1807 for the Post Office.<sup>203</sup> He proposed to shorten the section of road between Castleblaney and Ardee. This would have entailed by-passing Carrickmacross. When the proposal was brought before the grand juries of Louth and Monaghan whose responsibility it was to carry out the work, both agreed to Larkin's proposal. However, Louth grand jury changed its mind and decided that it wanted to retain Carrickmacross on the Derry mail route. The road had to be re-surveyed and a dispute arose between the grand juries of Monahan and Louth. This had to be referred for arbitration and the Post Office was caught in the middle. That incident, one of many, illustrates the difficulty the Post Office encountered when endeavouring to improve existing or build new roads. Nevertheless, the post-roads continued to improve under the supervision of the Post Office.

Several new lines of roads were laid out after 1805. Horace Townshend, in his 1815 *Statistical survey of the county of Cork*, lists many roads that had recently been built, including 'Cork to Skibbereen, through Innishannon, Bandon, Cloghnikilty, and Ross-carbery, a branch to Kinsale; a line of road from Cork to Kerry through Macromp and Milstreet; and another to Limerick through Mallow.'<sup>204</sup> Many of the county statistical surveys produced at that time told a similar story. Also new roads were built to replace old ones, as occurred between New Ross and Wexford. Charles Bianconi, while giving evidence before the Select Committee on postal communications with Ireland, stated that the road was so bad 'in consequence of a new line of road being on the eve of being opened.'<sup>205</sup>

By 1831, when the Irish Post Office was absorbed by the British Post Office, the roads had improved to an extent that they received little mention in the 1832 report. Also, as already shown, the speed with which the mail coach travelled had increased dramatically due to the much improved roads. By the late 1820s visitors travelling around Ireland seldom mentioned the roads or, when they did, they were usually complementary. One such visitor was the American traveller Nathaniel Hazeltine Carter, who described his journey in July 1825, from Limerick to Dublin in a mail-coach thus:

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., pp 48, 52.

<sup>203</sup> O'Keeffe, *Alexander Taylor's roadworks*, p. 138.

<sup>204</sup> Horace Townshend, *General and statistical survey of the county of Cork* (2nd ed., Cork, 1815), addenda, p. 38.

<sup>205</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 158, H.C. 1832 (716) xxi, 1.

On Saturday morning the 9th instant, we left Limerick in the post coach, and arrived in Dublin at 9 the same evening. The distance is 91 Irish or about 116 English miles. Each of the horses belonging to this line has his name stamped on the collar. Our coach was driven by *Bolivar*, and other horses. Relays are stationed at distances of eight to ten miles, and changes are effected with great expedition, seldom occupying more than two minutes. So exact are the times of arrivals at different stages, that the teams are standing harnessed at the door of the inn, the only delay is the unhitching and hitching the traces. Irish horses are generally stout and well fed calculated for strength rather than speed. They are not as fleet as ours. An American stage with an American driver would fly like lightening along an Irish road, which presents no obstructions. I have smiled at the caution of coachmen in this country. They begin to turn out by the time another coach is in sight, always taking the left hand side of the path, exemplifying the solecism that in travelling 'the left is always right.' where there is only a moderate descent the wheels are a locked. With such precautions, accidents very seldom happen. Travellers feel so much security as frequently to sleep upon the top of the coach, although at an almost dizzy height from the ground. We were told our ride from Limerick to Dublin was a pretty fair specimen of English travelling; and if so it has the preference in point of comfort over ours. The motion of the coach is easy, and very little fatigue was felt at the end of the journey.<sup>206</sup>

This extract reveals much about the state of the roads without actually referring to them. We can, for instance, deduce that coaches ran on time and that the roads were sufficiently wide to allow coaches to pass each other.

Another tourist, Henry David Inglis, a Scotsman, travelled throughout Europe and wrote accounts of his travels. In his book on Ireland, *A journey throughout Ireland, during the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834*, he seldom mentions the road except to pass a complement.<sup>207</sup> By contrast, in the account of his Spanish tour he often comments on the roads describing the road between Cádiz and Gibraltar as not much better than a

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<sup>206</sup> Nathaniel Hazeltine Carter, *Letters from Europe, comprising, the journal of a tour through Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Italy, and Switzerland, in the years 1825, '26 and '27* (2 vols, New York, 1827), ii, 37.

<sup>207</sup> Henry David Inglis, *A journey throughout Ireland, during the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834* (London, 1838).

‘mule track’.<sup>208</sup> These two accounts by travellers and the recorded acceleration in the speed the mail coaches travelled indicate was that by end of the 1820s, Irish post roads were on a par with those in Britain. The Post Office had played a major part in achieving this modernisation.

Although many travellers recorded favourable accounts of the roads, the country’s roads were far from perfect by 1830. It must be remembered that Taylor and Skinner had surveyed over 8,000 Irish (approximately, 10,000 English) miles in 1777. The Post Office only had an interest in the 1,765 Irish miles (2,207 English) over which its mail-coaches operated – less than quarter of those surveyed in 1777.<sup>209</sup> As a result, many other roads were in a poor condition. This in part has to be blamed on the 1805 Post road Act, section xvii, which warned that ‘till Post Roads are completed no sums shall be raised for other roads exceeding those for post roads’.<sup>210</sup> However, as noted above, the more stringent sections of this Act concerning the non-post roads were partially repealed the following year.<sup>211</sup> Nevertheless the grand juries were expected to prioritise the upkeep of post-roads within their jurisdiction. With the increased traffic and heavier vehicles on these main roads, before the introduction of tarmac, they needed constant maintenance. Bianconi for the most part used the cross and by roads and when giving evidence before a parliamentary committee in 1832, he was asked to comment on some of the 1,800 miles of roads that his cars travelled over at that time.<sup>212</sup> He stated that some of these roads were very good. However, when this statement is examined in detail, the ‘good roads’ he cited were in fact the mail-coach roads. The poor roads he referred to were cross post-roads – an example being the Mitchelstown to Mallow road. It was said that the only mail-coach road (Waterford-Clonmel) found to have been in poor condition was in this state as it had been ‘mismanaged from various causes’.<sup>213</sup>

Further evidence of the improvements in the post-roads was supplied by the Commissioners on Public Works, Ireland. Its first report, published in 1833, concerned eighty projects for which grand juries throughout the country had applied for funding. Of the nineteen projects involving roads, only one was a post-road (Limerick to Ennis); all others were by-roads, again indicating that the post-roads must have been in good

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<sup>208</sup> Henry David Inglis, *Spain in 1830* (2 vols, London 1831), ii, 136, 249.

<sup>209</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, pp 337-46.

<sup>210</sup> 45 Geo. III, c. 43 [U.K.] (1805).

<sup>211</sup> 46 Geo. III, c. 134 [U.K.] (1806).

<sup>212</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, pp 158-60. Bianconi does not state if it is English or Irish miles that are referenced in his evidence.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159, H.C. 1831-32 (716) xvii, 1.

repair at this time. In any case, the Post Offices' interest in the roads would soon wane.<sup>214</sup>

The Post Office only retained an interest in the condition of the roads only as long as their mail-coaches used them, and a new form of transport was set to arrive in Ireland. The first Irish railway, between Kingstown and the city of Dublin, began operating in 1834 and the train soon replaced the mail-coach on that route. As the railways spread throughout the country, beginning in earnest in the mid-century, they quickly replaced mail-coaches and as a consequence, the Post Office showed less and less interest in the country's roads.

The question has to be asked – was the independent Irish Post Office successful during its lifetime (1784-1831) as 'manager' of the main roads in Ireland? It certainly was, even if improvements were slow in coming about. In its defence, it could be argued that the Post Office was never equipped to bring the roads up to the standard required to accommodate its coaches and the ever increasing volume of traffic. Although the various post road Acts set the necessary standards and the Post Office was to survey the roads to ascertain what work was required, ultimately the Post Office could not compel the grand juries or turnpike trusts to carry out the crucial upgrading; nor was it given the power or means to carry out the work itself. In fact, it is doubtful if it was the appropriate organisation to be charged with carrying out such a task. The Post Office was entrusted with the task as it was the only state body that had a constant and pressing need for good roads and as such was the 'department' tasked with improving the thoroughfares. It did all that could be expected of it and the major improvements in the main roads in Ireland that took place between 1795 and 1831 were without doubt driven by the Post Office. Although the Post Office was only interested in less than twenty-five percent of the roads surveyed by Taylor and Skinner in 1777, its overseeing the improvement of these roads benefitted more than the postal service since these were also the main commercial arteries of the country, and as such the most important roads in Ireland. In 1790 Watson lists nineteen different coaches (including mail and day coaches) travelling out of Dublin: by 1830 this number had risen to seventy-six, some of which left and arrived daily, some twice or three times a week, and others just weekly.<sup>215</sup> The expansion in Ireland's trade was in no small way facilitated by the

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<sup>214</sup> *First report of the commissioners on public works, Ireland, of their proceedings, and an abstract of their expenditure, for the year 1832, 1833* (75) xvii, 373.

<sup>215</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1831), pp 209-13.

improvements carried out on the roads thanks to sustained pressure from the Post Office.

By 1831 the Irish Post Office provided both the public and the state administration with the service it required. While both were constantly demanding a better service, the Irish Post Office compares very well with its Scottish counterpart at the end of the 1820s. In Scotland in 1828 there were 313 ‘post offices’, that is 246 post-towns and sixty-five Penny Posts<sup>216</sup>; this compares with 425 in Ireland the same year.<sup>217</sup> The standard of the mail-coach service in Scotland at that time is difficult to gauge since it was in some disarray due to an ongoing dispute between the Post Office and the many turnpike trusts.<sup>218</sup> The *General almanack of Scotland and British register for 1809* lists five mail-coaches including the coach to London.<sup>219</sup> Almost twenty years later, in 1828, the *Edinburgh almanack or universal Scots and imperial register for 1828* lists only six routes on which mail-coaches operated; by 1835 this had risen to eleven.<sup>220</sup> Quite apart from the ongoing turnpike dispute, the state of the roads in Scotland was very poor and only two mail-coaches were operating outside of the central lowlands, between Edinburgh and Aberdeen and Aberdeen and Inverness.

### **Modernising the Dublin-London connection and sea crossings**

At the same time as improvements in the network infrastructure were being implemented in Ireland, the transport of mail between London and Dublin in particular, and between the island of Ireland and Britain in general, were being revolutionised. Although these advances occurred during Edward Lees’s time as secretary, he made no contribution to the modernisation of the infrastructure between London and Holyhead which was instigated and supervised by the Westminster parliament while the packets were the responsibility of the Post Office in London.

Since the Tudor era, little had been done to improve the important Dublin-London mail route which was long, slow and often dangerous. After the Act of Union, the transfer of Irish MPs from Dublin to London, and the merging of many government departments, this postal link became even more important. These new Irish MPs

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<sup>216</sup> *Edinburgh almanack or universal Scots and imperial register for 1828* (Edinburgh, 1827), pp 55-61.

<sup>217</sup> John Watson Stewart, *The gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (Dublin, 1828), pp 61-5.

<sup>218</sup> A. R. B. Haldane, *Three centuries of Scottish posts* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp 75-100.

<sup>219</sup> J. and A. Duncan, *General almanack of Scotland and British register for 1809* (Edinburgh, 1809), p. 337.

<sup>220</sup> J. and A. Duncan, *Edinburgh almanack or universal Scots and imperial register for 1828* (Edinburgh, 1827), p. 63; *Mail coach contracts. Copy of a further report, dated 13th August 1835, made by the commissioners appointed to inquire into the Post Office Department, on the subject of the mail coach contracts*, appendix no. 1, p. 3, H. C. 1835 (542) xlvi, 487.

required a fast and efficient communications service to conduct their political, business and personal correspondence between their homes in Ireland and London, and as Ireland was now governed directly from Westminster, the administration there also needed a modern service. As the Post Office was a branch of the state, it was the responsibility of the government to provide the required postal service linking the two cities. How the Westminster parliament viewed the link was summed up in an 1819 parliamentary report on postal communications with Ireland, which stated:

Your Committee therefore confidently trust, that as Parliament has recognised in so many Sessions the principle of establishing a safe and convenient road between *London* and *Holyhead*, in order more completely to identify the interests of *England* and *Ireland*, and thus to lead to the mutual benefit of both countries ... In respect to the convenience of *Irish* travellers, Your Committee regard this as secondary and inferior object to that of contributing to the internal improvement of *Ireland*, by opening a more easy and direct communication between it and the highly improved condition of *England*.<sup>221</sup>

After 1801 a succession of parliamentary committees issued reports recommending improvements. However, it was not until the Napoleonic wars had ended in 1815 that substantial amounts of money became available for investment in improving this important mail route and work on upgrading the route began in earnest. Almost every aspect of this work was scrutinised and supervised by the Westminster parliament. The earliest of these was the Committee on Holyhead road and harbour which issued two reports in 1810.<sup>222</sup> By 1840 in excess of 100 reports or documents relating to almost every aspect of the link had been produced. As a result, by 1831 the postal service between Dublin and London was as efficient as it could be for the time.

Some improvement had taken place during the late 1700s, most notably the introduction of a mail-coach between London and Holyhead in October 1785, and the building of Pigeon House harbour, a small basin harbour in Dublin, constructed between

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<sup>221</sup> *Second report of the committee on the road from London to Holyhead; &c.*, p. 14, H.C. 1819 (217) v, 121.

<sup>222</sup> *First report from the committee on Holyhead roads and harbour*, 1810 (166) iv, 33; *Second report from committee on Holyhead road and harbour*, H.C. 1810 (352) iv, 41.

1791 and 1796. (Previously, packet boats were tied up near Ringsend at ebb tide.)<sup>223</sup> Yet, notwithstanding these improvements, the journey remained long and slow. Many dangerous obstacles lay between the two cities. The sea-crossing was hazardous. There were no proper harbour facilities on either side of the Irish Sea. The journey through Wales involved crossing Menai strait by ferry and continuing over the Welsh mountains and onwards to London via Shrewsbury or along the north Welsh coast crossing the Conway estuary to Chester and then onwards to London. The itinerary also included a long trip on bad roads through England. Yet, by 1831 all of these obstacles had been overcome. Although progress was slow, good harbour facilities were built on each side of the Irish Sea at Holyhead and Dunlaoghaire. Thomas Telford, the most famous engineer of his day, improved the existing roads through both north Wales and across the Welsh mountains. This included construction of many new sections of road and two new major new bridges, one crossing the Conway estuary and another over the Menai Strait. The route through England was also realigned and improved. The introduction of Post Office steam packets in 1821 revolutionised mail transport across the Irish Sea, making the crossing safer and no longer reliant on the weather conditions. The result of all this activity was a major acceleration in the speed at which the mails travelled and a much more dependable service for conveyance of government, commercial and private correspondences. Between 1801 and early 1830s travel time for mail carried between the Dublin and London had been reduced from an uncertain number of days and possibly weeks to a reliable thirty-six hours and seventeen minutes.<sup>224</sup>

There were three driving forces behind these improvements – commerce and trade, Irish MPs, and the state administration. There is ample evidence of the first two pushing for a better service in the many reports produced. The fact that Westminster willingly invested in excess of £1,500,000 on improving the postal links between the two countries demonstrates its desire for a reliable and efficient communication or postal connection between the two capitals. It was hoped that these improvements in postal connections would help strengthen both political and commercial bonds between Ireland and the rest of Britain, making it a more integrated, modern part of the new United Kingdom.

Until the early 1790s there were no proper harbours at either side of the Irish Sea. On the Irish side, mail boats had to wait until the tide was right to berth or to send

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<sup>223</sup> *The London Gazette*, 4-8 Oct. 1785. The coach began operating on Monday 11 Oct. 1785 – see *Freeman's Journal*, 20 Nov. 1807.

<sup>224</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 371; *The Post Office annual directory* (Dublin, 1832), appendix, p. 22.



the mail ashore in small open boats – a dangerous operation in bad weather. At Holyhead, the situation was just as bad, with passengers having to be piggybacked ashore at low tide. It took three attempts to address the problem of poor harbour facilities in Dublin. The first two attempts (at the Pigeon House and Howth) did not provide the necessary facilities. Only when a deep-water harbour was built at Dunlaoghaire, renamed Kingstown in 1821, that high-quality facilities were made available and the service became fully reliable on the Irish side. The predominance of Kingstown was confirmed when in 1835 the Howth packet service was transferred there, making it the permanent packet station.<sup>225</sup> Westminster's first attempt to improve facilities was in 1805 when it granted £10,000 to build a packet harbour at Howth: that work commenced in 1807.<sup>226</sup> Eleven years later, in June 1818, an advertisement in the *Freeman's Journal* announced that 'on and after the 1st July next, His Majesty's Packet Boats will be stationed at the new packet harbour at Howth'.<sup>227</sup> However, after the introduction of steam in 1820 the size of the packets increased rapidly and Howth harbour proved unable to handle these larger vessels. In any event, the construction of the deep-water harbour at Kingstown heralded the demise of Howth as Dublin's main harbour. The Liverpool-Kingstown packet service commenced in 1825, using ships in excess of 300 tons which could only tie up at Kingstown. Ten years later, in 1835, the Holyhead packets were transferred to Kingstown. By then Howth's short-lived connection with the Post Office had cost the Exchequer almost a third of a million pounds.<sup>228</sup> Between 1815 and 1830 over £305,389 had been spent on the harbour – more than £57,000 in excess of the original estimate.<sup>229</sup> Conditions on the Welsh side of the Irish Sea were as poor as on the Irish side.<sup>230</sup> However, unlike at Howth, the construction of the harbour at Holyhead was straight forward, and much cheaper. The total expenditure on Holyhead up to 1829 was £165,316 0s 2½d. as compared with £326,082 2s. 9½d. on Howth.<sup>231</sup> The improved harbour amenities would soon be needed more than ever as a new form of power was set to transform transportation.

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<sup>225</sup> Packet station is the term used for a harbour or port used by a packet boat.

<sup>226</sup> 45 Geo. III, c. 113; Francis Elrington Ball, *The fifth part of A history of County Dublin* (Dublin, 1917).

<sup>227</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9 June 1818.

<sup>228</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on the Holyhead and Liverpool roads*, p. 36.

<sup>229</sup> *Fourth report from the Select Committee on the roads from Holyhead to London*, p. 36.

<sup>230</sup> *First report from the committee on Holyhead roads and harbour*.

<sup>231</sup> *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post-Office revenue, United Kingdom: part V. Packet establishments. Home stations*, 1830 (647) p. 548. The figure given here for Howth does not include monies spent before 1815.

### **The introduction of steam packets**

Coinciding with these major improvements to facilities on both sides of the Irish Sea was the introduction of steam-powered vessels in 1821. These rendered the dependence on wind and sea conditions largely irrelevant. Thereafter, only rarely would weather prevent the packets from sailing, and the travel time between the two ports was reduced to just seven and a half hours. (Previously it took anything from fifteen hours, when wind conditions were good, to days and sometimes weeks when weather conditions were bad.<sup>232</sup>) In July 1818 the ninety-tons *Rob Roy*, the first ever steam-powered ship built specifically for use at sea, began operating on the Irish Sea between Greenock in Scotland and Belfast.<sup>233</sup> In July the following year a private company, the Dublin Steam Packet Company, began running the 150-ton steam boat *Talbot* between Holyhead and Dublin. The *Ivanhoe* was added to the crossing the following year.<sup>234</sup> These ships proved reliable and fast, unlike the sailing packets used by the Post Office.<sup>235</sup> The directors of Dublin Steam Packet Company, which included Edward Lees, secretary of the Irish Post Office, were anxious to carry the mails under contract, but the Post Office was reluctant to allow the mail be carried in ships other than those it controlled. Soon the Post Office packets were losing passengers to the new steam boats: between 1818 and 1820 the number of passengers dropped by 44% from 13,128 to 7,468.<sup>236</sup> These losses forced the Post Office to consider deploying their own steam-powered vessels.

At first, the Post Office toyed with the idea of retaining the two sailing vessels ‘as auxiliary to the steam’ and towing the sailing boats in and out of harbour.<sup>237</sup> However, this proposal was dismissed by Nicholas Vansittart, chancellor of the Exchequer, as akin to using a mail coach to pull a wagon.<sup>238</sup> Three steam-powered vessels were, therefore, commissioned by the Post Office – the *Lightning* (210 tons with two forty-horsepower engines), the *Meteor* (190 tons with two thirty horsepower engines) and the *Vixen* (189 tons with eighty horsepower engines). Another smaller steam-ship, the *Ivanhoe* (165 tons, and two fifty-six horse-power engines), was also acquired and used by the Dublin Steam Packet Company; unlike the other two, it was

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<sup>232</sup> *Fifth report of the Select Committee on the roads from London to Holyhead ... 1822* (417) p. 203.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>238</sup> *Twenty-second report*, p. 112.

not built specifically for the Post Office.<sup>239</sup> The new Post Office steam packets commenced operations in the last week of May 1821.<sup>240</sup>

Like the introduction of the mail-coaches some thirty years earlier, the arrival of steam received much coverage in the newspapers. The *Freeman's Journal* reported the impact of the new steam packet on the service within just two days of their deployment:

By arrival of the packet we received on Thursday at the early hour of three o'clock P.M. the London mail on Tuesday and yesterday at the same hour that of Wednesday. Had we stated a few years ago the probability of such an occurrence, we should have been reckoned wild and visionary enthusiasts. But now the period has arrived, when by the astonishing improvements of the roads from London to Holyhead and the establishment of those noble vessels, the post office steam packet, the public may almost invariable calculate on the arrival in Dublin of the London mail, within 44 hours after it is despatched from the British Capitol.<sup>241</sup>

The viability and reliability of steam was emphasised to the public when the following August, King George IV was due to embark on a royal visit to Ireland. Due to unfavourable winds, the king abandoned his wind-powered yacht in Holyhead and sailed on board the Post Office steam-packet *Lightning*.<sup>242</sup> Any doubts about the efficiency of the new steam packets were put to rest in the early 1820s when the average duration of the Howth-Holyhead crossing was halved from fifteen to seven and a half hours.<sup>243</sup> Steam ships were now so successful that the Post Office began operating a new mail route, directly connecting Dublin and Liverpool.

The Dublin-Liverpool Post Office packet service which began operations on 29 August 1826 was established in response to requests from commercial interests in both Dublin and the north-east of England, for a quicker service between the two cities than that which already operated out of Holyhead.<sup>244</sup> Previously it took mail nineteen hours

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<sup>239</sup> See *Fifth report ... 1822* (417).

<sup>240</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 25 May 1821.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 June 1821.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Aug. 1821.

<sup>243</sup> *Fifth report*, p. 203.

<sup>244</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 21 Aug. 1821; *Twenty-second report*, pp 27-30, 273.

and twenty-five minutes to travel between Dublin and Liverpool via Holyhead; now the direct steam packet service took just fifteen hours and forty-five minutes.<sup>245</sup>

**Table 4.3 Comparison in journey times between Dublin-Liverpool via Holyhead and direct from Liverpool**

Via Holyhead	Hours	Minutes
Mail coach Liverpool-Holyhead including ferry across Mersey.....	11	40
Steam packet Holyhead-Howth.....	7	--
Mail coach Howth-Dublin.....	--	45
Total time taken .....	19	25
Direct packet	Hours	Minutes
Steam packet Liverpool-Kingstown.....	15	--
Mail coach Kingstown-Dublin .....	--	45
Total time taken .....	15	45

**Source:** *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, pp 44, 53.

Private shipping companies in both Liverpool and Dublin that operated steam ships between the two cities offered to carry the mails under contract; however as before, the Post Office in London rejected the offer, instead opting to build and operate their own packets, which proved expensive.<sup>246</sup> The service was established in 1825 under the Act 6 Geo. IV, c 28 and commenced on 29 August 1826 using four steam vessels – the *Dolphin*, *Thetis*, *Etn* and *Comet*.<sup>247</sup> At first it was hoped that these boats could operate out of Liverpool, call at Holyhead, and collect the London mails. However, this proved impractical as the boats’ schedule and that of the London-Holyhead mail coaches were not synchronised.<sup>248</sup>

Steam-powered vessels were so successful that within three years of their introduction (in 1824) they had replaced all sail packet boats on the Irish Sea. By 1830 the Post Office had sixteen steam boats operating across the Irish Sea, six between Holyhead and Howth, four between Liverpool and Kingstown, two between Portpatrick and Donaghadee, and four between Milford and Dunmore, serving Waterford. However, steam packets were expensive to build, and costly to maintain and operate. The year before their introduction, the operating cost of maintaining the Holyhead packet service

<sup>245</sup> *Twenty-second report*, pp 44, 53.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>247</sup> 6 Geo. IV, c. 28 [U.K.] (10 June 1825). The vessels, each of 140 horsepower, were the *Dolphin* (327 tons, cost £20,511 19s. 4½d. to build and outfit), the *Thetis* (301 tons, cost £19,216 0s. 9d.), the *Etna* (300 tons, cost £17,380 0s. 8d.) and the *Comet* (also 300 tons at a cost of £16,297 16s. 10d.) – see *Twenty-second report*, pp 72-3.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

was £3,593; within ten years this had increased by 500% to £21,580.<sup>249</sup> These high costs resulted in the Admiralty taking responsibility for the operations of the packet service in the 1830s. In turn, it contracted carriage of the mails to private companies. (This is examined in detail in the next chapter.)

**Table 4.4 The steam packet boats operating on the Irish Sea in 1830**

Name of vessel	Tonnage <sup>250</sup>	Horse-power	Home station <sup>251</sup>	Destination	Year built	cost <sup>252</sup>
Dolphin	327	140	Liverpool	Kingstown	1826	£18,505
Thetis	301	140	"	"	1826	£17,702
Etna	300	140	"	"	1826	£16,297
Comet	300	140	"	"	1826	£16,529
Escape	237	80	Holyhead	Howth	1826	£12,072
Wizard	237	80	"	"	1826	£10,428
Harlequin	234	80	"	"	1824	£13,614
Cinderella	234	80	"	"	1824	£10,410
Aladdin	230	80	"	"	1823	£9,410
Dragon	237	80	"	"	1827	
Crocodile	237	80	Milford	Donmore	1825	£11,053
Sovereign	205	80	"	"	1821	£10,432
Vixen	189	80	"	"	1823	£12,800
Sybil	237	80	"	"	1823	£6,813
Dasher	130	40	Portpatrick	Donaghadee	1822	£8,060
Arrow	130	40	"	"		

**Sources:** *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*; Wilson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*; *Report of the Select Committee on post communications with Ireland*, p. 362.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., pp 471-2.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., pp 444-5.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., pp 546-8.

**Table 4.5 Figures relating to receipts, expenditure, profit and value of postage at Holyhead packet station, 1818-29**

Year	Gross Receipt	Gross expenditure	Profit, loss ( ) to the revenue	Estimated value of postage carried between Holyhead and Dublin
1818	Nil <sup>253</sup>	£3,735	(£3735)	£83,778
1819	Nil	£3,761	(£3761)	£84,558
1820	Nil	£3,593	(£3593)	£84,591
1821	£12,998	£6,985	£6,013	£83,979
1822	£16,429	£13,798	£2,630	£83,790
1823	£17,891	£12,897	£4,994	£87,302
1824	£18,569	£12,057	(£6,511)	£94,084
1825	£18,637	£11,395	(£7,242)	£99,989
1826	£15,077	£12,358	(£2,718)	£92,412
1827	£13,306	£21,942	(£8,636)	£70,000
1828	£12,538	£21,098	(£8,560)	
1829	£12,050	£21,580	(£9,530)	

**Sources:** *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, pp 471-2.

At the same time as the sea crossings was being revolutionized, other improvements were being implemented on the route between London and Holyhead. There were two routes through Wales. The earliest route ran to Chester and along the north Wales where the Conway river or estuary had to be crossed continuing to Bangor before crossing the dangerous Menai straight to Anglesey then progressing on a very poor road to Holyhead harbour. The second road ran to Shrewsbury and followed a dangerous route over the Welsh mountains before joining the original route at Bangor. The London mail originally went via Chester but was changed to the Shrewsbury route when in the autumn of 1808 the mail coach route that had run between London and Shrewsbury was extended across the Welsh mountains to Holyhead. This had little effect on the Chester-Holyhead post-road as it connected much of the industrial Midlands and north of England (including the important commercial cities of Liverpool and Manchester) with Holyhead and, by extension, Ireland. Large sums of money were also spent on upgrading both these post-roads. The prominent engineer, Thomas Telford, was employed to bring these routes up to the required standard. This included upgrading all turnpike roads used between London and Chester, and between London and Shrewsbury; building a new road on the Shrewsbury route across the Welsh mountains, and another along the north Welsh coast between Chester and Bangor. (The latter involved construction of a new suspension bridge over the Conway river, completed in

<sup>253</sup> There were no gross receipts between 1818 and 1821 as the packet boats were owned by the captains who kept the passenger fees.

1825.) At the same time the Menai Strait was also bridged. Here, Telford designed for the Strait one of the largest suspension bridge in the world which was opened to the public amidst much fanfare on January 1826 when the first mail-coach passed over it.<sup>254</sup> Its importance to the postal connection between the two countries was not lost on the Irish public as progress on its construction was often reported in newspapers. A new road was also constructed across Anglesey Island to Holyhead harbour. Over £1,000,000 was spent on infrastructure between on the two post routes between London and Dublin.

**Table 4.6: The amount of money spent on the postal connection between Dublin and London between 1810 and 1831**

Structure	Cost in £
Dublin- Howth road	13,594
Howth harbour	420,427
Holyhead harbour	181,683
Road across Anglesey Island	62,034
Menai Bridge	144,244
Shrewsbury- Bangor road	135,249
London - Shrewsbury road	186,780
Other costs (surveys etc.)	10,705
Wages and travelling expenses	<u>26,460</u>
Total	1,181,176

**Sources:** *Report of the Select Committee on the Holyhead and Liverpool Roads* 1830 (432) pp 34-6; *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, p. 548.

**Note:** The figures for the two harbours include the running costs as well – see *Report of the Select Committee on postal communications with Ireland ... 1831-32* (716), p. 364.

No other post-roads in the British Isles had this amount of money spent on it or came under such scrutiny by parliament, indicating the exceptional importance the government in Westminster attached to developing this postal route. In total, when the cost of building the harbours, roads, bridges and packet boats are taken into account between 1807 and 1831, £1.4 million was spent on the Dublin-London postal route. Notwithstanding Westminster's *laissez-faire* approach to the development of Britain's roads which were expected to pay for themselves, the importance of this major post-road, and attitudes to it, changed significantly since 1785, when a proposal to build a bridge across the Menai was rejected by the Westminster parliament.<sup>255</sup> By contrast, in 1819, parliament acknowledged

<sup>254</sup> *Third report of the commissioners appointed under the Act of 4 Geo. IV. c. 74. for vesting in them certain bridges now building, &c. and for the further improvement of the road from London to Holyhead*, 1826 (129) p. 11; *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Feb. 1826.

<sup>255</sup> Watson, *The Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 100.

the absolute necessity of a grant of Public Money to keep open the communication between *England* and *Ireland*, as no scale of Turnpike Tolls that could be levied would be adequate to meet the expense of forming a safe Road through so rugged and mountainous a country, and as the *Welsh* counties felt very little interest in such a measure.<sup>256</sup>

In 1810, in perfect weather conditions, it took the mail-coach travelling via Shrewsbury forty hours and twenty-three minutes to reach Holyhead. If the wind was right, it took another fifteen hours to cross the Irish Sea. However, sometimes in winter the mail could be stranded in Holyhead for days at a time.<sup>257</sup> By 1831 Dublin and London were a reliable thirty-eight hours apart. The speed at which mail travelled is illustrated using a mail-coach time bill between London and Holyhead, and *The Post Office annual directory* of 1832.<sup>258</sup> The mail-coach departed the G.P.O. London at 8 pm and arrived in Holyhead twenty-eight hours and six minutes later, at six minutes past midnight. The mail boat departed within twenty minutes of the arrival of the mail-coach. It in turn arrived in Dublin via Howth. (*The Post Office annual directory* stated this time was ‘Uncertain, but averages from 6 to 8A.M.’) If the mails arrived before 7.30 am, letters for Dublin could be delivered in the city by the Penny Post first mail dispatch which left the G.P.O. at 8 am, or alternatively by the second delivery which left the G.P.O. at 11 am. If letters missed the first dispatch they could be collected from the G.P.O. in person. Letters destined for Cork and for towns on that mail-coach route were dispatched at midday; for the rest of the country, the dispatch was that evening at 7 pm. In Dublin, if a quick reply to mail was necessary, and if this mail were posted at the G.P.O. in the city before 2.30 pm, it was received in London the following Thursday morning – a three-and-a-half-day turnaround. This was a dramatic improvement from the start of the independent Irish Post Office in the mid-1780s when the minimum time

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<sup>256</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on the road from London to Holyhead; &c...* 1819 (217), p. 10; this also applied to the road across Anglesey.

<sup>257</sup> *Second report from committee on Holyhead road and harbour ...* 1810 (352) p. 38. Between 1 Jan. 1814 and 1 Jan. 1815, of 313 mails dispatched from Dublin Post Office, only 171 (55%) arrived in Holyhead on time for the departure of the mail-coach for London; *Third report of the Select Committee on the roads from Holyhead to London ...* 1817 (411) p. 27. In Dec. 1814 only nine packets sailed in total and only one between 20 and 29 Dec. The shortest journey time was fifteen hours on 15 Nov. whereas the longest was sixty-six hours and thirty minutes (almost three days) over 13-16 Jan. 1814; *Second report of the Select Committee on Holyhead roads, &c.* 1814-15 (395), pp 64-6.

<sup>258</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 371; *The Post Office annual directory* (Dublin, 1832), appendix, p. 22.



that elapsed between sending a letter and receiving an answer between Dublin and London was eight to ten days, if weather conditions were perfect.

**Table 4.7:** The reduction in delivery time (London and Dublin) between 1784 and 1831

	Prior to the introduction of the mail-coach	1785-1810 via Chester <sup>259</sup>	1810 <sup>260</sup>	1817 <sup>261</sup>	1819 <sup>262</sup>	1828 <sup>263</sup>	1831 <sup>264</sup>
Hours minutes		H M	H M		H M	H M	H M
London / Shrewsbury			23 02			17 14	16 01
Shrewsbury / Bangor			11 10			8 23	9 12
Menai crossing		0 40	0 40			-	---
Ferry / Holyhead			3 30			2 38	3 13
Stops re rest / P.O. business			1 15			1 10	1 15
Total time taken	4 -5 days	45 35	40 23	38 00	36 00	29 17	28 06

**Sources:** *Second report from committee on Holyhead road & harbour* 1810 (352); *Report of the commissioners of Holyhead roads, relative to the origin of their commission for improvement of Holyhead road, and the present jurisdiction and duties of the commissioners*, 1831 (298); *Third report of the Select Committee on the roads from Holyhead to London*, 1817 (411); *Second report from the committee on the road from London to Holyhead; &c.*, 1819 (217); *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, 1830 (647); *Report of the Select Committee on postal communications with Ireland: with minutes of evidence, and appendix*, 1831-32 (716).

In addition to the Liverpool-Kingstown and Holyhead-Howth routes, there were two other packet connections with Ireland. The Portpatrick-Donaghadee service had operated since the 1600s. It connected Ireland with Scotland and the very north of England. The Milford Haven-Waterford service, established in 1787, carried letters between the south of England and southern Ireland.<sup>265</sup>

Political and social links between the north-east of Ireland and Scotland had been especially strong since the Ulster Plantation in the early 1600s. Prior to 1718 when a link between Portpatrick-Donaghadee became permanent, there had been attempts to establish such a link, notably in 1662 by an Act of the Scottish parliament. This was not successful. In 1667 Charles II asked the Scottish Privy Council to re-establish the connection; once more, it seems to have been short lived. During William III's campaign in Ireland (1688-91), the link was again established but it was not until 1718

<sup>259</sup> *Second report from committee on Holyhead road & harbour*, p. 39.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>261</sup> *Third report of the Select Committee on the roads from Holyhead to London ...* 1817, p. 26.

<sup>262</sup> *Second report from the committee on the road from London to Holyhead ...* 1819, p. 16.

<sup>263</sup> *Twenty-second report*, p. 347.

<sup>264</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on postal communication with Ireland.*

<sup>265</sup> 27 Geo. III, c. 9 [G.B.] (1778).

that a connection was permanently settled. Although it is the shortest sea-crossing, it is one of the roughest and most dangerous. Consequently, the postal service was always very unreliable, a fact acknowledged by a parliamentary committee in an 1831 report:

The uncertainty attending sailing-packets ... it was found impossible to calculate the duration of the voyage with any accuracy ... in the previous year [1829-30] there were ninety-seven days on which, in the consequence of storms, calms and contrary winds the packet could not make a passage; and the duration of passage is stated to have varied from two and a quarter to twenty-four hours.<sup>266</sup>

As in the case of the Holyhead-Dublin crossing, there was a need for proper harbour facilities on each side. The poor state of the Scottish roads which were even worse than those in Ireland was a further impediment to mail-coach transportation. This was evident in 1805 when a mail-coach which began operating between Edinburgh and Portpatrick via Dumfries had to be withdrawn and replaced by a rider due to the bad condition of the road.<sup>267</sup> The development of the Donaghadee-Portpatrick route was slow. While in 1808 a parliamentary committee recommended improvements to both.<sup>268</sup> In 1823 the Select Committee on Glasgow and Port-Patrick roads recommended that the roads to Portpatrick be improved, that mail-coaches be used on the routes, and that steam ships should replace the sailing vessels.<sup>269</sup> Steam did replace sail the following year. On 5 May 1825 the *Belfast Newsletter* reported the arrival of the Post Office steam packets *Dasher* and *Arrow* (each which was 130 tons and equipped with a forty horsepower engine).<sup>270</sup>

As happened on the other Irish Sea crossings, the introduction of steam made the service fast and reliable. Down to 1824 the mails boats departed on alternate days; now steam allowed for a daily service. Captain Smithett, who worked the route, best summed up the improved speed and reliability of the new service: 'I will state the average passage for 1830: to Donaghadee, 3 hours 18 minutes; to Portpatrick, 2 hours 56 minutes ...'. Previously this passage took between two and a quarter and twenty-four

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<sup>266</sup> *Twenty-second report*, p. 37.

<sup>267</sup> Haldane, *Three centuries of Scottish post*, p. 80.

<sup>268</sup> *Report from the committee, appointed to examine into Mr. Telford's report and survey, relative to the communication between England and Ireland, by the North-West of Scotland*, p. 4, H.C. 809 (269) iii, 609.

<sup>269</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Glasgow and Port-Patrick Roads; ...*, p. 15, H.C. 183 (486) v, 153.

<sup>270</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 May 1825; *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, p. 444.

hours. He also claimed that during 1829 there were only five or six days when that the packet did not sail and no more than 10 in 1830.<sup>271</sup>

Although not nearly as important as the Dublin-Holyhead mail connection, the Donaghadee-Portpatrick link was none the less significant since all mail between Ireland and Scotland as well as extreme north of England was routed through there. Mail from London, destined for the north-east, was also originally routed through this connection. However, soon after the introduction of steam boats between Howth and Holyhead, this changed. On 2 July 1821, within a month of the first steam packet commencing operation on the Dublin-Holyhead route, the *Belfast News-Letter* remarked: ‘Yesterday we received the London papers by way of Donaghadee and Dublin.’<sup>272</sup> By 1831 London mail was no longer routed via Donaghadee, although Scottish mail continued to be sent via this route.<sup>273</sup> The introduction of steam-powered vessels not only speeded up carriage of the mails between the two harbours; it also heralded their demise as packet stations since a steam-power boat by sea was faster than a mail-coach on land. In 1849 Belfast and Greenock replaced Donaghadee and Portpatrick as the packet stations connecting the northern part of Ireland with the northern part of the British mainland.<sup>274</sup>

Further south, the packet service operating between Milford Haven and Waterford provided the postal link between the south of England and the south of Ireland. The harbour on the Irish side was Dunmore (East), nine miles from Waterford city; a mail-coach ran between the two. That this route was the lesser of the four packet lines is reflected in the small amount of money, time and effort expended on it by parliament when compared with the other packet connections. Only one committee was charged with inquiring into its operations and it produced two short reports in 1826.<sup>275</sup> However, the route did feature in the more general Post Office and fiscal reports. This route was the natural main connection between the city of Bristol and south of Ireland which had long-standing trading connections. Yet, although the link was established by an Act of parliament in 1787, work on the construction of a proper harbour did not

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<sup>271</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 201.

<sup>272</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 July 1821.

<sup>273</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 385.

<sup>274</sup> Ayres, *History of the mail routes to Ireland until 1850*, p. 58.

<sup>275</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Milford Haven communication*, H.C. 1826-27 (258) iii, 551; *Second report from the Select Committee on the Milford Haven communication*, H.C. 1826-27 (472).

commence until 1815 when £19,358 was allocated to the project<sup>276</sup> and as the 1827 report into communications via Milford Haven highlighted, this route was not popular with Waterford's commercial sector:

the commercial inhabitants of Waterford frequently, and of Cork and Limerick almost entirely, adopt a very circuitous [route] of Dublin-Holyhead for transmission to London and even Bristol, of their letters, in preference to that of Dunmore and Milford, under an increased rate of postage, which in the case of Waterford amounts to 9*d.* on every letter between Waterford and London.<sup>277</sup>

There were many reasons for this, not least Milford Haven's awkward position on the north side of the Bristol Channel, a distance of 149 miles over a poor road from Bristol city. Furthermore, it had no proper harbour facilities. The packet boat had to be moored out in the bay and both passengers and mails had to be rowed out and to shore in an open boat.<sup>278</sup> Even the introduction of steam vessels in April 1824 did not improve its popularity; neither did the investment of £89,493 in Dunmore harbour by 1830, and a further £108,286 on Milford Haven by 1836.<sup>279</sup> The sorry state of the Milford Haven-Waterford route was summed up in 1832:

Direct mails are daily dispatched to Milford from both London and Bristol; Post-Office packets sail daily from both sides of the Channel; yet owing to the defective state of the line, and notwithstanding the increase in charge, letters requiring an early delivery are sent to the South of Ireland from London by the circuitous route of Holyhead; and letters from Bristol to Cork are sent nearly 150 miles out of their direct line and subject to higher postage, for the purpose of insuring speedier arrival. This route appears to have been greatly neglected by the Post-Office; the Road is hilly in many places, but capable of easy improvement, and being much shortened.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on the Milford Haven communication*, p. 107, H.C. 1826-27 (472) iii, 649; Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (2 vols + atlas, London, 1837), ii, 587.

<sup>277</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Milford Haven communication*, p. 4, H.C. 1810 (352) iv, 41.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, p. 549; Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland*, ii, 587.

<sup>280</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 7.

This captures the attitude of the authorities (both postal and government) towards the link which never became significant due to the prioritization of the London-Holyhead route. Just how much more important the Dublin-Holyhead connection was is evident from the table below.

**Table 4.8: The volume and value of letter that crossed the Irish Sea each year between 1818 and 1827**

	Estimated amount of postage carried between Holyhead and Dublin	Estimated number of letters carried between Holyhead and Dublin	Estimated amount of postage carried between Dublin and Liverpool	Estimated number of letters carried between Dublin and Liverpool	Estimated amount of postage carried between Milford and Waterford	Estimated amount of postage carried between Donaghadee and Portpatrick
1818	£83,778	No account	no service	no service	£9,149	£14,341
1819	£84,558	"	"	"	£9,370	£13,965
1820	£84,591	1,177,421	"	"	£9,334	£14,840
1821	£83,979	1,130,012	"	"	£8,860	£16,439
1822	£83,790	1,073,868	"	"	£8,678	£12,176
1823	£87,302	918,240	£17,712 <sup>281</sup>	224,472	£8,146	£10,998
1824	£94,084	1,033,722	£15,417	244,504	£9,282	£11,016
1825	£99,989	1,168,490	£15,815	247,022	£10,332	£12,409
1826	£92,412	1,184,206	£13,388	250,101	£10,736	£13,386
1827	£70,000	1,148,480	£12,818	296,040	£8,500	£11,000

**Sources:** *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post-Office revenue, United Kingdom: part V. Packet establishments. Home stations.* 1830 (647), pp 471-2, 477.

**Note:** There is no estimate for the number of letters carried on the Milford and Waterford and Donaghadee and Portpatrick, and this would be impossible to calculate as the cost of letters varied on the different routes.

### **The role of the Post Office in facilitating increasingly efficient state administration in Ireland**

By 1831 the ever widening postal network throughout Ireland, the constant acceleration in the speed at which the mails travelled within Ireland, the new harbour facilities on both sides Irish Sea, and the introduction of steam crossing that sea, along with the improved connection between London and Holyhead provided both the public and the state administrations both in London and Dublin with a modern communications network. With the exception of the islands on the west coast, few town or village was more than two days from the capital, thus enabling Dublin Castle to react quickly to any

<sup>281</sup> This figure for Dublin-Liverpool would have been included in the Holyhead figure for the years 1823, 1824 and part of 1825.

situation that might arise. This was important as although the 1798 rebellion had been quashed, other potentially controversial political developments were in train. Catholic Emancipation was promised in return for Catholic support for the Union: when that pledge was reneged on, political unrest ensued. On the other side, the Orange order also demonstrated its potential for generating serious political disruption. During the early 1800s, therefore, sectarian conflict was on the increase. The Westminster parliament had to be ready to react quickly to any crisis situation that might arise. Its capacity to act decisively and quickly was dependent on its possession of accurate, regular and up to date intelligence. For generations, the Post Office proved capable of supplying that intelligence. With the exception of a few pockets along the western seaboard, it was possible to send a letter via the mail-coach system and receive a reply within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. For example, in just thirty-six hours a letter could be sent to Belfast and a reply received in Dublin, Cork and back was fifty hours.<sup>282</sup> Other coaches could, though this was illegal, carry messages, but they were much slower. For instance, the mail coach to Limerick took just nineteen hours whereas the Limerick day coach took thirty hours.<sup>283</sup> The speed of communications provided by the Post Office was vital in enabling the state administration to monitor developments at local level throughout the entire country.

The rise of agrarian disturbance, which by its very nature was localised and sporadic, required the Dublin Castle authorities to have quick access to information from the localities if such violence was to be contained.<sup>284</sup> One consequence of the agrarian agitation was a Peace Preservation Act (1814) establishing a professional police force. As Stanley H. Palmer states in his book *Police and protest in England and Ireland, 1780-1850* (Cambridge) '[Robert] Peel's revolutionarily proposal would create salaried, Castle-controlled police force as needed in disturbed districts in Ireland'.<sup>285</sup> It was the Post Office, through its fast mail-coach service, that made this centralised control possible. In 1825 this Peace Preservation Force, as it was known, consisted of some 4,500 men distributed across the country.<sup>286</sup> Under the 1814 Act, appointments of local constables by grand juries were abolished, and provincial constabularies were established with power centralised in four provincial inspector-generals, who in turn

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<sup>282</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1832), pp 210-12.

<sup>283</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1820), pp 78-9.

<sup>284</sup> For further information see S. J. Connolly, 'Union government, 1812-23' in Vaughan (ed.), *New history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, pp 70-1.

<sup>285</sup> Stanley H. Palmer, *Police and protest in England and Ireland, 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 200. Robert Peel, the future Prime Minister, was Chief Secretary in 1812-18.

<sup>286</sup> Connolly, 'Union government, 1812-23', p. 71.

answered to the Lord Lieutenant.<sup>287</sup> This force was superseded by the new Irish Constabulary in 1836<sup>288</sup> who were even more centralised with a single inspector-general and two deputy inspector-generals, all of whom had to reside in Dublin.<sup>289</sup> This scattered force had, via the Post Office, daily contact with Dublin Castle, home to its headquarters. If a local district inspector required advice or reinforcements, he could expect a reply to a letter sent to Dublin Castle within two or three days, depending on what part of the country he was stationed in. The Post Office, with its rapid and regular communications network, made the centralisation of command and control both possible and efficient.

The use of the ever developing and ever accelerating postal network by the new police force demonstrates how the centralisation of command and control structures for all departments of the state, be they courts, policing, military, revenue and so on scattered throughout Ireland, was made possible by the Post Office. In theory at least, this allowed the simultaneous imposition of any changes in policy, enforcement of new laws and exaction of new taxes by the state authorities throughout the country.

### **The Post Office as revenue generator**

Providing a communication network was not the only service the Post Office supplied to the state. Revenue generation continued to be an important function of the Post Office. The 1711 Act, passed during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) had guaranteed the profits of the Post Office to the state to help finance that war. Once again in the late 1700s and early 1800s, war (this time against France) impacted this Post Office function. From the time that Britain declared war on France in 1793 and apart from two brief pauses in 1802-03 and 1814-15, the war lasted until the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. To help finance this war, many existing taxes were raised and many new ones introduced. Although Ireland initially was spared some of these new taxes such as income tax, taxes on food clothes and housing, many existing taxes were raised, such as those on newspapers, whiskey, tobacco and tea. Between 1801 and 1815, taxation increased dramatically. In 1817 revenue from taxation in Ireland was double what it had been in 1801.<sup>290</sup> Among the existing taxes continually targeted by government was that imposed on postage. Between 1784 and 1814, the cost of sending a

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<sup>287</sup> 3 Geo. IV, c. 103 (U.K.) (1822); Séamus Breathnach, *The Irish police from the earliest times to the present day* (Dublin, 1974), p. 35.

<sup>288</sup> 6 & 7 Will. IV, c. 12. [U.K.] (1836).

<sup>289</sup> Breathnach, *The Irish police*, p. 36.

<sup>290</sup> Connolly, 'Union government, 1812-23', p. 63.

letter within Ireland increased on six occasions (1784, 1797, 1805, 1810, 1813 and 1814). Letters were rated using a complicated formula combining the distance travelled and the number of sheets (pages) or alternatively their weight. It is possible to track the increases in the case of letters dispatched from Mullingar to Dublin (a distance of 38 Irish miles). In 1784 there were only two distance bands – *2d.* for under 40 miles, and *4d.* for over 40 miles. Hence, a Mullingar-Dublin letter cost *2d.* In 1797 the number of bands was increased to five with the result that Mullingar-Dublin fell into the third band (thirty to fifty miles) which was rated at *4d.* In 1805 the bands were not adjusted but a *1d.* increase was imposed on all bands; therefore, a letter from Mullingar to Dublin now cost *5d.* In 1810 another *1d.* was added across all bands; consequently, the letter cost *6d.* to send to Dublin. Because in 1813 the number of distance bands was increased to nine, a letter fell within the thirty to forty band and as a result, the cost of postage fell back to *5d.* However, this was short lived. The following year the number of bands was again increased, this time to fourteen, and as the letter fell within the thirty-five to forty-five band, the cost again rose to *6d.* If the letter contained two sheets, the cost doubled, and if it contained three, it trebled.<sup>291</sup> Over the same time the cost of sending a letter between Derry and Dublin (a distance of 114 miles) rose from *4d.* in 1784, to *6d.* in 1797, to *7d.* in 1805, to *8d.* in 1810, and finally to *10d.* in 1813; after 1814, it remained the same for several years.<sup>292</sup> Until the 1814 Act the cost of sending a letter between Londonderry and Cork was calculated according to two different rates – to Dublin and from Dublin. Hence, for example, in 1813 this cost *10d.* for 114 miles to Dublin and another *10d.* for 124 miles from Dublin to Cork, totalling *20d.* or *1s. 8d.* The 1814 Act stated that the combined mileage of that total 238 was to be rated, resulting in a cost of *13d.* or *1s. 1d.* (see appendix 1).

The rate in Britain also increased during this time. There were adjustments to the rates and bands in 1784, 1797, 1801, 1805 and 1811. These rate increases are reflected in the returns of the gross receipts and net receipts for the Irish Post Office at that time. In 1801 its gross receipts were £84,040 and its net receipts were £24,824. By 1815 this had risen to £212,562 gross and £91,191 net, an increase of £66,367 or 267% in net profit.<sup>293</sup> In Britain at the same time the gross receipts in 1804 were £1,429,429 and net receipts were £956,212. By 1815 the gross receipts had increased significantly to

<sup>291</sup> See appendix 1 for a more detailed.

<sup>292</sup> 24 & 24 Geo. III, c. 17 [Ire.] (1744); 37 Geo. III, c. 11 [Ire.] (1797); 45 Geo. III, c. 21 [U.K.]; 50 Geo. III, c. 74 [U.K.] (1810); 53 Geo. III, c. 58 [U.K.] (1813); 54 Geo. III, c. 119 [U.K.] (1814).

<sup>293</sup> *First report from the Select Committee on postage; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix* p. 511, H.C. 1837-38 (278) xx, pt i., 431. It should be noted here that the earlier figures date from a time when no proper accounts were kept by the Irish Post Office.



£2,372,429 and similarly the net receipts rose to £1,598,295 – an increase of £642,083 or 67%.<sup>294</sup> These increases in revenue cannot be entirely attributed to the rise in rates alone since the volume of letters was also growing, although regrettably the dearth of statistical evidence for the latter makes it difficult to assess the relative importance of each. It is noticeable that there were no further rate increases after 1814, the year Napoleon abdicated. Instead, new forms of taxation became available, most noticeable income tax. Although introduced to Britain in 1798 as a short-term war tax, then suspended after the war and later reintroduced in 1842, it was not introduced to Ireland until 1853.<sup>295</sup>

The Post Office's role in supplying revenue to the state was never so important as in times of war, a fact reflected in the rate increases during the French wars. The end of the Napoleonic wars did not mean an end to high postage rates as the war still had to be paid for. High rates were retained until 1840 when it became impossible to ignore calls for cheap postage; the uniform penny post was therefore introduced. Although the Post Office was not the only financial contributor to the expensive war, it was an important one, demonstrating the continuing reliance of the state on it, not just to carry its communications but to provide a steady source of revenue.

### **The Post Office and the private correspondent**

Not only did the state administration benefit from the service provided by the Post Office, so also did those among the general population who were literate. Just ten years after the foundation of the national primary education system in Ireland, the 1841 census showed that 57 per cent of men and 36 per cent of women were literate.<sup>296</sup> (Obviously it was not until several decades after the period covered in this thesis that the positive impact of primary education on the general population's literacy levels became manifest.<sup>297</sup>) The speed of the mails also ensured news travelled faster, both in the form of letters and newspapers. For example, the following announcement appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* on Tuesday 19 April 1825: 'On Friday morning, in the Crescent, Limerick, the Lady of C. G. Wynne [gave birth to] a son and heir': it only took

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<sup>294</sup> *First report from the Select Committee on postage*, p. 509.

<sup>295</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Poverty, population, and agriculture, 1801-45' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, p. 117.

<sup>296</sup> *Census Ireland, 1841*, pp 438-9 [504], H.C. 1834, xxiv, 546-7; Oliver McDonagh, 'The economy and society, 1830-1845' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, p. 89.

<sup>297</sup> According to K.T. Hoppen, by 1881 three-quarters of all those aged between six and fifteen were able to read – see *Ireland since 1800*, p. 23.

three days for the happy event to appear in the Dublin newspaper.<sup>298</sup> Within another two days the newspaper was distributed countrywide by the Post Office. It was thanks to the Post Office that friends and relations of the couple received the news both quickly and almost simultaneously. Letters of congratulation would be received in Limerick within ten days of the happy event, thus drawing the Wynne's circle of family and friends together in celebration. This illustrates how quickly news was disseminated by the Post Office, allowing friends and family to keep abreast of the latest news. Another example was when the assizes court was being held in Mullingar on Saturday 23 July 1831: details of its proceedings and the list of new grand juries was reported on in the *Freeman's Journal* the following Monday.<sup>299</sup> The same newspaper was able to report on a court case in Castlepollard, County Westmeath that had taken place on Wednesday 27 July 1831: the report appeared just two days later.<sup>300</sup> These select examples illustrate the role played by the Post Office in making the news available to the entire country quickly and efficiently. As a result, most parts of the country were now simultaneously open to many influences at home (for instance, Catholic Emancipation), from England (such as parliamentary reform), or from further afield (for example, the redrawing of Europe's political boundaries after the defeat of Napoleon). In short, the whole country was now in step, receiving the same news at the same time. Readers all over Ireland, or more precisely, those who were literate and used the post, were connected to each other and to the rest of the world as quickly as was possible at that time.

This would have had a unifying effect on individuals and communities scattered about the country or abroad, who shared a common interest or goal. Distinct interest groups (political, social or commercial) were now reading the news from the same newspapers at the same time. This contributed to a heightened shared consciousness within and sometimes between such groups. The Post Office also made a significant contribution towards modernising Ireland through its role in standardising time.

### **The Post Office standardises time**

As schedules and timetables played an increasingly important role in the operations of the mail-coach system, so also did a standardisation of time, although there was little evidence of this before the reinvigoration of the mail-coach network and system in 1805. As the network grew, and especially the cross post mail coaches network after

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<sup>298</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Apr. 1825.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 July 1831.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 July 1831.

1805, the time of arrival of cross post mail had to dovetail with the mail to and from Dublin. This becomes very evident when two Post Office circulation maps of 1803 and 1829 and the 1831-32 *Report of the select Committee on Post Communications with Ireland* are examined together.

The earliest evidence of a countrywide standardisation of time is in William Larkin's Post Office circulation map of 1803<sup>301</sup> which highlights the arrival and departure of the mails in all post-towns throughout the country. The explanation or key of the map, stated that 'the sloping figures above the name of the town denote the hour the post arrives from Dublin: and those underneath, the time of arrival from the Country towards Dublin:'. It also indicates how long the post was delayed in certain towns to allow for a change of horses or letters to be added to a bag. A second version of the map, produced in 1805, features many additional mail-coach routes. This proves that a complex and sophisticated countrywide timetable was adhered to. For this timetable to work successfully, the synchronisation of time throughout the entire countrywide network was necessary. To achieve this, all mail-coach guards carried a sealed timepiece and a time-bill and the arrival and departure time at each stop was recorded on the time-bill. All of these timepieces had to be synchronised with a common clock in Dublin, the hub of the whole network. This was probably the first time in Ireland such a complicated system involving countrywide synchronisation of time on a daily basis was in operation.

The map attached to the 1829 report was even more detailed. For example, in the case of Mullingar, the mail-coach route had three numbers – above the name 12.50 am 'Hour of arrival of the mail in sloping figures', below the name in 'sloping figures' the hour of dispatch of the mail, in 'upright figures' the 'Total distance from Dublin,' and distance from 'town to town in figures along the line of road.' Just how important and complex the system was is evident from this map. In 1831 an integrated daily communications network and system operated in Ireland. Eleven mail-coaches arriving and another eleven departing Dublin each day connected with seven cross-posts mail-coach routes and forty-eight mail cars, eighty horse post routes and numerous local foot posts, all of them working to a common timetable.<sup>302</sup> As such it was new, modern and arguably equal to any such system in the world at that time.

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<sup>301</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 1.

<sup>302</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1831), pp 209-13.

### **The forces driving advances in the Post Office network, system and service**

Commercial users in industry, trade and commerce had since the 1790s been to a fore in pressing for continual improvements and developments within the Post Office. This influence was very evident by the second decade of the nineteenth century as revealed by those called to appear before the different parliamentary committees. By then, the importance of commerce to the Post Office was also reflected in the preamble of many reports. In the early reports the terms ‘post’, ‘mail’ or ‘mail-coach’ were used in almost all preambles; for example, in 1811 the preamble stated that the committee was ‘to examine into the manner and time in which Mail is conveyed from Holyhead to London’.<sup>303</sup> However, by 1815 the phrase ‘for the conveyance of Passengers, Goods, and Merchandize’ was in common use.<sup>304</sup> By the 1820s the influence of commerce was very apparent: the first page of the 1827 report on the Milford Haven communication featured comments on the importance of ‘commercial intercourse’ between the south of England and ‘the cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick, as well as the whole south and south-west of Ireland.’<sup>305</sup> In compiling this report, merchants’ opinions were sought. This was also the case in 1830 when commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue consulted the Chambers of Commerce of Bristol, Glasgow, Londonderry, Wexford, Waterford, and Cork.<sup>306</sup> The 1832 report was a similar story businessmen were called to give evidence and express their opinion. The most striking illustration of the potency of commercial interests arose in relation to the Liverpool-Dublin route. This was established solely to satisfy the merchants of Dublin and Liverpool who threatened to use existing steam boats that plied between the two cities to send letters as an alternative to the standard packet boat service. This was not illegal as at the time there was no direct Post Office packet connection between the two cities; hence letters were sent as ‘ship letters’. This was quicker and cheaper than sending them over land by mail coach to Holyhead. In order to prevent such a loss of revenue, the Post Office established a packet service between the Dublin and Liverpool.<sup>307</sup>

While it may have been commercial interests they drove for these developments and improvements, they found a willing partner in successive governments who were willing to expend substantial amounts of money on these initiatives. It has already been emphasised that increased speed of communications provided by the mail-coach service

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<sup>303</sup> Preamble to *Report from the committee on Holyhead roads*, p. 3, H.C. 1811 (197) iii, 801.

<sup>304</sup> Preamble to *Report from Select Committee on Holyhead roads, &c.*, 1814-15 (363) p. 3.

<sup>305</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Milford Haven communication*, p. 3, H.C. 1810 (352) iv, 41.

<sup>306</sup> *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, pp 325-39.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 25-45.

within Ireland and via the Dublin-London link made governing the country easier. Decisions made by government in London could now be relayed faster than ever to Ireland. Vital as the Post Office was to the administration of state, no civil servant or army representative was called to give evidence of their use of the Post Office, or its importance to the administration; rather, this seems to have been taken for granted. Neither Dublin Castle nor Westminster's need or use of the Post Office was mentioned in any of the many reports, nor were any civil servants or army personnel ever called to appear before the committees. The only mention of the military was a few passing comments in two reports (1807 and 1823) concerning the Glasgow and Portpatrick roads, noting how useful a good road would be to the army in Ireland.<sup>308</sup> The only mention of official or civil service use of the post appeared in an 1830 report, again just a passing reference.<sup>309</sup> That report was commenting on in an 1826 experiment when the Post Office was attempting to combining the Liverpool and Holyhead mail routes. The upshot of this experiment was much delay and irregularity in the arrival in Dublin of London letters. The report stated that 'Great inconvenience ensued, both to the Public and in the official departments of the establishment in Ireland'. It is possible the only mention in a parliamentary report of the administrations use of the use of the postal network. In 1831 both commerce and the state administration's common demand for a viable and reliable communications network resulted in Ireland developing a modern postal network that was held in high regard by those who used it.

An indication of the public's attitude to the Post Office can be gleaned from certain guide books and histories of Dublin produced at the time; the two-volume *History of the city of Dublin: from the earliest accounts to the present times*, published in 1818, was just one.<sup>310</sup> This work includes a nine-page history of the Post Office which opens with the statement, 'The Post-Office system, in its present improved state is the most perfect system of finance and the most important department that can exist under any government.'<sup>311</sup> It presents a history of the Post Office in general and of the improving one in Ireland. Similarly, *New picture of Dublin: comprehending a history of the city* by John James McGregor, published in 1821, included a five-page brief history

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<sup>308</sup> *Report from the committee, appointed to examine into Mr. Telford's report and survey, relative to the communication between England and Ireland, by the North-West of Scotland*, p. 11, H.C. 1809 (269) iii, 609; *Report from the Select Committee on Glasgow and Port-Patrick roads; &c.*, p. 17, H.C. 1823 (486) v, 153.

<sup>309</sup> *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue*, p. 38.

<sup>310</sup> *Report from the committee, appointed to examine into Mr. Telford's report and survey*, p. 11.

<sup>311</sup> John Warburton, James Whitelaw, and Robert Walsh, *History of the city of Dublin: from the earliest accounts to the present times* (London, 1825), pp 1001-09.

of the Post Office as did George Newenham Wright's *An historical guide to the city of Dublin, illustrated by engravings, and a plan of the city*.<sup>312</sup> All of these books included an engraving of the new GPO which symbolised the increased popularity of the Post Office. However, one of the most telling indications of the public's growing fondness for the Post Office was the glowing accounts by Jane Austen. She summed up the attitude of the letter-writing public as opposed to the commercial users of Post Office in her novel, *Emma*, published in 1815 when Jane Fairfax says of it:

The post-office is a wonderful establishment! The regularity and despatch of it! If one thinks of all that it has to do, and all that it does so well, it is really astonishing! So seldom that any negligence or blunder appears! So seldom that a letter, among the thousands that are constantly passing about the kingdom, is even carried wrong -- and not one in a million, I suppose, actually lost! And when one considers the variety of hands, and of bad hands too, that are to be deciphered, it increases the wonder.<sup>313</sup>

Although Jane Austen was writing about the British Post Office, the same could be said about such users on Ireland. The extract and the three histories listed above all illustrate how popular the Post Office was and it is understandable why the state authorities in both Ireland and Britain wished to be associated with it. This popular and efficient Post Office was used in Ireland by the Westminster authorities in the drive to assimilate Ireland into the new United Kingdom.

## Conclusion

The Westminster parliament harnessed the machinery of the Post Office as one of several means deployed '... more completely to identify the interests of *England* and *Ireland*, and thus to lead to the mutual benefit of both countries'.<sup>314</sup> Tellingly, there was no ambiguity whatsoever in a later report (1832) which explicitly acknowledged this important function of the Post Office:

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<sup>312</sup> John James McGregor, *New picture of Dublin: comprehending a history of the city* (Dublin, 1821), pp 77-81; George Newenham Wright, *An historical guide to the city of Dublin, illustrated by engravings, and a plan of the city* (Dublin, 1825), pp xxiii, 164-7.

<sup>313</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford edn., 2007), p. 155.

<sup>314</sup> *Second report of the committee on the road from London to Holyhead; &c.*, p. 14, 1819 (217) v, 121.

... by every improvement of a line of communication the expense of maintaining it sufficiently will diminish, and the use of it, and thereby the Revenue, will increase; besides, every new line of communication which shall be opened with England will open a new district for the employment of Capital and the exercise of industry ... a new market for the English Manufacturer, a new supply of food for the Artisan, and a new source of revenue for the State. Every improvement in the lines of Communications already existing will tend to settle in the more remote parts of Ireland, civilization and employment of people will extend; and disturbance, and the cost of putting down disturbances, will be got rid of. The government should recollect that it is peculiarly an English object that most remote parts of Ireland should be connected as intimately and as closely as possible with herself; that this object will be mainly effected by opening to every part of that Country the most direct lines of Communication with England; that thus the identity of feeling and interest will be sooner attained, on which depend the prosperity and permanence of the Union of the two Countries.<sup>315</sup>

The amount of money, effort and energy spent on the postal connection between London and Dublin, following the Act of Union, and in particular after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, illustrate the significance of the Post Office to Westminster. It was determined to use the Post Office to bind all parts of the United Kingdom more closely together and to strengthen its governance throughout.

The abolition of the Irish parliament and the introduction of direct rule of Ireland by Westminster after the Act of Union heralded many changes for the Irish Post Office; however, these were slow to materialise. The ease and speed of communication between the London and Dublin administrations, and between Dublin and the provinces, made governing Ireland directly from Westminster more straightforward and efficient than before. At least in principle, decisions taken at Westminster or Dublin, be they military or civil, could be implemented simultaneous countrywide. The speed and ever widening network provided by the Post Office certainly resulted in an unprecedented level of connectivity between Dublin and provincial Ireland. The Post Office regularly carried news of local and foreign events to cities, towns and villages across the country, providing geographically dispersed groups of people with a common interest, be that social, political or commercial. The speedy and reliable service of the steam packets also ensured Ireland's reading public was kept abreast with developments in Britain and the rest of the world. In essence, therefore, between 1803 and 1831, the Post Office,

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<sup>315</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 30.

notwithstanding its many faults, had put in place a system that worked very effectively and an expanding network that provided a service that was acceptable to all that used it. It providing those engaged in commerce with a satisfactory service and those who governed Ireland with both an efficient communications system and much needed revenue. In the process, it playing a significant role in modernising Ireland.



## Chapter five

### A Department of state in the service of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 1831-40

The period 1831 to 1840 was one of profound change in the evolution of the Post Office in Ireland immediately after the amalgamation of the independent Irish Post Office with its British counterpart in 1831. The latter ushered in a succession of reforms and heralded a new phase in the expansion and modernisation of the Post Office in Ireland as the management structure was brought into line with the British Post Office, and the speed at which the mails were processed continually increased. Now a branch of the British Post Office, any reforms that were introduced automatically applied to Ireland. From the public's point of view, particularly significant advances were the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840 and continued expansion of the network. Within the Post Office in Ireland the reforms in work practices were significant, too. Some obstacles complicated the processes of integration and standardisation within this single Post Office system, the most problematic being the retention of Irish miles as a unit of measurement which resulted in different rates of postage having to apply in Ireland and Britain. This phase of modernization was at the instigation of and closely monitored by Charles Gordon-Lennox, Duke of Richmond, while postmaster-general, and after his resignation in July 1834, by the House of Commons. Richmond was followed in quick succession by three postmasters-general.<sup>1</sup> In Ireland the implementation of these reforms was carried out by Augustus Godby, who in 1831 replaced Edward Lees as secretary of the Post Office in Ireland and retained the position until April 1850.<sup>2</sup> Godby oversaw a renewed acceleration in the expansion of the provincial postal network, which had slowed down dramatically during the last five years of Lees's term. As a consequence, during the period 1831-40 the number of post-towns increased from 428 to 691<sup>3</sup>, new mail-coach routes were introduced, the cross post system was completely reorganised, and many post boys were replaced by mail cars. It was also during this period, in 1834, that the first railway in Ireland between Kingstown and Dublin began to

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<sup>1</sup> Richmond was followed in quick succession by Francis Nathaniel Conyngham, Marquess Conyngham (5 July-31 Dec. 1834), William Wellesley-Pole, third Earl of Mornington (31 Dec. 1834-8 May 1835). The Marquess of Conyngham returned for a short period (8-30 May 1835). Thomas William Anson, first Earl of Lichfield, next held the position from 30 May 1835 to 15 Sept. 1841.

<sup>2</sup> Godby joined the Post Office in 1789 and rose steadily through the ranks. Aside from his career in the Post Office, little is known about him. Reference to Godby rarely appears in the newspapers except on official Post Office announcements – see, for example, *Irish Examiner*, 17 Apr. 1850.

<sup>3</sup> Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1831), pp 68-72; *Post Office annual directory and calendar for 1841* (Dublin, 1841), pp 395-402.

operate, carrying mail from the outset. The Dublin city and county postal region was also reorganised by 1840, and although the number of receiving houses in the Dublin Penny and Two Penny Posts did not increase, the postmen walks in the Two Penny areas were rearranged and included such amenities as at the Zoological Gardens in the Phoenix Park.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile in Britain a campaign to reform the Post Office was quickly gaining momentum. By 1833 demands for a cheaper and more efficient postal service were being voiced at Westminster. Robert Wallace, MP for the Scottish Greenock constituency, led the campaign for reform. In 1837 Rowland Hill, who was secretary to the South Australian colonization commission, published his pamphlet, *Post Office reform: its importance and practicability*, which elaborated how these reforms could be achieved and financed.<sup>5</sup> Parliament responded by establishing a Select Committee on postage, and although there was stiff opposition from senior management within Post Office, the reforms proposed by the committee were passed by parliament, the uniform penny post was introduced in January 1840, and thereafter the functions of the Post Office changed profoundly. Most significantly of all, one of the Post Office's original core function as a provider of revenue to the state was suddenly eliminated; instead, providing an efficient, regular, reliable, and safe service to both the general public and the state administration in equal measure now became its main function. This chapter traces and explains the expansion of the postal service in Ireland between 1831 and 1840. As this was a period of fundamental and enduring reform of the system within Ireland and Britain, the measures introduced to modernise both the structure and operations of the Post Office in Ireland are charted, with particular attention to those changes which were considered and introduced in the Post Office of the United Kingdom.

During what Oliver MacDonagh refers to as 'The age of O'Connell' (1830-45), single party Government at Westminster emerged.<sup>6</sup> The Whigs, who had not been in power in any real sense since the 1760s and who were now supported by Daniel O'Connell, formed a Government after the general election of 1830. Except for a brief period between November and April 1835, they remained in power throughout the

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<sup>4</sup> *Post Office annual directory and calendar for 1840* (Dublin, 1840), p. 390.

<sup>5</sup> Rowland Hill, *Post Office reform: its importance and practicability* (London, 1837). The first print run in early January 1837 was small, intended for limited distribution among members of the Government. There was a second printing run the following February, with a third edition in November that year. An ex-schoolteacher, Hill was a civil servant at the time he published this pamphlet.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver MacDonagh, 'The age of O'Connell, 1830-45' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, pp 158-68.

1830s, led at first by Charles Grey (1830-34) and later by William Lamb (1835-41). Regarded as the reform party, one of their first initiatives was reorganisation of the Irish Post Office, although this was set to happen in any case.<sup>7</sup> The Board of Works in Ireland was also reformed in 1831 and responsibility for management of the roads, including the important post-roads, was transferred to that office.<sup>8</sup> In 1836 changes to the police force and to sections within the magistracy were introduced: in 1838 the Poor Law system was introduced in Ireland, and in 1840, local Government was reformed.<sup>9</sup> Together, these measures helped further centralise Government power in Dublin, generating more official mail within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain, and thus increasing the state administration's reliance on the Post Office.

Among the Whig Government's most significant initiatives was the introduction in 1831 of a national school system in Ireland which, according to D.H. Akenson, 'deserves credit for making Ireland a country of literates'.<sup>10</sup> L. M. Cullen contests this claim in *Economy, trade and Irish merchants at home and abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin 2012), asserting that this literacy project had started long before (in the 1790s in fact).<sup>11</sup> However, there is no doubt that rising literacy levels resulting from increased numbers attending national school, combined with the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840, allowed a growing proportion of the Irish population to avail of the Post Office, especially between emigrants and their relations back home. This Whig Government is best remembered for the wide-ranging changes it made to the electoral system which had a knock-on effect on reform of the postal system in Britain and Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Under these reforms, Ireland gained five new seats at Westminster, whereas if the same criteria been applied to Ireland as England, Ireland would have gained 100 seats. While these reforms had little direct bearing on the Post Office, many of the new Scottish and English MPs were from major newly enfranchised industrial and commercial towns where an efficient Post Office and cheap postage would serve the interest of growing numbers of constituents. As a result, most MPs from these towns were in favour of and

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<sup>7</sup> Postmaster General Act 1831, 1 Will. IV, c. 8 [U.K.] (11 May 1831). For an overview of the Whig reforms see Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800*, pp 22-5.

<sup>8</sup> 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 33 [U.K.] (15 Oct. 1831).

<sup>9</sup> Constabulary (Ireland) Act, 6 & 7 Will. IV, c. 13 [U.K.] (20 May 1836); see also Oliver MacDonagh, 'Politics, 1830-45' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, pp 179-80; the Municipal Corporations Act (Ireland) 1840, 3 & 4 Vict. c. 108; Virginia Crossman, *The Poor Law in Ireland* (Dundalk, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> D. H. Akenson, 'Pre-university education, 1782-1870' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, p. 536.

<sup>11</sup> L. M. Cullen, *Economy, trade and Irish merchants at home and abroad, 1600-1988* (Dublin 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Three separate Acts were passed – one for England and Wales, 2 & 3 Will. IV c. 45, and another two, one each for Scotland, 2 & 3 Will. IV, c. 65, and Ireland, 2 & 3 Will. IV, c. 88 [U.K.] (10 Aug. 1840).

voted for the uniform penny post when it came before parliament in 1839. Introduced in January 1840, this was yet another of the major reforms instigated by the Whig Government. It had far-reaching implications since this initiative instantly placed the Post Office at the service of those members of the general public who could afford the penny to send a letter.

Although he did not play a major role in instigating the uniform penny postage, Daniel O'Connell was strongly in favour of it and not only 'promised his powerful aid, but even volunteered to move for a committee on the plan,'<sup>13</sup> a fact born out in his correspondence.<sup>14</sup> Gladstone remarked that 'he [O'Connell] was one of only a handful of people to recognise its importance at the time.'<sup>15</sup> On a purely personal level, O'Connell stood to benefit from this cheap postage as he received 200 or so letters each day at an estimated daily cost of £10.<sup>16</sup> He also realised its benefit to Irish labourers in Britain who had little contact with home due to the prohibitive cost of postage. Richard Cobden, who was active in local politics in Manchester, a founder of the Anti-Corn Law League and later MP for Manchester, stated that many of the 50,000 Irish living in and around the city in 1828 may as well have been living in 'New South Wales, for all the correspondence or communication [they had] with their relatives in Ireland'.<sup>17</sup> Prior to the introduction of the uniform penny post, the cost of carrying a letter between Mullingar and London was 1s. 4d.; after 1840 it fell to just 1d. This was at a time when the average farm labour could expect to earn about 12½d. a day or an artisan in a provincial town 3s. 6d. a day.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Irish emigration beyond the United Kingdom began to grow significantly during the early decades of the nineteenth century: it is estimated that between 1815 and 1845, a million people from all sections of Irish society emigrated to North America.<sup>19</sup> This resulted in a dramatic increase in the volume of letters between emigrants and home.

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<sup>13</sup> Sir Rowand Hill and G.B.N. Hill, *The life of Sir Rowland Hill and the history of penny postage* (2 vols, London, 1880), i, 278.

<sup>14</sup> *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator*, ed. W. F. Fitzpatrick (London, 1888), pp 175, 176, 182, 185, 225.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick M. Geoghegan, *Liberator: the life and death of Daniel O'Connell, 1830-1847* (Dublin, 2010), p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> *Third report from the Select Committee on postage; together with an abstract of the evidence, directed by the committee to be appended to the report*, pp 21-2, H.C. 1837-38 (708) xx, pt. i, 517.

<sup>18</sup> Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland starved: a quantitative and analytical history of the Irish economy, 1800-1850* (London, 1983), p. 226; see also Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland before and after the famine: explorations in economic history, 1800-1925* (Manchester, 1988), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'Emigration, 1801-70' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union*, p. 565; see also Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish history, 1607-2007* (Basingstoke and New York, 2008).

It was also during the period 1831-40 that what MacDonagh describes as ‘the complete ‘integration’ of the Irish economy with the British’ took place.<sup>20</sup> As increased commerce between the two parts of the United Kingdom resulted in heavier reliance on the Post Office service, commercial interests on both sides of the Irish Sea successfully applied political pressure on the Post Office to reduce its charges: this lobby was extremely powerful in bringing about the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840.

Although there were many pressing political matters in Ireland between 1831 and 1840, including the Tithe war and O’Connell’s demand for repeal of the Union, few had a direct bearing on the Post Office in Ireland. The changes that did occur within the Post Office in Ireland related to structures, value for money, and efficiency and were driven by the Post Office in London and the British Treasury in response especially to commercial users’ demands for speed, frequency, predictability, safety, a wide-ranging network, and a cheaper service.

### **Secretary Augustus Godby progressing reform and modernisation of the Post Office systems and management**

As has been highlighted, many Irish Departments of state had been unified and or reformed by 1832 as part of the outworking of the Act of Union. This was done at the instigation of the British Treasury for which ‘efficiency and economy were ... ideals’.<sup>21</sup> Between 1821 and 1829 the Treasury’s Irish revenue commissioners, appointed by parliament, produced twenty-two reports, including its damning 1829 *Nineteenth report* on the Irish Post Office. As a consequence of Westminster’s far-reaching inquiries into many aspects of government, society and economy throughout the 1810s and 20s,

By 1830, with the civil service largely reformed, with administrative techniques improved and improving, and [armed] with the vast amount of factual information by inquiries into different aspects of the community’s life, the state stood poised, ready for increased activity.<sup>22</sup>

The Irish Post Office was a particularly impressive example of this. By 1831, arising from many inquiries it commissioned, parliament had gathered a substantial body of

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<sup>20</sup> MacDonagh, ‘The age of O’Connell, 1830-45’, p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> R. B. McDowell, ‘Administration and the public service, 1800-70’ in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v; Ireland under the Union*, p. 542.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 549.

statistical data on the Irish Post Office. Unlike many other state departments, the Post Office had not yet been reformed. Its work practices, examined in the last chapter, were badly in need of change. This was achieved in two ways. Firstly, in 1831, two Acts were passed in parliament, unifying the British and Irish Post Offices; in effect this made the Post Office in Ireland a branch of the London Office. Secondly, in the same year, Augustus Godby was brought over from Scotland to replace Edward Lees as secretary of the Post Office in Ireland, Lees having taken Godby's position in Edinburgh. Godby proved an inspired choice as during his term of office (1831-50) he reformed the Dublin office, increasing Post Office revenue from £129,108 to £144,321 by 1839.<sup>23</sup>

In March 1831 *An Act enabling His Majesty to appoint a Postmaster-general for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* brought British and Irish Post Offices under the management of one Postmaster General, Charles Gordon-Lennox, fifth Duke of Richmond.<sup>24</sup> The following year another Act, 2 Will. IV c. 15 *An Act to enable his Majesty's Postmaster General to extend the Accommodation by Post, and regulate the Privilege of Franking, in Ireland; and for other purposes relating to the Post Office*, repealed anomalies that permitted abuse of the privilege between the two offices, notably the franking regulations.<sup>25</sup> Now, in addition to MPs, twenty-two named high office holders such as the Lord Lieutenant and his Chief Secretary, commissioners and secretaries of certain bodies, such as the Commissioners for auditing public accounts, were afforded this privilege. This Act also legislated for the establishment of provincial Penny Posts.

In addition to replacing the two Irish postmasters with the English postmaster-general, several other management and operational changes were implemented. Chief among these was replacing Edward Lees as secretary with Augustus Godby, who at the time of his arrival already had thirty-five years' experience working in the Post Office.<sup>26</sup> In 1834 the duke of Richmond, postmaster-general, explained his choice of Godby for the position:

He was brought up in the Post Office here, and was promoted to the situation of Surveyor, for which, on detection of the extensive frauds in

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<sup>23</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Will. IV, c. 8 (U.K.) (11 Mar. 1831) *An Act enabling His Majesty to appoint a Postmaster General for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Will. IV, c. 15 [U.K.] (24 Mar. 1832) *An Act to enable his Majesty's Postmaster General to extend the Accommodation by Post, and regulate the Privilege of Franking, in Ireland; and for other purposes relating to the Post Office*.

<sup>26</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on postage; together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, p. 180, H.C. 1837-38 (658) xx, pt. i, 1.

Scotland, in the year 1822, he was selected to revise and re-model the Establishment in Edinburgh. This gentleman's course of service, and more especially the practical results of his employment in Scotland, designate him as peculiarly qualified for the fulfilment of the arduous and responsible appointment, to which, upon public grounds alone, I felt it my duty to appoint him.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike his predecessor, as secretary Godby had limited powers. He reported to the secretary in London, Sir Francis Freeling, until 1836 and thereafter to William Maberly who in turn reported to the Postmaster-general; ultimately he was answerable to parliament. Unlike Edward Lees, Godby made no major decisions such as awarding contracts. It was in London that such decisions were now taken: this is evident from the many newspapers advertisements concerning the Post Office such as for mail coach contracts which appeared particularly after 1838.<sup>28</sup> Godby carried out instructions received from London; however, his advice would have been sought. Richmond provided Godby with a list of twenty-three improvements to be implemented immediately, together with other instructions.<sup>29</sup> These were some of the sixty or so recommendations made in the *Nineteenth report* (1829).<sup>30</sup> Priority was to be given to reorganising the Dublin Office. In particular, Godby was to end double jobbing by ensuring that those in receipt of a salary carried out the work they were paid to do rather than farm it out or pay someone else to do it.<sup>31</sup> To compensate for the loss of income arising from this reform, Post Office employees' wages were increased. Richmond justified this measure on the grounds that 'with the exception of some few persons employed who enjoyed official incomes disproportionate to their rank and duties, the great body of the Office [staff] were underpaid.'<sup>32</sup> In their *Nineteenth report* the commissioners of revenue had also recommended some sixty changes to both structure and practices in the Irish Post Office.<sup>33</sup> Within three years of Godby taking office, the staff had been reduced by fifty officers, and a saving of between £5,000 and £6,000 *per*

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<sup>27</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 33, H.C. 1834 [48] xlix, 497.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, *Freeman's Journal*, 16 July 1837.

<sup>29</sup> Instructions to Mr. Godby on his appointment as secretary to the Post Office in Dublin in *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, pp 41-7.

<sup>30</sup> *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post-office revenue, United Kingdom: part II. Ireland, 1829* (353).

<sup>31</sup> *Instructions to Mr. Godby*, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain*, pp 1-94.

*annum* in the G.P.O. had been achieved.<sup>34</sup> Further evidence of Godby's efficacy in implementing the prescribed reform programme is to be found in a report by the newly appointed postmaster-general, Earl of Lichfield, in 1835 which states that all sixty recommendations made in the 1829 *Nineteenth report* had been carried out or were in the process of being implemented. Godby had already carried out the reforms specified by Richmond; these new recommendations included one that 'letter carriers of the General and Penny Post ... be united into one corps'<sup>35</sup> – an attempt to eliminate duplication of work which stemmed from the fact that both the Dublin Penny Post and the General Post Office delivered to the same areas in Dublin. Another major ongoing abuse in the system – misuse of the franking privilege by the lower ranks in the Post Office – was also tackled. Rules were tightened up and only certain named individuals within the Post Office, such as the secretary, were afforded the privilege and then, only for official Post Office business. Between 1831 and 1836 the staff working in the G.P.O. in Sackville Street had been reduced from 345 to 259, resulting in an annual savings of £6,623.<sup>36</sup>

Under the new regime financial practices were more tightly regulated. Provincial postmasters were obliged to make weekly returns and arrears were no longer tolerated as the following case illustrates. On 5 January 1829 Mullingar's postmaster, John Mc Donnell, was £127 8s. 0<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. in arrears, with five instalments due: his situation was worse the following January when he was £190 6s. 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d. in arrears, with eight instalments due. In October 1831 McDonnell was replaced by Edward Gordon. By January 1836 the problem with Mullingar's payments had been resolved: Gordon's balance was £3 10s. 2d. and there were no instalments due.<sup>37</sup> This case was by no means unusual. In fact, 171 of the 375 provincial postmasters were replaced between 1831 and 1834 – eighty-six dismissed outright, a clear indication of just how widespread, sweeping and ruthless the implemented changes were.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *A return showing which of the recommendations made by the commissioners of revenue inquiry (and of which recommendations an abstract was sent, by order of the commissioners charged with an inquiry into the Department of the General Post Office, in October 1834, to the General Post Office) have been carried into effect; together with a statement in respect of such of the said recommendations as have not been acted upon, with the reasons why the same respectively have not been carried into effect*, p. 14, H.C. 1835 (443) xlviii, 313.

<sup>36</sup> *Returns relating to the General Post Office Ireland*, p. 2, H. C. 1836 (260) xlv, 431.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain*, pp 411-13; *A return of appointments of deputy postmasters and postmistresses, their salaries and emoluments, 1835* (264), pp 5-7.



## Expansion and improvements in the network

Godby also expanded provincial networks and reformed how letters were delivered within the city of Dublin. In total 263 new provincial offices opened between 1831 and 1841. Many Post Offices were down-graded: eighty-nine post-towns were reduced to sub-offices and another twenty-one to the status of receiving house for a local Penny Post system, while six new sub-offices and 164 Penny Post receiving houses were opened.<sup>39</sup> Not only did the number of offices increase, many walks and horse posts were converted to mail car routes, new mail coach routes were introduced such as Belfast to Enniskillen, and the speed at which the mails travelled continued to accelerate.<sup>40</sup> In Dublin the Penny Post and Two Penny Post network was reorganised and streamlined. Welcome improvements from the Treasury's prospective, these changes resulted in more efficient work practices and greater financial transparency within the Post Office in Ireland. For the public, the expansion in the network resulted in an enhanced service.

Although an Act passed in 1765 legislated for the introduction of local Penny Post systems in Britain and Ireland, these were slow in being established.<sup>41</sup> The provincial Penny Posts carried letters between a post-town and outlying villages at a cost of 1*d.*, regardless of distance. This penny was in addition to other charges the letter incurred beyond the local post-town. However, the Act of 1784 that established the Irish Post Office did not make allowance for such arrangements in Ireland. As a result, unlike in Britain, Dublin had the only Penny Post network in Ireland until the 1830s. In Britain, Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow all had networks in operation by 1800.<sup>42</sup> By 1830 in England and Wales there were twenty-six penny post networks and twenty-three fifth-clause networks – another type of local delivery system.<sup>43</sup> At the same time in Scotland there were twenty-three local Penny Posts networks. In Ireland, officially there was none. However, there were at least thirty-one unofficial local delivery services operated by local postmasters.<sup>44</sup> The normal charge for the service was 1*d.* or ½*d.*, depending on the distance travelled. In the case of Emyvale,

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<sup>39</sup> *Returns relating to the General Post Office Ireland*, pp 3-5.

<sup>40</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Sept. 1831.

<sup>41</sup> 5 Geo. III, c. 25, sect. ii.

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 216.

<sup>43</sup> *First report from the Select Committee on postage; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, pp 474-509, H.C. 1837-38 (278) xx, pt. i, 1.

<sup>44</sup> *A return of the name of each post town in Ireland where an extra charge, beyond the rate of postage established by act of Parliament, is made, for delivery of letters to those residing within the limits of the town; also the amount of such rate collected in the year 1828, with a statement of the authority by which such charge is made; also, an account of the dates on which any of the towns in Ireland have been relieved from such extra charges for delivery of letters, within the past three years*, p. 2, H.C. 1830 (478) xxxi, 57.

County Monaghan, the cost varied from 1*d.* to 3*d.* The 1832 Act (clauses i-ix) specifically allowed for provisional Penny Posts. Even before the Act was passed, the first official Penny Post had begun operating in Waterford on 26 September 1831; its two receiving houses were Passage and Tramore.<sup>45</sup> Immediately local town Penny Posts began to be established countrywide. *The Connaught Telegraph* reported in June 1832 that nineteen had been created in Connaught.<sup>46</sup> Within four years, by 1836, 124 towns had Penny Post networks, with a total of 222 receiving houses.<sup>47</sup> (See map appendix 6) The largest provincial network was in Omagh which had ten receiving houses, Derry had nine, Tralee, eight, Enniskillen and Cork had seven each, while most towns had two or three and many just one. In Ireland the Penny Post network gross revenue in 1836 was £4,544 13*s.* 1*d.*; expenses ran to £3,464 19*s.* 9*d.* with a net revenue of £1,079 13*s.* 4*d.* These figures include the Dublin General Penny Post (not to be confused with the Dublin Penny Post) and Two Penny Postal networks.<sup>48</sup>

Another improvement was the abolition of a fee called a gratitude delivery. This was paid for a door-to-door delivery service available in post-towns throughout Ireland. In England, a door-to-door service was available free of charge in many towns since the start of the nineteenth century. By 1834 an official delivery service replaced the old service and operating in many of the Ireland's principal commercial towns, and the plan was to extend this as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made.<sup>49</sup>

The 1829 *Nineteenth report* had found many faults and abuses within the Dublin Penny Post. In the General Post Office, double jobbing was common practice: of its six taxing clerks, 'two were practising attornies and solicitors, and Mr John O'Neill was serving his time as an attorney and being also President of the Penny Post-Office'.<sup>50</sup> Since its reorganisation by Edward Lees in 1810, Dublin's Penny Post failed to make a profit until 1824; this was despite the fact that its receipts rose from £1,208 10*s.* 8*d.* in 1810 to £4,538 0*s.* 9½*d.* in 1826.<sup>51</sup> Many other abuses centred on accounting malpractices were also noted. Godby set about correcting the worst of these defects in the system.

In 1830 two different branches of the Post Office were delivering letters within Dublin – the General Post Office and the Dublin Penny Post. There was little difference

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<sup>45</sup> *First report from the Select Committee on postage*, p. 507.

<sup>46</sup> *Connaught Telegraph*, 13 June 1832.

<sup>47</sup> *First report from the Select Committee on postage*, pp 502-09.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain*, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

between the two; they had many personnel in common, and both worked out of the G.P.O. The Dublin Penny Post confined itself to carrying letters posted in the fifty-one city receiving houses and the twenty-eight offices of the Two Penny Post area.<sup>52</sup> At the same time the General Post Office had sixteen city receiving houses, typically on the same streets as the Dublin Penny Post; for example, 8 Clare Street was the city receiving office for the General Post while 20 Clare Street was the receiving house for the Dublin Penny Post. In fact Great Britain Street (renamed Parnell Street in 1891) had three offices, two belonging to the Dublin Penny Post at numbers 50 and 85, and one belonging to the General Post (number 122).<sup>53</sup> Anxious to eradicate such duplication Godby reduced the number of city receiving houses from fifty-one to thirty-seven. The number of two penny receiving offices was also reduced by ten to thirty-two. Of these, fourteen were in the suburbs (Castleknock, Rathmines Ringsend) while others were further out (Finglas and Raheny to the north, Leixlip and Lucan to the west, and Dalkey and Enniskerry to the south): these offices received their mail by passing mail coaches, or in the case of Kingstown, by train. Although the number of receiving houses was reduced, the 1839 Post Office directory printed a list of seventy-six ‘places in the Two-Penny Post delivery’ to which letters were being delivered, indicating that in these areas, letters were delivered door-to-door.<sup>54</sup> Another anomaly in the system was that the General Post Office only charged 1*d.* for letters it carried to and from the Dublin Two Penny Post offices.<sup>55</sup>

Within just eight months of Godby’s appointment in March 1831, an advertisement appeared in the *Freeman’s Journal* announcing a rationalisation of the city daily delivery service, reducing the deliveries from six to four.<sup>56</sup> His stated reason for this reduction was that ‘sometimes we were sending out 12 or 13 carriers with only three or four letters; sometimes letter-carriers had not a single letter to deliver.’<sup>57</sup> This was just one of the recommendations suggested by commissioners in their 1829 *Nineteenth report*; another was that the position of letter carriers of the General and Penny Post be united in one corps<sup>58</sup> and that it and the position of taxing clerk be

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<sup>52</sup> Watson Stewart, *Watson’s or the gentleman’s and citizen’s almanack* (1830), pp 72-3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 67-8, 72-3.

<sup>54</sup> *Post Office directory* (Dublin, 1839), p. 370.

<sup>55</sup> The Act 5 Geo. III, c. 23 [G.B.] (1765) had introduced a special 1*d* rate for a letter travelling not more than one post stage (i.e. between two neighbouring towns regardless of distance on the same mail route)

<sup>56</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 Mar. 1831; *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 Oct. 1831.

<sup>57</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on postage*, p. 192.

<sup>58</sup> *A return showing which of the recommendations made by the commissioners of revenue inquiry ... 1835* (443) p. 14.

combined and become part of the General Post Office staff: these recommendations were duly implemented.

Delivery of the mails in Dublin was not straightforward. Godby stated in 1838 that the Penny Post delivery started at the same time every day (eight o'clock). The General Post letters usually went out with these, but their doing so was dependent on the arrival of the mail coaches and the English packet boats.<sup>59</sup> Thus, while the country mails were usually dispatched at eight o'clock, the second General Post Office dispatch 'was guided [by] the English mail, which must be uncertain'.<sup>60</sup> The Post Office ran an advertisement in the *Freeman's Journal* every day, beginning in 1833 and continuing through the 1830s, recording details of the arrival and dispatch of its two deliveries the previous day (see Fig 5.1).

**Fig 5.1. Post Office advertisement relating to the dispatched of the General Post Office on 29 December 1834 and 1 January 1835 and showing the different dispatch times for the two days caused by the irregular arrival of mail coach and packet boat**

GENERAL POST-OFFICE—DECEMBER 29.		GENERAL POST-OFFICE—JANUARY 1.	
	HOURS. MINUTES		HOURS. MINUTES
Despatch of Irish Carriers at .....	8 '0' A.M.	Despatch of Irish Carriers at .....	7 55 A.M.
Delivery finished .....	10 35 A.M.	Delivery finished .....	10 10 A.M.
Arrival of London Mail .....	8 10 A.M.	Arrival of London Mail .....	9 33 A.M.
Despatch of Carriers .....	8 45 A.M.	Despatch of Carriers .....	10 20 A.M.
Delivery finished .....	10 40 A.M.	Delivery finished .....	1 0 P.M.
J. BANNEN, Inspector of Letter-Carriers.		J. BANNEN, Inspector of Letter-Carriers.	

Sources: *Freeman's Journal*, 30 Dec. 1834, 2 Jan. 1835.

The commissioners also recommended that already operating mail-coaches might transport the late dispatch to outlying two penny offices along their routes and to carry the letters from these offices to the GPO in the mornings: this too was put into effect.<sup>61</sup> Within just four years of his appointment, Godby has made major strides in streamlining and modernising the Post Office systems in Ireland. In 1835 Postmaster General Lichfield reported to the House of Commons that remediate action to address most of the faults in the Post Office in Ireland, as listed in the Revenue commissioners' 1829 report, had been taken.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on postage*, p. 189.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *A return showing which of the recommendations made by the commissioners of revenue inquiry (and of which recommendations an abstract was sent, by order of the commissioners charged with an inquiry into the Department of the General Post Office, in October 1834, to the General Post Office) have been carried into effect; together with a statement in respect of such of the said recommendations as have not been acted upon, with the reasons why the same respectively have not been carried into effect*, pp 13-14, H.C. 1835 (443) xlvi, 313.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

By 1839 Godby had streamlined the Post Office in Dublin and put an end to many abuses that had been commonplace before his arrival, notably irregular accounting practices. His scaling down the number of receiving offices and his abolition of two daily deliveries in the city seems to have been accepted by those who used the post since there is a complete absence of comment in the Dublin newspapers of the time. This contrasted with reaction to other improvements Godby introduced including the expanding network in the country, or to the progress of Irish Post Office bills through parliament, or to other changes concerning mail coach timetables or mail-coach accidents, all of which excited much comment in letters and editorials.<sup>63</sup> Although Godby modernised practices within the Post Office in Dublin, bringing them in line with the rest of the United Kingdom, these advances were already almost out of date. With the arrival of the uniform penny post in 1840, the Dublin Penny Post system, which operated as a separate identity from the general post, ceased. The job of taxing each individual letter also disappeared as the reforms of 1840 resulted in virtually all letters being prepaid. The fact that the delivery man no longer had to collect a fee for each letter meant a much more efficient Post Office service.

### **Mail-coaches, mail cars and roads**

During the period 1831-40 the mail coach service continued to develop at a steady pace. Although in 1840 the same number of mail coaches left Dublin as in 1830, important changes were introduced in the interim. Kingstown's two daily mail coaches were replaced by the train, and as the packet boat no longer used Howth, its mail coach did not run.<sup>64</sup> Further afield, new mail coaches operated to New Ross, Kilkenny, and a second, a day coach, was added to the Belfast route. The number of mail coaches running on the cross post network also increased from seventeen to twenty. Other significant advances included a new service linking Waterford and Wexford, the Limerick-Ennis mail coach service which was extended onwards to Galway city in September 1831, and Galway was now connected directly to Sligo instead of via the Ballinasloe on the Dublin-Sligo route.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 Nov. 1831, 21 Jan. 1832; *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Sept. 1831.

<sup>64</sup> *Second report from the committee on postage*, p. 235; *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 338.

<sup>65</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Sept. 1831; see map attached to the *Third report from the Select Committee on postage*.

The 1832 report recommended that routes be broken into sections and more contractors be employed to operate the mail-coaches on these different sections, as was the practice in England. The Select Committee noted how Ireland lagged well behind Britain in this regard, stating that ‘There are probably more separate contractors for the Holyhead mail than there are Contractors for all the Mail Coaches in Ireland.’<sup>66</sup> Although the Irish mail coach service was now controlled from London, and contracts for the routes were renewable every five years and were advertised in the newspapers, a small number of contractors continued to monopolise the service.<sup>67</sup> Of the twelve mail-coaches that left Dublin each day in 1837, Peter Purcell held the contract for eight.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, this did not hinder continued improvement in the service. In Ireland, down to the mid-1830s, as stated in the contracts, the contractors continued to provide coaches, as well as horses and drivers, unlike in England where coaches only were provided by the Post Office.<sup>69</sup> The fact that contractors had to supply the coaches is the most likely reason for their small number. After 1837, however, the Post Office began supplying coaches in Ireland too. That year an advertisement for new contracts on the Dublin-Limerick route stated that coaches would be supplied by the Post Office.<sup>70</sup> Despite this, both the mail coach network in Ireland and the number of contractors remained small: in the mid-1830s there were ‘about 74’ mail coaches operating in Ireland, all built by Frederick Bourne and the aforementioned Peter Purcell.<sup>71</sup> Yet, the service improved since the number of mail coaches increased, and so too did the speed at which they travelled. For example, between 1832 and 1840 the mail-coach between Dublin and Derry gained two hours and twenty minutes in time (see table 5.1). There are several reasons for this, notably better designed coaches<sup>72</sup>, but it was the improvement in road construction that proved the most significant determining factor of all.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Ireland’s mail-coach roads had improved since the introduction of the coaches in 1790. Nevertheless, many more improvements

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<sup>66</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> *Seventh report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, H.C. 1837 (70) xxxiv, pt. i, p. 104.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 30-31.

<sup>70</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 28 Feb., 17 Mar. 1837.

<sup>71</sup> *Return relating to poundage charged by postmasters upon money orders. 2. Return of payments to contractors for furnishing mail coaches, and the number of coaches in use, 1835* (294) p. 1. When Bourne and Purcell lost the contract to build the Irish mail-coaches in 1844, it caused a political storm in which Daniel O’Connell was involved.

<sup>72</sup> *Seventh report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, pp 15-26.

and continued maintenance were necessary if target speeds were to be attained. In 1837 the average speed of the mail-coaches in England was eight miles and seven furlongs per hour; in Ireland, it was seven miles and four furlongs.<sup>73</sup> In 1832 only two mail-coaches, those on the Dublin-Limerick and Dublin-Sligo routes, exceeded a speed of eight miles per hour.<sup>74</sup> However, standards were improving: by 1837 the average speed throughout the country had reached eight mile and two furlongs per hour.<sup>75</sup> The 1832 report stated that although the roads might have been good enough for local light vehicles, they were not of the standard required by fast-moving mail coaches drawn by four horses. Witnesses who appeared before the committee were ‘doubtful of the safety of any increase in speed, unless improvements shall first have taken place’.<sup>76</sup> In an attempt to address this problem, the Select Committee recommended that responsibility for the roads

should no longer be left to local caprice; nor when made should their maintenance in Repair be left the subject of local mismanagement ... [Instead] they should at once be taken from the hands of the Grand Juries, or the local Trusts.<sup>77</sup>

Steps to improve the roads had already been taken prior to the Act that integrated the Irish and British Post Office and to Godby’s appointment. In the 1831 an Act of parliament (1 and 3 Will. IV c 33) that established the Office of Public Works (O.P.W.) in Ireland,<sup>78</sup> section 101 transferred all powers previously vested in the postmaster-general to the commissioners of the board. The postmaster-general was to inform the commissioners when repairs on roads needed to be carried out, or when new roads needed to be constructed.<sup>79</sup> The work of the O.P.W. was important in bolstering Godby’s efforts at modernising the Post Office service in Ireland in a number of ways. The board’s first report in 1832 stated that repairs were carried out on two mail coach

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43; *Report from the Select Committee on Post Communication with Ireland: with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, 1831-32 (716) p. 338.

<sup>74</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 27.

<sup>75</sup> *Seventh report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on post communication with Ireland*, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> Act 1 & 3 Will. IV, c. 33 [G.B.] (1831) An Act for the Extension and Promotion of Public Works in Ireland.

<sup>79</sup> The previous Acts were 43 Geo. III, c. 43, 46 Geo. III, c. 134 and 53 Geo. III, c. 146. The postmaster had a year to bring such notice to the commissioners. However, in 1836 this time was extended ‘For the time being’ in clause 61 of 6 & 7 Will. IV, c. 116 [GB] 20 Aug. 1836.

roads (Limerick-Waterford and Limerick-Ennis).<sup>80</sup> Echoing the Select Committee's concerns, the commissioners also reported that these two roads were in 'so bad a state as to render it almost impracticable for the mail.' By 1835 two sections of important mail coach routes out of Dublin – the fifty-one miles stretch between Dublin and Mullingar on the Sligo route, and the twelve mile between Dublin and Navan on the Enniskillen route – had deteriorated and had to undergone major repair.<sup>81</sup> These repairs proved successful as by 1840 the journey time between Sligo and Dublin had been shortened by one hour and twenty minutes and by two hours and twenty minutes on the Enniskillen route.<sup>82</sup> In 1837 when the Post Office advertised for tenders to operate the Dublin-Limerick mail route, for the first time it stipulated that the mail-coaches were to run at nine miles per hour.<sup>83</sup> This was also the first advertisement to state that the coaches would be supplied by the Post Office. All of these advanced combined to bring the mail coach service in Ireland in line with its British counterpart.

**Table 5.1 Time taken by the down mail coaches in 1831 and 1840 and the time saved in 1840**

	<b>Time taken 1831</b>	<b>Time taken 1840</b>	<b>Time shortened</b>
<b>Down from Dublin</b>	<b>Hours &amp; mins.</b>	<b>Hours &amp; mins.</b>	<b>Hours &amp; mins.</b>
Belfast day mail	No service	12 00	-----
Belfast night mail	13 15	11 30	1 45
Derry	20 20	18 00	2 20
Cork night mail	22 15	20 00	2 15
Cork day mail	21 15	21 00	0 15
Wexford	14 45	12 00	2 45
Waterford	12 45	12 00	0 45
Enniskillen	14 20	12 00	2 20
Limerick	14 15	12 30	1 45
Galway	16 15	14 46	1 31
Sligo	16 15	14 55	1 20

**Sources:** Watson Stewart, *The gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (1831), pp 209-13; *Post Office annual directory and calendar* (1840), pp 414-16.

**Note:** The 1840 *Post Office annual directory* states that the Belfast night mail will take 11½ between 1 March and 1 November; likewise the Cork Night mail, the Galway and Sligo.

Not only did the main post service operating out of Dublin continue to improve, so also did the cross post network. As explained in the previous chapter, the cross posts were rented at the discretion of local postmasters in order to supplement their poor wages.<sup>84</sup> As a result, they were slow; the mail cars travelling at an average speed of six

<sup>80</sup> *First report of the commissioners on public works, Ireland, of their proceedings, and an abstract of their expenditure, for the year 1832, 1833* (75) p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> *Third annual report from the Board of Public Works in Ireland, 1835* (76) p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> See table 5.1 Time taken by the down mail coaches in 1831 and 1840 and the time saved in 1840.

<sup>83</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Feb., 17 Mar. 1837.

<sup>84</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 27.



miles per hour and the horse posts at five miles per hour.<sup>85</sup> One of the worst cross post connections in the early 1830s was between Waterford and Wexford, in particular the section of road between Waterford and New Ross which was only 10½ miles long. In 1831, not only was the road in bad condition, the mail was carried by a ‘Car having only one horse and sometimes six Passengers and a Driver.’<sup>86</sup> It took ‘2 hours 20 minutes to travel between Waterford and New Ross in total to Wexford took six hours.’<sup>87</sup> Three years later, these two towns were still six hours apart.<sup>88</sup> However, by 1838, a mail-coach operated between the Wexford and Waterford, reducing significantly to four hours and fifty-four minutes the journey between the two.<sup>89</sup> Many new roads constructed in the west of Ireland together with existing routes repaired by the Board of Works were used by the cross post network.

**Table 5.2: ‘Up’ and ‘down’ departure and arrival times for the ‘down from’ Dublin and ‘up to’ mail coaches**

	Miles Irish	Down		Time taken	Up		Time taken
		Depart	arrival	Hours & mins.	Depart	Arrival	Hours & mins.
Belfast day mail	80	8.30 am	8.20 pm	11 50	6.00 am	6.10 pm	12 10
Belfast night mail	80	9.00 pm	8.30 am	11 30	6.30 pm	6.30 am	12 30
Derry	113	9.00 pm	2.00 pm	17 00	2.00 pm	7.00 am	17 00
Cork night mail	126	9.00 pm	4.15 pm	19 15	11.00 am	7.00 am	20 00
Cork day mail	133	11.00 am	8.00 am	21 00	6.30 am	3.30 am	21 00
Wexford	74	9 .00 pm	9.00 am	12 00	6.00 pm	6.00 am	12 00
Waterford	80	9 .00 pm	9.00 am	12 00	6.00 pm	6.00 am	12 00
Enniskillen	80	9 .00 pm	9.00 am	12 00	6.00 pm	6.00 am	12 00
Limerick	94	9 .00 pm	9.33 pm	12 33	6.00 pm	6.33 am	12 33
Kilkenny	59	8.00 am	5.45 pm	9 45	8.30 pm	5.54 am	9 45
Galway	104	9.00 pm	11.46 an	14 46	4.14 pm	7.00 am	14 .46
Sligo	105	9.00 pm	11.55 am	14 55	4.05 pm	7.00 am	14 55

**Sources:** *Post Office directory 1841*, pp 416-18. A note at the bottom of the page states that ‘mails will run faster between March and November.’

### The railway era

While the mail coach network was at its height in 1840, these were not the only coaches operating in Ireland which had a well-developed stage coach service operating throughout the island. In 1840 at least forty coaches, including twelve mail-coaches, left

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Post Office directory 1834* (Dublin, 1834), p. 473.

<sup>89</sup> *Post Office directory 1839* (Dublin, 1839), p. 397.

Dublin each day, together with twenty-one caravans and eleven jaunting-cars.<sup>90</sup> Some of these left on a daily basis, or on alternate days, while others operated a weekly service. This was replicated in all large towns throughout the country albeit on a much smaller scale. However, only a few years earlier, in 1834, a new form of transport arrived in Ireland – the railways.

Ireland's first railway ran between Dublin and Kingstown. Before a track had been laid, the directors were confident that railway transport could 'contribute to the improvement of the intercourse with England by accelerating transmission of the mails'.<sup>91</sup> Initially a canal between Kingstown and Dublin was proposed, but this idea was abandoned in favour of a railway.<sup>92</sup> On 6 September 1831 the Act 1 & 2 Will. IV, c. 69 legislating for the building of the line received royal assent: construction commenced the following April.<sup>93</sup> The railway was opened to the public just over a year later on 17 November 1834.<sup>94</sup> Mail was carried for the first time on this line on 6 April 1835.<sup>95</sup> The transfer of the mails from the mail coaches to the railway was rapid in the case of Kingstown as reflected in *Watson's Almanack* of 1836: under the mail coach timetable, the three Kingstown mails were listed as 'per Railway'.<sup>96</sup> Beyond Dublin, however, the transfer from coach to railway transportation was much slower as it was not until the mid-1840s that the next railway lines were built in Ireland.

### **Investment in the Dublin-London connection**

As highlighted in the previous chapter, vast sums of Government revenue were invested in upgrading the Dublin-London link, with very positive results in terms of both the speed and regularity of the mail service. Money continued to be spent on improving the roads, although such large sums were no longer needed. Consequently, the time taken to travel between London and Holyhead continued to decrease. In 1828 the journey took

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<sup>90</sup> *Post Office directory 1841* (Dublin, 1841), pp 415-24.

<sup>91</sup> James Pim, secretary to the proprietors of the Kingston Railway, to the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland, 14 Sept. 1831 in *Kingstown railroad. Copy of correspondence between the commissioners of public works in Ireland, and the proprietors of the Kingstown railroad, or others on their behalf*, 1833 (291) p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Post Office directory 1841*, pp 416-26.

<sup>93</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Apr. 1833.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Dec. 1834.

<sup>95</sup> *Return of the annual amount of Post Office revenue between Liverpool and Manchester during three years previous and three years subsequent to the mail being sent by the railway*, p. 1, H.C. 1837 (206) 1, 301.

<sup>96</sup> John Watson Stewart, *Watson's or the gentleman's and citizen's almanack* (Dublin, 1836), p. 196.

twenty-nine hours and seventeen minutes<sup>97</sup>: by 1832 this had fallen to twenty-eight hours and six minutes.<sup>98</sup> The time was further reduced to twenty-six hours and fifty-five minutes in 1837.<sup>99</sup> The London-Holyhead mail coach route was the third fastest in England. The mail-coaches were reaching their maximum efficiency and travelling as fast as horses could draw them. However, they were about to be replaced by a new mode of transport, steam trains.

Like at sea, steam in the form of railways was to revolutionise the speed, efficiency and reliability of the mails on land, bringing Dublin and London even closer. The Post Office recognised immediately the advantages of sending mail by rail. Unlike in Ireland, where railway building stuttered after completion of the Dublin-Kingstown line construction in 1834, in Britain, railway construction continued unabated. The Liverpool and Manchester Railway was the first inter-city railway in the world. It opened officially on 15 September 1830: within a month the *Manchester Chronicle* reported the vastly improved postal service which was reliant upon rail transport: ‘Mails sent by rail Thursday morning at 7am an arrived in Liverpool 9am. left Liverpool at 10am and arrived Manchester 12am. The Irish Mails [from Dublin via Liverpool] came five hours earlier than previously.’<sup>100</sup> The building of the railway line between London and Liverpool, which commenced in November 1833, was watched with keen interest by the Irish public. The progress of various bills relating to the railway line through parliament were regularly reported in the press as was the opening of various stages of the route.<sup>101</sup>

Soon after construction on the London-Birmingham Liverpool railway line began, the postmaster-general, Lord Lichfield and the railway companies, began protracted negotiations about transporting the mails by train; throughout, the railways continued to carry mail. When no agreement was forthcoming, Lichfield proposed a bill in parliament which would have given the postmaster-general extensive powers over the operations of the railways. After strong opposition from the railways companies, the bill

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<sup>97</sup> *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain ... part V. Packet establishments. – Home stations*, 1830 (647), p. 347.

<sup>98</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 371.

<sup>99</sup> *Seventh report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, p. 82.

<sup>100</sup> Harold S. Wilson, *The travelling Post Offices of Great Britain and Ireland: their history and postmarks* (Derby, 1996), p. 1. There are many philatelic books concerning the Post Office and the railways. Although not an academic study, this author recommends Wilson’s history.

<sup>101</sup> Progress of the bills was reported in newspapers – see *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 May 1833; *Belfast News-Letter*, 10 May 1833; progress of the construction and opening was covered in *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 Sept. 1838; *Belfast News-Letter*, 21 Sept. 1838.

was modified and in 1838 an Act to provide for Conveyance of Mails by Railways was passed.<sup>102</sup> Even before the agreement was reached and before the railway was completed, special mail trains began operating on completed sections between Liverpool and London, the first on 7 May 1837.<sup>103</sup> As early as December 1837 mail began to be sorted on board the train.<sup>104</sup> This proved so successful that just a year later, in May 1838, the Post Office commissioned purpose-built sorting carriages for use between London and Liverpool.<sup>105</sup> Four months after the completed line was opened to the public on 24 September 1838, all mail between Dublin and London was routed via Liverpool and the Holyhead packet station was moved to Liverpool.<sup>106</sup> It was moved again, in September 1840, to Birkenhead after a spur railway line was opened between there and Chester. All London mail continued to be routed through Birkenhead until August 1848, when the railway reached Holyhead, and it once again became the main packet station.<sup>107</sup>

Although the steam packet boats had demonstrated their worth in delivering a faster, regular and reliable service, they were very expensive to operate. The Post Office paddle steamers were poorly designed, and needed regular refits or adjustments to the ship's structure. The 1832 report on communications with Ireland was critical of how the Post Offices operated its fleet.<sup>108</sup> John MacGregor Skinner, the popular captain of the packet steamer *Escape*, which plied between Holyhead and Howth, when giving evidence to the committee questioned the ability of Post Office to run a shipping line and the sea worthiness of the packet steamers.<sup>109</sup> Tragically, his comments on the poor design of his ship proven accurate when on 30 October 1832, some months after appearing before the committee, he and his mate were washed overboard as a heavy sea struck the starboard side of his vessel. Their deaths were reported in all the newspapers.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> 1 & 2 Vict., c. 98 [U.K.].

<sup>103</sup> Wilson, *The travelling Post Offices*, p. 18.

<sup>104</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 8 Dec. 1837. However, Wilson in *The travelling Post Offices*, p. 18 states that this did not happen until 20 Jan. 1838: this may be when it officially began.

<sup>105</sup> Wilson, *The travelling Post Offices*, p. 18.

<sup>106</sup> Ayres, *History of the mail routes to Ireland*, p. 21.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> See *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 52-67. Captain Skinner was washed overboard and lost at sea in November 1832.

<sup>110</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 Nov. 1832; *Belfast News-Letter*, 2 Nov. 1832. Captain Skinner's biography by James Sparrow, *Biography of John MacGregor Skinner, Esq.,: commander, and late captain of one of her majesty's mail packets at Holyhead* (London, 1866) was published soon after his death. Money was raised in Holyhead to erect a memorial in his honour. It stands near the railway station to this day. He had fought in the American War of Independence on the British side and like Nelson, he lost an eye and an arm. He began working for the Post Office on the Holyhead route in 1799. At the time of his death, aged 70, he had spent fifty-nine years in public service.

According to *The sixth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department* published in 1836, the Post Office was ill-equipped to run a commercial shipping line, which is what the packet service essentially was.<sup>111</sup> Its fleet consisted of twenty-six ships, eighteen on the Irish Sea and eight plying between the south of England and mainland Europe, and operated a dock yard at Holyhead, which was used for repairs. However, as the report testified, the fleet was struggling: in the four years between 1832 and 1836, the Post Office packet service was carrying an operating loss of £154,956 14s. 4½d.<sup>112</sup> As early as 1832 Sir Henry Parnell, the Irish MP for Queen's County, had called for the Admiralty to take over the running of the packet boat.<sup>113</sup> In an effort to address the fleet's problems and as a result of the findings in the *Sixth report* in 1836, the Treasury transferred responsibility for the packets and the Post Office packet boats to the Admiralty. The order did not come into effect until January 1837 at which point all packet boats were renamed.<sup>114</sup>

In defence of the Post Office, shipping was not its main concern; providing a postal service was, and ships were only part (albeit an expense part) of its overall operations. Steam ships and the engineering associated with them were in their infancy and the Post Office, like shipping companies, was still only coming to grips with steam-powered ships. It did not keep up to date with the latest developments in steam navigation and its management of its packet service was poor. Soon after the Admiralty took over the packet service, the mail between London and Dublin, as previously stated, was transferred to the Liverpool packet station. This decision necessitated a second sailing on the route which was contracted out by the Post Office to the City of Dublin Steam Packer Company.<sup>115</sup> At the introduction of steam packets in 1821, the same company had offered to carry the mails under contract, but was turned down. The new service began on 24 January 1839: the Admiralty packet left Liverpool at 9 a.m. and the City of Dublin Steam Packer Company at 8 p.m.

If steam was revolutionising the Irish Sea crossing, on land it had a largely similar effect. An 1834 report detailed how 'The mail leaves London at Eight o'clock at night, reaches Dublin, under ordinary circumstances of weather, between seven and

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<sup>111</sup> *Sixth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, pp19-20, 1836 (51) xxviii, 145.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>113</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 276.

<sup>114</sup> *The Dragon, Escape, Wizard, Harlequin, Cinderella, and Gulnar became the Zephyr, Doterel, Otter, Sprightly, Cuckoo, and Gleaner*; see Watson, *The Royal mail to Ireland*, p. 148.

<sup>115</sup> Watson, *Royal Mail to Ireland*, p. 153.

eight the second Morning’, the journey time being just thirty-six hours.<sup>116</sup> The report also stated that this journey comprised ‘269 miles by Land, and a sea passage of 70 miles, including stoppages for Official Business and other necessary purposes.’<sup>117</sup> By 1841 the introduction of trains had reduced the journey time by a third to just twenty-two hours and thirty minutes, thirteen and a half hours faster than in 1834.<sup>118</sup> It was envisioned that this could be further reduced to under seventeen hours if a railway line were built all the way to Holyhead, as happened in 1850.<sup>119</sup>

### **Reform of the British Post Office**

Measures aimed at achieving a major restructuring of the Irish Post Office were not the only reforms sought during the early 1830s. There were also many calls from both inside parliament and the public outside for reform of the British Post Office. Queen Anne’s 1711 Act was still the main legislation governing the Post Office, which was subsequently supplemented by another 125 lesser Acts.<sup>120</sup> In 1830 Francis Freeling, its secretary, who had been in office for over thirty years, was viewed as dictatorial and out of date. Many of the Post Office’s structures and practices were also regarded as dated, in particular, the manner in which senior staff were paid. How the Post Office conducted its core business (collecting and delivering letters), the expense of conducting that business, and how it operated the mail packets were also questioned. Between 1829 and 1830 the published five reports concerning the Post Office.<sup>121</sup> As happened with many previous reports, their findings could have been ignored but for the determination of one man, the Whig MP, Robert Wallace.

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<sup>116</sup> *Papers relating to the Post Office 1834*, p. 5.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, n. c.

<sup>118</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office communication with Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix*, H.C. 1841 (1) (399) p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office communication with Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, p. iv, 1842 (373).

<sup>120</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 256.

<sup>121</sup> *Eighteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain. Post Office revenue, United Kingdom, 1829* (161); *Nineteenth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain ... part II. Ireland, 1829* (353); *Twentieth report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain ... part III, Scotland, 1830* (63); *Twenty-first report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain ... part IV. England. Twopenny-Post Office, 1830* (94); *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of inquiry into the collection and management of the revenue arising in Ireland and Great Britain ... part V. Packet establishments. – Home stations, 1830* (647).

Wallace entered parliament, following passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832, as the first MP for Greenock in Scotland.<sup>122</sup> Almost immediately he began attacking the Post Office. In August 1833, only six months after entering Westminster, he accused the Post Office of opening letters ‘for the purpose of detecting suspected frauds on the revenue, by which the secrecy of the post was destroyed.’<sup>123</sup> Reports of his attacks on the service delivered in parliament were carried in many of the Irish newspapers. In three months (August-September 1833) he spoke in parliament on at least five different occasions concerning various defects in the Post Office.<sup>124</sup> He was not the only MP calling for reform – Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer, also lobbied for change within the Post Office<sup>125</sup> – but it was Wallace who was most vocal, alleging that it was an expensive and inefficient institution. As a result, in 1835 a commission for inquiring into the Post Office department was established; between July 1835 and January 1838 it produced ten reports.<sup>126</sup> It has already been noted how, as a result of one of these reports, *The sixth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, published in 1836, the Admiralty took over operating the packet service. Another outcome was the consolidation, in 1837, of all 125 Acts that governed the Post Office into just six.<sup>127</sup> The 1837 Acts did not reform how the Post Office operated; rather, they brought clarity to existing laws. Before its last report was published, Rowland Hill in 1837 published his pamphlet *Post Office reform: its importance and practicability* in which he called for cheaper postage.<sup>128</sup> The implication of the proposals in this pamphlet and its supplement was to profoundly change the postal service.

Although there had been sporadic calls for cheaper postage, Hill’s proposal for a low-cost service, and his presentation of facts and figures to support his contention that

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<sup>122</sup> Wallace was MP for Greenock. Newly-enfranchised, it was the port city of Glasgow and an important trade centre. Wallace’s father was a West India merchant in Glasgow and would have been very aware of the usefulness of an effective and cheap postal service to commerce.

<sup>123</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 13 Aug. 1833.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Oct. 1833; *Leinster Express*, 24 Aug. 1833; *Freeman’s Journal*, 16 Oct. 1833.

<sup>125</sup> Robinson, *The British Post Office*, p. 247.

<sup>126</sup> *Report of commissioners of Post-Office inquiry, dated 15 December 1834, with evidence, &c.*, H.C. 1835 (416), xlvi, 253; *Mail coach contracts. Reports made by the commissioners for inquiring into the Post-Office Department, on the subject of mail-coach contracts*, H.C. 1835 (313) xlvi, 399; *Fourth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, H.C. 1836 (49) (50) (51) xxviii, 33, 101, 145; *Seventh report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*; *Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department. Part I*, H. C. 1837 (85) xxxiv, pt. i, 405; *Ninth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department*, H.C. 1837 (99) xxxiv, pt. i, 431; *Tenth report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the management of the Post-Office Department. Registration of letters*, H.C. 1837-38 (112) xxxv, 185.

<sup>127</sup> 7 Will. IV & 1 Vict., c. 32, c. 33, c. 34, c. 35, c. 36 and c. 76.

<sup>128</sup> See Hill, *Post Office reform*.

this could be achieved in 1837, came as a bolt out of the blue. His pamphlet caused a sensation. He described in detail the many faults within the Post Office, focussing in particular on the abuse of the franking system, the illegal evasion of paying postage. He also emphasised how cumbersome the system was since each individual letter had to be rated at the point of posting and payment collected on delivery. Hill showed that these were in fact the points at which the expense was incurred, not the transport. In addition, postal rates were complex, depending on the distance and the number of sheets in the letter. Hill made many recommendations and backed these up with facts and figures. He stated that if his proposals, in particular that concerning prepayment for letters, were carried through, then a postage rate of one penny per half ounce (if prepaid) would be possible.

A Select Committee was established in late 1837, chaired by Robert Wallace, to examine Hill's proposals for a British Isles-wide penny post. Wallace's committee on postage was established on 23 November 1837, began taking evidence on 7 February 1837, continued work until the 3 July and produced three large reports, full of facts and figures, one in April 1838 and two the following August.<sup>129</sup> The report came down very much in favour of the Hill's scheme. Many witnesses were called both from within and outside Post Office. The Post Office's witnesses, including its new secretary, Col. W.L. Maberly, who replaced the recently deceased Freeling, together with Earl Lichfield, the Postmaster General, were very much opposed to Hill's idea, saying that it was unworkable, while almost all the other witnesses (including Charles Bianconi) were in favour. Nonetheless, the committee favoured the scheme and after the Lords of the Treasury were convinced it was workable, a temporary four penny post was introduced and ran between 5 December 1839 and 9 January 1840. The uniform penny post was introduced on 10 January 1840 with new postage stamps first going on sale in May of that year.

### **Factors driving change**

During the period 1831 to 1840 the demand for better work practices and systems under within the Post Office in Ireland was driven by the state administration and the Treasury in London. This was in contrast with Britain where it was those in the commercial sector who pressed for reforms that culminated in the introduction of a uniform penny post throughout the United Kingdom in 1840. The expansion of the network and the

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<sup>129</sup> See *First report from the Select Committee on postage; Second report from the Select Committee on postage; Third report from the Select Committee on postage*, 517.



continual improvement in the speed at which the mails moved were driven by commercial interests: this is evident in the predominance of commercial parties amongst those called to give evidence before the different committees. This thesis has discussed in detail the 1810, 1829 and 1832 reports regarding the Irish Post Office: the first two concerned mismanagement while the third concentrated on the speed of communications within Ireland and the connectivity between Ireland and Britain. Of the 115 witnesses called to give evidence before the 1829 Select Committee, all bar three individuals, representing the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, were Post Office personnel.<sup>130</sup> The same was also true of the earlier reports. The 1832 report marked a change, now commercial people were predominant among witnesses called before the Select Committees. For the 1832 and subsequent report many business people were called to give evidence on the usefulness of a faster service. The importance of speed was emphasised by the two bankers, G. W. Baird, manager of the Provisional Bank of Ireland in Wexford, and James William Gilbert, manager in Waterford.<sup>131</sup> However, speed was also important to the state administration as demonstrated by the large amounts of capital it was prepared to spend on the Dublin-London route in order to ensure optimal speed of delivery of the mails between the two cities. Other links were as important (if not more so) to commerce. The two other links from Scotland and south of England via Donaghadee and Dunmore, from a commercial standpoint, were as important as the route via Holyhead. Yet the money spent on these pales into insignificance when compared with the enormous outlay on the Holyhead route. The roads to Milford and Portpatrick were never brought up to the standard of the Holyhead road; indeed the Portpatrick road by 1839 was still not fit to take a mail coach. This clearly demonstrates that Westminster invested in upgrading routes which would best serve its needs in the future.

If 1832 saw a change in who was the driving force behind much of the developments within the Post Office, the 1838 report by Robert Wallace's committee certainly highlighted this change. It must be remembered here that the two Post Offices were now one and any changes introduced in England also applied to Ireland. It is clear from the evidence given by individuals who appeared before Wallace's postal reform Select Committees (1837-8) that mounting pressure for change and speed was coming from commercial interests. The fact that the uniform penny post was introduced at all reinforces this, as it was introduced against the advice of the Postmaster General Earl

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<sup>130</sup> *Nineteenth report*, pp 110-12.

<sup>131</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, pp 194-98, 208-11.

Lichfield and his secretary Colonel Maberly and others from within the Post Office who feared that the resulting loss of revenue would adversely affect the Post Office. The fact that it was the commercial interests that the Government listened to and not Post Office management reveals who was now driving the reforms concerning the Post Office. It also demonstrates that the Post Office in Ireland was now operating as part of the much larger United Kingdom postal organisation.

### **The Post Office and private correspondence**

It is impossible to ascertain the amount of personal letters carried by the Post Office during this period. Yet, there is little doubt the number was growing. There were two main reasons for this – improving literacy and in emigration. Literacy among the poorer Catholic labouring class was beginning to increase, boosted in no small part to the introduction of the National school system in Ireland in 1831.<sup>132</sup> According to the 1841 census, forty-three per cent of the population was literate.<sup>133</sup> As a result, an increasing number of people would have the option to use the postal service, especially after 1840 when it became affordable to most of the population.

Movement of people away from their native place and the necessity or desire to keep in contact with home was another reason for the rise in personal correspondence. For those emigrating, the post was usually the only link with home. Although emigration abroad had long been a feature of Irish experience, before the 1840 the Irish were already emigrating in large numbers as evident from the Irish ghettos that had emerged in English cities notably Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and London.<sup>134</sup>

During the early decades of the nineteenth century the numbers leaving Ireland were growing significantly. America had long been a popular destination for emigrants; by the 1830 Irish Catholics were emigrating there in ever increasing numbers. It is estimated that as many as one million people emigrated to the US between 1815 and 1845.<sup>135</sup> Contact between home and many emigrants was regular as evidenced the frequency of chain emigration.<sup>136</sup> This generated a large amount of mail traffic between Ireland and America. Arnold Schrier in his book, *Ireland and the American emigration, 1850-1900*, states that between 1833 and 1835, over 700,000 letters passed through

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<sup>132</sup> Akenson, 'Pre-university education', p. 523.

<sup>133</sup> *Census Ireland, 1841*, pp 438-9, H.C.1843 (504) xxiv, 546-7.

<sup>134</sup> Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington Indiana, 1976), p. 60.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Fitzgerald & Lambkin, *Migration in Irish history*, p. 145 for a comment on the importance of Irish migrant letters in chain-migration.

Liverpool Post Office from New York – eleven times more than went to New York – and many of these were for Ireland.<sup>137</sup> Kerby A. Miller estimates that ‘by the early 1830s between one-sixth and one-half of the Irish emigrants leaving Liverpool and Ulster ports had received their ticket or passage money from America.’<sup>138</sup>

Australia too had a growing Irish population. Unlike America, many of the early emigrants were convicts transported there by the authorities. It is estimated that 40,000 convicts were transported from Ireland and another 8,000 Irish among those transported from Britain.<sup>139</sup> Again there were many letters home: several of these differ from the American letters as many convicts tried to persuade wives and families to follow them out to Australia and thus, like the American letters, they tended to paint a rosy picture of their new homes and lives.<sup>140</sup> It has to be stated that many of the various colonial administrators, members of the judiciary and the clergy, were also Irish<sup>141</sup>; like the convicts, they too wrote home. The introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840, the combination the availability of elementary education for almost all the population, and growing Irish migration both within the United Kingdom and further afield resulted in an increasingly heavy reliance on the Post Office for conveying personal correspondences.

### **Changing functions of the Post Office**

Certain functions of the Post Office began to change slowly between 1831 and 1840. From the Government’s point of view, service to the state administration was still its principal function and as such, its main purpose continued to be the state’s communications network, thus allowing all elements of the state to function efficiently. Its function as a provider of intelligence also continued, although in peacetime this was obviously less significant. By contrast, its function as a provider of revenue to the state was nearing an end. Instead, it had a new function – to make Ireland an integral part of the United Kingdom.

This thesis has argued that the post and later the Post Office had since its beginnings played a growing role in facilitating British governance of Ireland. After the Union the concerted drive at Westminster was to achieve assimilation and integration of

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<sup>137</sup> Arnold Schrier, *Ireland and the American emigration, 1850-1900* (Minneapolis, 1958), pp 18-42.

<sup>138</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America* (New York, 1985), p. 271.

<sup>139</sup> Malcolm Campbell, ‘Irish immigrants in the Pacific world’ in Laurence M. Geary and Andrew J. McCarthy (eds), *Ireland, Australia and New Zealand: history, politics and culture* (Dublin, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>140</sup> Patrick O’Farrell, *Letters from Irish Australia, 1825-1929* (Belfast and Kensington N.S.W., 1984), p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> Campbell, ‘Irish immigrants’, p. 5.

Ireland into the new United Kingdom. It was anticipated that the Post Office could be employed to help implement this policy. Westminster hoped that this could be achieved through trade and commerce.<sup>142</sup> As good communications are important element of trade and commerce, it was necessary to have within Ireland and crossing the Irish Sea a state-of-the-art Post Office. This was acknowledged in the 1842 *Report on communications with Ireland* which stated:

Your committee entirely concur in the doctrine which, since the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland, has been constantly recognized by the Imperial Legislature, and put forth by former Committees of Your House, namely, that any expenditure which may be necessary for affording the utmost facility of intercourse between these countries to be regarded as an outlay of money for national purposes than for the advantage of any particular department of the Public Service.<sup>143</sup>

This comment makes it clear that any investment in accelerating the mail service was money well spent and the fact that Westminster was prepared to ensure that Ireland's postal systems and network were as efficient as those in Britain at this time points to a new function of the Post Office – to help implement the United Kingdom's Government policy of integration. The above comment was written, in 1842, two years after the introduction of the uniform penny post, when the revenue that the Post Office was providing to the Exchequer was less than a third of what it had been before it's the uniform penny post. The fact that Westminster was prepared to suffer this loss in revenue reflected the acknowledged importance of the Post Office to the future success of the United Kingdom.<sup>144</sup>

### **A glimpse of how the postal system worked**

When in 1831 Augustus Godby succeeded Edward Lees as secretary of the Post Office, the formerly independent Irish Post Office had been reunited with its sister Post Office in London and he found a Post Office whose systems were badly in need of reform. It

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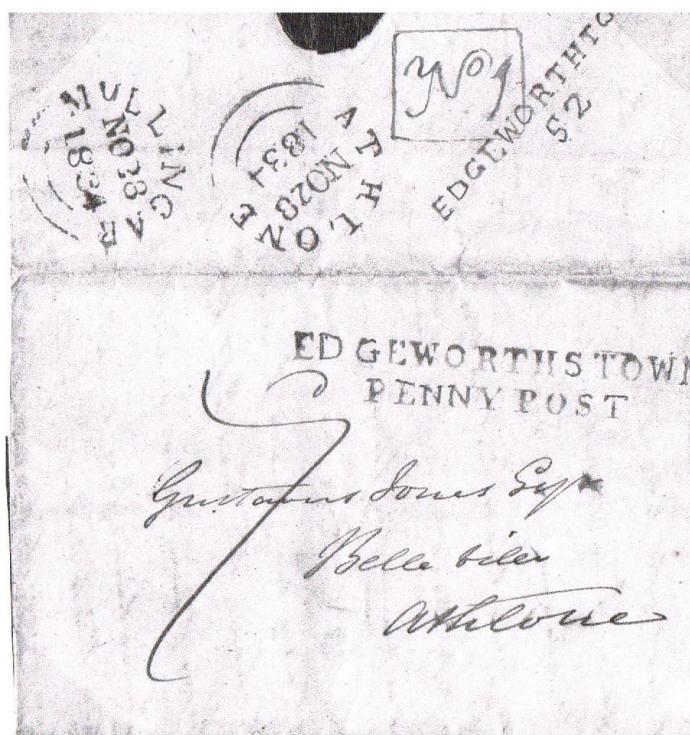
<sup>142</sup> *Report of the Select Committee on post connection with Ireland*, p. 30.

<sup>143</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office communication with Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, p. iii, H.C. 1842 (373) ix, 343.

<sup>144</sup> In 1839 the net revenue of the Post Office was £1,659,509. In 1842 it had fallen to £500,789 and would not recover its pre-1840 level until 1874: see *First report of the Postmaster General, on the Post Office 1854-55*, p. 68, H. C. 1845-55 (1913) xx, 555; *Twenty-seventh report of the Postmaster General on the Post Office*, p. 52, H.C. 1881 (C.3006) xxix, 583.

was not all bleak, however. Thanks to the efforts of both John and Edward Lees before him, the Post Office network was good, although its cross posts operations were in need of reform. Godby certainly improved the systems, bringing them in line with those in Britain, although these were proving to be dated as well. He improved the network by introducing many provincial Penny Post services, thereby changing how the cross posts operated, and reformed the Dublin Penny Post.

**Fig 5.2 The peregrinations of a letter dispatched from Ardagh in County Longford to Athlone, County Westmeath, Nov. 1834**



**Source:** Letter in author's private collection.

Just how quickly Godby succeeded in providing Ireland with a sophisticated system, countrywide network that supplied a modern and efficient service is illustrated by the case study of one letter (Fig 5.2) sent from Ardagh to Athlone in November

1834.<sup>145</sup> The letter was committed to the Edgeworthstown Penny Post at a receiving house in Ardagh. From there, it was carried to Edgeworthstown by foot post. At Edgeworthstown it was placed on the Sligo-Dublin mail coach arriving in Mullingar. There, it was put in the Athlone bag and carried by mail car to Kilbeggan where it was transferred to the Dublin-Galway mail coach, arriving in Athlone within twenty-four hours of its committal to the postal system.

When the postmarks on this letter are closely scrutinised they reveal the changes in the system that Godby had introduced. At Edgeworthstown three postmarks were applied – an Edgeworthstown Penny Post postmark indicating that it was carried by the Penny Post, a *N<sup>o</sup>.1* indicating that the letter was posted at Ardagh (the latter being the number one receiving house in Edgeworthstown Penny Post network, the second being Ballinalee)<sup>146</sup> and lastly, an Edgeworthstown mileage mark which indicated the distance from Edgeworthstown to Dublin.<sup>147</sup> Next, at Mullingar and Athlone, circular date stamps were applied, indicating the date the letter passed through those offices. These hand-stamps were beginning to replace the mileage mark throughout the country at this time. No hand-stamp was applied at Kilbeggan as there was likely a separate bag for mail between Mullingar and Athlone; letters could be added to it at Kilbeggan, but not removed. The letter travelled from Edgeworthstown to Athlone in the one day. Had it been held overnight in either Mullingar or Athlone, a second date stamp with the next day's date would have been applied. The letter was rated at *7d.* the rate for a letter travelling not less than forty-five or more than fifty-five miles.<sup>148</sup>

The letter reveals several features of the postal service of that time. Firstly, it shows how complex both the system and the network were. The letter was moved in four stages, using three different modes of transport. For this to work successfully and the letter to be delivered on time at each of the four Post Offices, all those involved had to work off a common time: as mentioned in the previous chapter, it was the mail coaches that provided this. The use of such an array of postmarks made it clear to the public that there was no delay on the part of the Post Office in carrying mail or if there was, it was clear where in the system this occurred. The letter illustrates just how far the Post Office had evolved by the early 1830s. Prior to Godby's arrival, the person posting this letter would have had to go to Edgeworthstown. From there, the letter

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<sup>145</sup> Unknown to Gustavous Jones, 28 Nov. 1834 (private collection in author's possession).

<sup>146</sup> Ardagh was established in 1832 – see *First report from the Select Committee on postage*, p. 508. Ballinalee is not recorded until 1836 – see *Post Office annual directory 1836* (Dublin, 1836) p. 381.

<sup>147</sup> Mileage marks were introduced in 1808 and indicated the distance of a town from Dublin since at that time, most mail either went to or via Dublin and was rated accordingly (to Dublin and from Dublin).

<sup>148</sup> 54 Geo. III, c. 119 [U.K.] (1814)

would have gone to Dublin where it would have been held overnight before being dispatched to Athlone where it would have arrived two days later. The charge would have been 10*d.*, the cost of a letter travelling between ninety-five and 120 miles (that is, fifty-two from Edgeworthstown to Dublin and fifty-nine Dublin to Athlone – a total of 111 miles). The letter illustrates the improvements introduced by Godby and shows how modern the postal system and network he delivered were. Short of an individual carrying it directly from Ardagh to Athlone, it is doubtful if the letter could have been delivered any faster. This small case study of a single letter is emblematic of Ireland's modern, fast and efficient postal service which was available to both the state administration and to those among the general public who could afford to use it. Building upon generations of advances before him, this was the improved Post Office that Godby had put in place within three and a half years of his arrival. From Westminster's perspective, these improvements made governing Ireland much easier than had hitherto been the case.

### **Conclusion**

After the Act of Union, like the two Post Offices, many other Government departments in Ireland and Britain were amalgamated. The Post Office smoothed the way for their integration. It made possible the centralisation of command and control structures in Dublin or London for the police, the army and other sections within the administration. Its commitment to effecting this centralization explains the premium the Government placed on the Post Office, especially the link between London and Dublin. This was made possible by a Post Office that had by 1840 penetrated almost the entire country and that was arguably as fast and efficient as was possibly for that time.

The mail between Dublin and London and within Ireland moved ever faster, allowing various Government departments in London to communicate with Dublin more rapidly than ever before. Dublin in turn was able to communicate more quickly with the many branches of the administration in various towns throughout Ireland. As the governance of Ireland became more centralised in London, increasingly the authority and influence of the administration at Dublin shifted to London, one such example being the position of the Lord Lieutenant. The Act of Union stripped the Lord Lieutenant of many of his powers, reducing him to little more than a figurehead: the onset of faster, regular and reliable communication between Dublin and London facilitated this change.

In the aftermath of the Act of Union and more particularly from the early 1830s, Westminster anticipated that a modern and effective communications system would bring all countries within the union closer, provide benefits to both, and help integrate Ireland into the new United Kingdom, just as Scotland, over 100 years before, in 1707, had been successfully united with England to form what was seen as the flourishing Great Britain. Supporting commerce and trade was an important element in achieving this objective. For these to succeed, an efficient Post Office was essential. The unification of the two Post Offices by Acts of parliament, and the far-reaching changes implemented by Augustus Godby during the years 1831 to 1840 were key elements in the process of cementing the Union and of assimilating the two countries.

The importance of the London-Dublin link was reflected in a comment featured in an 1842 parliamentary report produced when it was becoming obvious that trains were going to replace the mail-coaches, after large sums of public money have already been expended ‘on now out of date mail coach roads, nevertheless, this money was regarded as having been spent ‘justly and wisely’.<sup>149</sup> Those engaged in commerce may have pushed for some of the changes; however, it was the Government that decided where infrastructural money was to be invested. The main purpose of the Post Office from the Government’s standpoint was providing the state with a communications network. That function did not change; neither did its function as a provider of intelligence. Its function as a provider of revenue was set to fade completely. However, as this chapter has shown, the Post Office now had a new function which was to bind Ireland to, and incorporate her into, the new United Kingdom as seamlessly as possible. In particular, the 1839 Act changed forever the public perception of the Post Office.<sup>150</sup> Thereafter, it would as the duke of Richmond declared, become a service for all the people, not just an elite who could afford it.

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<sup>149</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Post Office communication with Ireland ... 1842* (373), p. iii.

<sup>150</sup> 2 & 3 Vict., c. 52 [U.K.]. (17 Aug 1839) This Act was only a provisional Act it was not until the following year when 3 & 4 Vict., c. 96 [U.K.] (10 Aug 1840) that the uniform penny post became permanent.



## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to trace, for the first time, the evolution of the Post Office in Ireland from its formal institutional beginnings in 1638 until 1840. The study has attempted to track, periodise and explain the expansion of the postal network; to examine when, how and why various iterations of postal systems developed and operated; to identify changes in the profile of those whose needs the Post Office served; to highlight how and when the postal service responded to changing needs of a widening pool of clients, and to show how improvements in the service contributed to the modernisation of Irish society. As emphasised at the outset of this thesis, the modernisation of the Post Office in Ireland was far from a linear progression. As this study has demonstrated, the official post in Ireland had a faltering start in the late sixteenth century, collapsed entirely in the disturbances of the mid-seventeenth century, went through periods of intense expansion followed by stagnation, survived managerial neglect, maladministration, and corruption, adapted to major re-structuring arising from far-reaching political and constitutional changes, and developed largely on an *ad hoc* basis in response to contingencies ranging from the election of a local MP to the introduction of mail coach travel, or steam-power, or railways.

The central point that has been emphasised in the thesis is that throughout most of this period, the Post Office in the British Isles in general and in Ireland in particular first and foremost served the state administration by carrying official mail, gathering intelligence, and generating revenue for the English Treasury. Thus, while the English Post Office had its origin in the early thirteenth-century kings' appointment of *nuncii* to carry official mail to and from London whilst they were on campaigns elsewhere, similarly in Ireland, the precursor of the official public Post Office (est. 1638) was the official service temporarily established by Lord Deputy Mountjoy, commander of the Crown's forces, to facilitate coordination of the campaign in Munster during the latter stages of the Nine Years' War (1594-1603) – the last phase of the Tudor conquest of Ireland. During the early Stuart period, in the later years of the Interregnum (1657-60) and in the 1690s in particular, it played an important role in facilitating the *consolidation* of that conquest through fulfilling its three core services (defined and reiterated in legislation in 1654, 1657, 1660 and later, in 1711) to the predominantly Protestant administration (both civil and military) and settler population.

It was during the course of the Hanoverian era (1714-1837) that the Post Office evolved dramatically from being primarily dedicated to serving the state administration as other interest groups within the state, notably merchants, traders (and in latter decades) retailers, grew increasingly reliant upon the service to the point that by the 1830s, their pressure to shape the development of the Post Office rivalled (though never exceeded) that of the state administration. Furthermore, it was during that period that the service was increasingly used (by those who could afford its still relatively high rates) to maintain social intercourse with family and friends within Ireland and overseas. By 1840 the Post Office of the United Kingdom, of which Ireland was a part, had undergone significant reform, standardisation and modernisation with the result that it was arguably the most modern state Post Office in the world at that time.

Although letters circulated in Ireland well before 31 July 1635 when Charles I in a proclamation established a letter-office in London and issued instructions for the creation of post roads throughout England, along with one to Edinburgh and another to Holyhead and thence to Dublin, Ireland had no organised internal postal network. Evan Vaughan's establishment of an official public Post Office in Ireland in 1638 therefore marked a significant departure in the modernisation of Irish society. However, as this study has shown, the fledgling service was an unacknowledged casualty of the 1641 rebellion and subsequent Cromwellian war, an equally unacknowledged part of the state infrastructure rehabilitated in the mid-1650s, and a vital aid to the nascent newspaper trade in Ireland. Despite ongoing infighting between rival political factions within both the Post Office and the Dublin Castle administration (royalists versus Cromwellian factions and later Williamite versus Jacobite supports) and the country's financial, economic and political difficulties during the last forty of the seventeenth century, the Post Office in Ireland has been shown to have recovered, stagnated and then settled into a phase of very slow expansion.

In broad institutional terms, by 1703 significant progress had been made: the Post Office had been set on a firm organisational footing, and was fulfilling its original core functions as defined in 1654, 1656 and 1660 legislation, including facilitation of the commercial enterprises of Ireland's merchants and traders (some of them Catholic). Yet, on closer examination, the picture is less impressive. George Warburton's long term as postmaster in Dublin (c.1667-1703) brought little in the way of improvements: instead, there were frequent complaints about the poor service and the practice of opening of letters without warrants. This poor performance stemmed from a lack of

sustained engagement on the part of those farmers entrusted with responsibility for the Post Office, the Postmasters General in London, Warburton himself, and Westminster which was ultimately responsible for the Post Office in Ireland.

However, as this study has shown, periodically a conscientious, committed official appointed to the helm of the Post Office in Ireland could make a profound impact on the pace and direction of developments. Such a significant step-change occurred in 1703 when the London Post Office, dissatisfied with Warburton's stewardship of the Irish office's finances, dispatched one of its own officials, the remarkably dynamic Isaac Manley, to regularise the accounting practices. Manley, like Vaughan before him, showed just how much a capable and engaged postmaster could achieve in terms of improving the Irish postal network, system and service. Bolstered by the landmark provisions of the 1711 Act which created a monopoly and set down the standards and rates for the Post Office in Britain and Ireland for over 100 years, Manley is deservedly credited with taking the construction of a countrywide postal network to a new plain, growing the number of post-towns from approximately fifty-seven when he arrived to 119 at the time of his death in 1738. Equally, the *absence* of Manley's exceptional leadership and drive between then and the appointment of John Lees, the next committed and able manager, as secretary of the Irish Post Office in 1784, is evident in the drastic drop in the pace of the network's expansion (only twenty-six post-towns established in forty-five years). This was in contrast with England where the Westminster parliament ensured that the Post Office operated efficiently and adapted regularly in order to respond to emerging customer needs.

Yet, the picture in Ireland is not entirely bleak: there were some significant advances during the period *c.*1739-84, mostly in terms of the quality of the service. The increased frequency of the dispatch of mails on the Munster and Ulster roads from three to six times weekly and on the Connaught from twice to three days, together with the establishment of the Dublin Penny Post in 1773, were foremost among the improvements. Equally, it is clear that while a majority of postmasters in Ireland throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries treated the position as little more than another lucrative sinecure, in spite of their disengagement the postal *service* (that element over which the Post Office secretaries had control) continued to improve, especially from the 1760s when many towns had a delivery six days a week. Furthermore, the Post Office's profits rose as it carried an increasing volume of mail, including newspapers. In that era, therefore, the Post Office's development was in

response to and a reflection of growing demand from customers in a widening range of sectors of Irish society.

Meanwhile, other factors that determined the development of the Post Office in Ireland changed, too. Westminster and Dublin Castle's preoccupation with military campaigns during 1638-90 on the whole lessened (apart from sporadic invasion scares such as in 1715 and during the 1740s) and was replaced in the decades down to the 1780s by a drive to strengthen and modernise the country's civil administration at both national and local levels through the introduction of reform initiatives in local government, defence, local and circuit courts, collection of taxation and customs. During that period, while the Post Office continued to operate as a branch of the English Post Office and was regulated by Westminster rather than the Irish parliament, it played a significant role in facilitating these processes of pacification, normalisation of politics and governance, and copperfastening of Protestant ascendancy in Ireland. Certainly in terms of infrastructural development, it was the needs of the state that continued to drive progress in the Post Office in Ireland. The constantly expanding network of post-towns, combined with increased frequency of the mails, enabled Westminster maintain a firm grip on the affairs of the Irish kingdom during the long eighteenth century.

Ever since Thomas Withering established the Post Office in England in the mid-1630s, it generated profit. This is evident in the amount of money that individuals were prepared to pay for the farm. In Ireland, it was during the Hanoverian period that the revenue-generating function of the Post Office assumed unprecedented importance. The 1711 Act ensured (through granting it a monopoly on the carriage of letters) that the Post Office generated substantial profits and that these went to the English Treasury. The timing of the Act was no accident: it was passed during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714) when Westminster was badly in need of finance to press on with the campaign. For its part, the Post Office in Ireland yielded increasing returns to the English Treasury, particularly from the late 1740s, when Irish trade and commerce entered a phase of prosperity that in turn caused the volume of letters carried and the revenue this generated to grow dramatically. The fact that this greatly inflated sum was being channelled into the English Treasury proved extremely controversial, drawing protests from aggrieved Irish merchants and traders whose growing reliance and expenditure on the post largely generated this revenue from which neither they, nor the Irish postal system, nor indeed Ireland, benefitted. It also became a political issue for the Protestant patriots in the Irish parliament who resented the arrangement as a clear

demonstration of the imbalance of power between kingdoms within the British ‘composite state’ and as yet another instance of Westminster’s assertion of undue control over their parliament.

After Dublin Castle responded to pressure from the Irish parliament to establish an independent Irish Post Office in 1784, a new era of unprecedented expansion, innovation and modernisation of the postal infrastructure and service dawned under the loyal and able (if self-serving) stewardship of John Lees, secretary of the Irish Post (1784-1803). The number of post-towns increased dramatically from 142 to 258; by 1803 the network extended across the whole country and a new safe, secure and increasingly speedy means of transporting mail – the mail-coach – was operating on the main routes. During the politically turbulent 1790s and early 1800s, when the Post Office steadfastly served the Dublin Castle administration, it was its intelligence-gathering function that once more came to the fore, proving especially vital in enabling the administration to detect and suppress insurrection.

This study has traced the significant shift in Westminster’s outlook on the Post Office in Ireland during the four decades following the Act of Union, highlighting how its hitherto largely *laissez-faire* attitude towards the actual running of the post gave way, especially during the era of the reforming Whig government in the 1830s, to a much more interventionist, more tightly regulatory approach. However, it has also been shown that it was not until after 1815 and the end of Britain’s wars with France that Westminster embarked upon a reform drive. Reform was delayed as Westminster needed all the revenue the Irish Post Office could generate to fund its war campaign. Given that the Irish Post Office never provided the Treasury with the expected revenue, the authorities were loathe to do much more than squeeze as much money as possible from the Office by repeatedly increasing postal rates.

As in previous phases in its evolution, during the early 1800s, despite mismanagement and widespread corruption, the Irish Post Office underwent significant modernisation, notably a doubling in the number of post-towns and the unprecedented speed of the service, particularly at sea. It has demonstrated how, in the wake of the Act of Union and more particularly post-1815, the Post Office in Ireland played a vital role in helping the administrations in both Westminster and Dublin transition from the British ‘composite state’ framework and attain the goal of more integrated, efficient and effective governance of Ireland within the evolving new institutional framework for

government of the United Kingdom. Although the Post Office continued to primarily serve the British state administration during this period, commercial and trading interests were by the 1830s of equal importance. However, at that point, major changes were also in train for the Post Office. In January 1840 the uniform penny post was introduced and while it did not precipitate any major changes in the systems or networks, overnight it fundamentally changed the ethos and orientation of the Post Office throughout the whole of the United Kingdom and particularly so in Ireland where, as this thesis has demonstrated, down to 1840 the Post Office continued its main mission to serve the state administration. This was in contrast with England, Wales, or Scotland after 1707 where the Post Office served in roughly equal measure the public and the state administration and where (unlike in Ireland), expansion of the postal service since the eighteenth century was driven by the needs of industry, trade and commerce.

This study has shown that from its very foundation, the Post Office was intended primarily to serve the needs of the British state administration. Throughout this period, the importance that the state administration in London attached to the Post Office in Ireland was constantly, sometimes symbolically, demonstrated. Such was its acknowledged importance that control of the Post Office was the cause of disputes between royalists and parliamentarians, Jacobites and Williamites, Whigs and Tories, even kings themselves (James II and William of Orange). Westminster ensured control of the post by always having a 'Castle man' at the helm. This became particularly vital after the passing of the Octennial Act (1768) when Westminster could no longer be assured of the Irish parliament's loyalty and in an era when Irish patriots were susceptible to the influence of American colonists following the War of Independence (1775-83) and later, the French Revolution. Even though since 1784, technically control of the Post Office in Ireland passed to the Irish parliament, the appointment of John Lees as secretary and his loyal service to Dublin Castle and by extension Westminster during the 1798 Rebellion demonstrated the premium both administrations placed on the service and their heavy reliance upon the dependability of the official at the helm. This study has also highlighted how, on a symbolic level, the Dublin Castle administration sought to capitalise on the popularity and success of the Post Office mail-coaches from 1809 onwards by including several of them in the annual parade and pageantry to celebrate the king's birthday.

Certainly compared with the rest of Britain and (post-1800) the United Kingdom, the state administration's influence over the expansion of the Post Office network in Ireland was exceptional. As this study has shown, all of the early post-towns were civil administration centres or military installations (often both), and all county towns (with the exceptions of Mayo and Longford) were post-towns by 1682. Throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, as the reach of state administration extended across the country, the Post Office network expanded. That is not, however, to argue that the expansion of the Irish post was driven exclusively by the state: as this study has highlighted, the greatest drivers of expansion in the period 1703-84 were MPs attending parliamentary sessions in Dublin. Equally, it should be emphasised that throughout the era when Ireland was a kingdom within the British 'composite state', the focus of its Post Office was first and foremost on serving the needs of the Irish kingdom through its service to the Dublin Castle administration, and to a lesser extent, the Irish parliament. After the Union it was those in the commercial sector who were most persistent in demanding improvements; they had a willing partner in the state administration. Also the Westminster administration, regardless of which political party was in power, went to great lengths to modernise the London-Dublin connection. The fact that it was prepared to spend in excess of £1.5 million on the postal route between London and Dublin in the 1820s testifies not only to the close link between the Post Office and the administration at Westminster; it also demonstrates how reliant that administration was on the reliable carrying service, intelligence-gathering, and revenue-generating functions of the Post Office. By the early 1830s the headquarters for the tax system, the army, customs and even the Post Office itself were clustered there. By 1841 Dublin and London were only twenty-two hours and thirty minutes apart and the speed at which the post was dispatched facilitated the exercise of effective control throughout the United Kingdom by a centralised state administration in London.

In this course of the 285-year period covered in this thesis, the core function of the Post Office – to provide a communications network for the state administration – certainly broadened enormously with a growing proportion of the state's citizens using and in turn driving advances in the network for the improvement and prosperity of that state. Yet, that core function did not fundamentally change; neither did its function as a provider of intelligence. However, on the eve of the introduction of the uniform penny

post in January 1840, just when its role as a generator of much-needed revenue for Westminster was about to fade, the Post Office was taking on a new function – to bind Ireland to, and incorporate her into, the new United Kingdom as seamlessly as possible. In particular, the 1839 Act changed forever the public perception of the Post Office. Thereafter, it would (as the duke of Richmond declared), become a service for all the people, not just an elite who could afford it.

The many ways in which the Post Office contributed to the modernisation of Irish society have been explored in this study. Its role in introducing and ensuring compliance with standard time throughout the country and its facilitating increased connectivity not alone between districts within Ireland but, more consequentially, between Ireland, Britain and the outside world in particular were highlighted. The proclamation founding the English Post Office in 1635 made it clear that a priority for the new service was ensuring that the mail dispatched from England reached Dublin, and on a regular basis. Although down to the introduction of steam-powered packets on the Irish Sea in 1821 the vessels were susceptible to the vagaries of weather, they almost always arrived, albeit it sometimes after long delays. The reliability and efficacy of that service in facilitating the conduct of state business throughout this 285-year period is evidenced by both the heavy reliance of Westminster, Dublin Castle and the Irish parliament on it, and the limited number of complaints regarding loss or (more frequently) delay of mails. As this study has highlighted, it was principally through this artery of communication that growing numbers of merchants, traders, retailers, learned societies such as the Dublin Philosophical Society and the Dublin Society, polemicists, scholars, landlords, land agents, newspaper editors, personal and professional correspondents of all kinds in Ireland conducted business with their contacts abroad, and in the process modernised the country by channelling the latest foreign news, modish commodities, fashions, and new ideas about politics, science, philosophy, law, military strategy and munitions, cartography, religious controversy and so on.

In the absence of an institutional archive, this study of the evolution of the Post Office in Ireland down to 1831 is based upon a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative evidence (much of it fragmentary) extracted from a wide array of diverse and often deeply biased contemporary source material. Furthermore, as is inevitable with such a longitudinal study, there are significant gaps in the evidence used, limits to the amount



of source material that can feasibly be consulted, and constraints imposed by the defined parameters for the study as stated at the outset. Consequently, there remains considerable scope for further study of the history of the Post Office and related themes during this era. For example, little has been written on the mail-coaches. Equally, there is potential for a fascinating dedicated study of the lives and careers of John and Edward Lees, and exhaustive mining of the voluminous correspondence of leading politicians and prelates of this period such as Jonathan Swift. What this thesis has shown is the stages and processes by which the Post Office in 1830s Ireland became, in the duke of Richmond's words, more closely connected 'to every class ... than any other branch of the state.' But it has also shown that meeting the demands of growing numbers of interest groups within the state was at best only ever a dual commitment. As the opening line of the 1784 Act establishing the independent Irish Post Office made clear, its *raison d'être* was 'the better support of your Majesty's government.' Down to the eve of the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840, the Post Office in Ireland remained first and foremost at the service of the state administration.

**Appendix 1**  
**Post Office rates 1657 to 1839**

In 1657 Cromwell's Parliament set the rates of postage for Ireland after the restoration of the monarchy. In 1660 Charles II confirmed these rates with the Act 12 Charles II, c35 [Eng] 1760

	Single	Double	Over 1 oz
Under 40 miles	2 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i> per oz
Over 40 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 per oz

In 1711, 9 Anne, c10 [G.B.] (1711) the ounce rate for over 40 miles was changed to 16*d* and a new treble rate introduced.

	Single	Double	Treble	Over 1 oz
Under 40 miles	2 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i> per oz
Over 40 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	16 <i>d.</i> per oz

5 Geo III c 25 [G.B.] (1765) a special 1*d* rate introduced for letters not travelling more than one stage ie the next post-town regardless of distance.

1773 Dublin Penny Post established the following year the extended beyond the circular roads for an additional 1*d*. However this network is not officially sanctioned by parliament until 1784

1784 Act of the Irish Parliament, 23 & 24 George III c 17 [Ire] (1784)

	single	double	treble	Over 1 oz Per ¼ oz
Up to 15 miles	2 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	2 <i>d.</i>
15 to 30 miles	3 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>	3 <i>d.</i>
Over 30 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>

Extension of 1797

30 to 50 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>
50 to 80 miles	5 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>	15 <i>d.</i>	5 <i>d.</i>
Over 80 miles	6 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>

1805 Apr. 5<sup>th</sup> Act George III. c 21 [Ire]

Distance	Single	double	treble	Over 1 oz Per ¼ oz
Up to 15 miles	3 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>	3 <i>d.</i>
15 to 30 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>
30 to 50 miles	5 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>	15 <i>d.</i>	5 <i>d.</i>
50 to 80 miles	6 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>
Over 80 miles	7 <i>d.</i>	14 <i>d.</i>	21 <i>d.</i>	7 <i>d.</i>

Act 50 George III c 74 [U.K.] (1810)

	Single	double	treble	Over 1 oz Per ¼ oz
Up to 15 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>
15 to 30 miles	5 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>	15 <i>d.</i>	5 <i>d.</i>
30 to 50 miles	6 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>
50 to 80 miles	7 <i>d.</i>	14 <i>d.</i>	21 <i>d.</i>	7 <i>d.</i>
Over 80 miles	8 <i>d.</i>	16 <i>d.</i>	24 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>

Act 53 George III c 58 [U.K.] (1813)

1813 rates	single	double	treble	over 1 oz per ¼oz
up to 10 miles	2 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	2 <i>d.</i>
10 to 20 miles	3 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>	3 <i>d.</i>
20 to 30 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>
30 to 40 miles	5 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>	15 <i>d.</i>	5 <i>d.</i>
40 to 50 miles	6 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>
50 to 60 miles	7 <i>d.</i>	14 <i>d.</i>	21 <i>d.</i>	7 <i>d.</i>
60 to 80 miles	8 <i>d.</i>	16 <i>d.</i>	24 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>
80 to 100 miles	9 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	27 <i>d.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>
over 100 miles	10 <i>d.</i>	20 <i>d.</i>	30 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>

Act 59 George III c 119 [U.K.] (1814)

	Single	Double	Treble	Over 1 oz per ¼ oz
Up to 7 miles	2 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	2 <i>d.</i>
7 to 15 miles	3 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>	3 <i>d.</i>
15 to 25 miles	4 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	4 <i>d.</i>
25 to 35 miles	5 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>	15 <i>d.</i>	5 <i>d.</i>
35 to 45 miles	6 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	6 <i>d.</i>
45 to 55 miles	7 <i>d.</i>	14 <i>d.</i>	21 <i>d.</i>	7 <i>d.</i>
55 to 65 miles	8 <i>d.</i>	16 <i>d.</i>	24 <i>d.</i>	8 <i>d.</i>
65 to 95 miles	9 <i>d.</i>	18 <i>d.</i>	27 <i>d.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>
95 to 120 miles	10 <i>d.</i>	20 <i>d.</i>	30 <i>d.</i>	10 <i>d.</i>
120 to 150 miles	11 <i>d.</i>	22 <i>d.</i>	33 <i>d.</i>	11 <i>d.</i>
150 to 200 miles	12 <i>d.</i>	20 <i>d.</i>	30 <i>d.</i>	12 <i>d.</i>
200 to 250 miles	13 <i>d.</i>	26 <i>d.</i>	39 <i>d.</i>	13 <i>d.</i>
200 to 300 miles	14 <i>d.</i>	28 <i>d.</i>	42 <i>d.</i>	14 <i>d.</i>
over 300 miles	15 <i>d.</i>	30 <i>d.</i>	45 <i>d.</i>	15 <i>d.</i>

On 6 Jan following 6 Geo IV, c79 [U.K.] the Irish currency and Irish Miles were abolished and replaced by those of Great Britain This was reflected in the Post Office directory printed that year this led to much confusion<sup>1</sup> However within two years Irish miles had been restored to the directory

<sup>1</sup> Post Office Post Office Directory (Dublin 1827)

**Appendix 2**  
**Vaughan's account of the Irish Post Office.<sup>2</sup>**

Corke Road

Miles			p ann		
			£.	s.	d.
	Dublin Euan Vaughan	}			
12	To the Naas John Robinson	}	32	0.	0.
20	To Caterhaugh Thomas Moore postmaster		38	0.	0.
	30 to Waxford by a footeman Cuthbert				
	Smith for an office there only	}	13.	6.	0.
	Nathaniell Quarre Postmaster of Ross for Abramh of	}			
	12 from the Road between Carlos and Waxford by a Footeman	}	8.	4.	0.
	Arthur Manwaring for an office onely	}			
	Eniscorfe on ye Road between Carlos and waxford	}	2.	0.	0.
15	To Kilkenney Thomas Talbott for ye Road onely	}	32.	0.	0.
	37 to Neanagh by a Footeman and for his office				
	There Morian Thomas	}	3.	18.	0.
	7 to the Birr [?] & Lorking to Ross Crea letters	}	3.	18.	0.
	18d p weeke morris Thomas	}	46.	0.	0.
6	To Callon Patrick Vaunee	}			
	17 miles to Waterford by a Footeman Tho: Wright only	}	16.	0.	0.
	for an office there				
	14 to Cashall John Ogden		36.	0.	0.
	23 To Limerick Robert Butterton for y Roade & his				
	Office		32.	0.	0.
14	To Clonmell John Forton		32.	0.	0.
17	To Tablow[?] Robert Joans		34.	0.	0.
	12 to yaughall Abram Vuaghan for a footman & office				
	there		15	0.	0.
18	To Corke John Vaughan p horse &	}			
	12 to Kinsale	}	44.	0.	0.
	12 to Bandon	}			
	for p a Footeman				

<sup>2</sup> *Cal of S. P. Ireland 1647-60* pp 323, 687. Thurloe's postal accounts for the Quarter ended 23 June 1659 Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS a.64(f.32) also full list see J. W. M. Stone, *The inland posts (1392-1672)* p. 272-3

		Connaught Road				
	Dublin Euan Vaughan	}	Postmasters	030.	0.	0.
10	To Manought Ralph Bullocke	}				
20	To Mullingar Richard Wilson			038	0.	0.
	To Athlone John Ellis			042	0.	0.
	12 to Roscommon John Coats			024.	0.	0.
	20 to Abbey Boyle Thomas Hudleston	}		030.	0.	0.
	20 to Llegod[?] slegod	}				
10	Balaynassloe Robert Warner			034	0.	0.
14	To Loughren Thomas Broughton			029.	0.	0.
12	To Gallaway Zachary Browne			026.	0.	0.
		23.2.9. Ulster Road				
	Dublin Euan Vaughan	}		24.	0.	0.
10	To Ballaugh Richard Robinson	}		30.	0.	0.
10	To Droghedagh John Talbot			30	0.	0.
16	To Dundalke Robert Carter			20.	0.	0.
8	To Newry Bernard Butterfeild			30	0.	0.
8	To Loughbrickland John Todd			30.	0.	0.
	16 To Lisnegarvy by foote John Coshett			18.	0.	0.
	16 To Carick Fergus through bellfast William	}		6.	0.	0.
	Thompson for a footeman and for an office there	}		30.	0.	0.
	Robert Jackson for a office at Belfast					
	John Young postmaster of Coleraine	}				
	37 p foote passing through Antrim to Linegarvy	}		3.	0.	0.
	Ralph Bethell Postmaster of Antrim for an office					
	only			24.	0.	0.
14	To Ardmagh William Hacker			26.	0.	0.
12	To Dunganon Thomas Hall			28.	0.	0.
	18 Omagh Francis Tracy			08.	0.	0.
	21 To Eniskilling by foote Francis Tracey			24.	0.	0.
12	To Strabane Roger Joanes			24.	0.	0.
	To London Derry Benjamin Ash			26	8.	0.
	Richard Robinson Postmaster of Belturbott	}				
	Keeping a foote post to goe to Dublin 52 miles	}				
	Backward and forward & for his office there	}				

**Appendix 3**  
**The Irish Post Office in 1682.<sup>3</sup>**

<u>Stages &amp; Miles</u>	<u>Postmaster</u>	<u>Salary</u>	<u>Branches</u>
<u>Munster Road</u>			
Dublin	17 J. Knight	25 --	
Kilcullen			
Carlow	30 G. Quigley	50 --	A bag at Castledermot and Goran
Kilkenny	20 W. Lahorn	38 --	Another at Cullen
Clonmel	12 R. Dennison	32 --	To Capperquin 16 miles once a week
Tallough	28 Robt. Jones	36 --	
Cork	10 I. Vaughan	50 --	To Kingsdale 10 Brandon 12 Tralee 40
Mallough	14 I. Darby	5--	
Roserea	56 Corne: Horan	50 10	To Athy, Maryborrow, Burr & Nenagh
Rosse	21 N. Quarms	24 --	
Waterford	L. Pearce	10 --	
Wrexford	15 W. Hughes		
Cashell	20 J. Neave	30 --	
Limmerick	12 R. Wilkins	30 --	And to Charleville 16
Youghall	10 G. Renolds	<u>15 --</u>	
		413 10	
<u>Ulster Road</u>			
Dublin	20 J. Knight	35 --	
Drogedagh	16 John Bray	25 --	
Dondalk	8 B. Gaughan	15 --	
Newry	16 Edw. Smith	40 --	And to Downpatrick 21
Armagh			
Dongannon	28 J. Doudall	42 --	
Omagh	24 F. Tracy	45 --	And to Emiskilling 24
Strabane	W. Maxwell	6 --	
London Derry	H. Sherrard	10 --	
Loughbrickland	23 E. Douglas	30 --	To Belfast & Carrickferg
Lisnagarvy	10 G. Olgivy	28 --	
Belfast	R. Jackson	7 --	

<sup>3</sup> Legg family archives (B.L., Add MS. 63091). The first report (1678) was written for James, Duke of York, later James II, who had been granted the profits of the Post Office in 1663. The second was written for Colonel George Legge, Lieutenant General of Ordinance and confidant of Charles II. The two surveys were reproduced and published by the Postal History as special series No. 5 *A general survey of the Post Office 1677-1682* by Thomas Gardiner edited by Foster W. Bond (London 1958) pp 69-70.

Carrickfergus	H. Burnes	7 --	
Antrim	M. Bethell	7 --	
Colerain	20 Paul Young	<u>18 --</u>	
		315--	
<u>Connaught Road</u>			
Dublin	10 J. Knight	18 --	
Manooth			
Lanesbrough	40 John Lort	63 10	At Mullingar a Bagg
Athlone	21 John Noble	32 --	
Lanesbrough	12 Fitzharris	15 --	
Roscommon	20 John Coates	28 --	
Elphin	J. Slaughter	4 --	
Slegoe	20 John Rouse	33 --	And at Boyle a bagg
Galway	36 R. Warner	<u>70 --</u>	At Ballinasloe & Loughrea
		263	

#### Irish Stages and Postmasters.

<u>Stages</u>	<u>Postmasters</u>	<u>Salaries</u>
Dublin	Mr. Knight	35 --
Droughedagh	Mr. Brady	25 --
Dondlake	Mr. Gaughan	15 --
Newry	Mr. Smith	40 --
Armagh	Mr. Dowdall	42 --
Omagh	Mr. Tracey	45 --
Strabane	Mr. Maxwell	6 --
London: derry	Mr. Sherrard	10 --
Loughbrickland	Mr. Douglas	30 --
Lisnagarvy	Mr. Olgevy	28 --
Belfast	Mr. Jackson	7 --
Carrickfergus	Mr. Bournes	7 --
Antrim	Mr. Younge	<u>18 --</u> 315. 0
<u>Stages</u>	<u>Postmasters</u>	<u>Salaries</u>
Dublin	Mr. Knight	25 --
Catherlough	Mr. Quigley	50 --
Kilkenny	Mr. Laughorn	38 --
Colnmell	Mr. Dennison	32 --
Tallough	Mr. Jones	36 --
Corke	Mr. Vaughan	50 --
Mallough	Mr. Darby	5 --
Roserea	Mr. Horan	50 10

MUNSTER ROAD

Rosse	Mr. Quarmes	24 --	
Waterford	Mr. Pearce	10 --	
Wrexford	Mr. Hughes	18 --	
Cashell	Mr. Neave	30 --	
Limmerick	Mr. Wilkins	30 --	
Youghall	Mr. Reynolds	15 --	413.50

Dublin	Mr. Knight	18 --	
Manooth	Mr. Lort		63 10
Athlone	Mr Noble	32 --	
Lanesborough	Mr. Fitzharris	15 --	

CONNAUGHT ROAD

Roscommon	Mr. Coates	28 --	
Elphin	Mr. Rowse	4 --	
Slegoe	Mr. Slaughter	33 --	
Galway	Mr. Warner	70 --	263.10

Clarkes	(Mr Knight	40 --	
	(Mr Garnett	30 --	
	(Mr. O'Neille	30 --	
	(Browne	30 --	
	(Horam	18 --	
Letter Carriers	(Gaughan	18 --	
	(Office Porter	5 --	171.0



**Appendix 4**  
**The Irish Post Office in 1784.**<sup>4</sup>

An Establishment or list containing payments to be made from the General Post Office of Ireland which our pleasure is shall commence and be accounted payable from the first day of August One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty Four Inclusive.

		£	s	d	Per Annum		
					£	s	d
His Majesty's Post Master General of Ireland appointed by the Kings Letters Patent <u>James Viscount Clifden</u> <u>William Brabagon Ponsonby Esq.</u>					3000	-	-
The Secretary's Office Secretary <u>John Lees</u> Esq. appointed by Letters Patent in Lieu of Coals and Candles So as Comptroller of the Penny Post Office		300	-	-			
		33	5	-			
		100	-	-	433	5	-
First Clerk <u>Robert Shaw</u> in Lieu of Coals and Candles Do for Prints for the Post Master General		120	-	-			
		19	19	8			
		20	-	-	159	19	8
Second Clerk <u>Patrick Thomson</u> Do as Store Keeper		60	-	-			
		20	-	-	80	-	-
Third Clerk and Clerk of the dead Letter Office <u>William Armid</u>					60	-	-
Carried forward					733	4	8
The Secretary's Office Brought forward Fourth Clerk <u>Jackson Golding</u>					733	4	8
					50	-	-
					783	4	8
<b>Treasurer's Office</b> Treasurer or Receiver <u>General Lodge Morris</u> Esq. Appointed by the Kings Letters Patent First Clerk <u>Devereux</u> Second Clerk <u>Paul Stuart</u>					500	-	-
					70	-	-
					40	-	-
					610	-	-
<b>Accomptant Generals Office</b> Accomptant General Appointed by the Kings Letters Patent Do in Lieu of Coals and Candles Clerk <u>Thomas Goodwin</u>	<u>John Armit</u> Esq.	350	-	-			
		19	19	8	369	19	8
					70	-	-
					439	19	8

<sup>4</sup> British Postal Museum and Archive, POST 15/154, Irish Post Office letter copy book (on microfilm M.F.A. – 43-Post Office film 1).

	£	s	d	£	s	d
<b>By &amp; Cross Road Letter Office</b> President Surveyor and Comptroller <u>William Foretscue</u> Esq. Appointed by the Kings Letter Patent Do in Lieu of Coals and Candles	300	-	-	319	19	8
Clerk <u>Isaac De Jon Court</u> First Riding Surveyor <u>George</u> <u>Webb</u> and also an occasional Allowance of ten Shillings and six pence per day when employed out of Dublin Second Riding Surveyor <u>Robert</u> <u>Johnston</u> and also an occasional Allowance of ten Shillings and six pence per day when employed out of Dublin				50	-	-
				50	-	-
				50	-	-
				469	19	8

<b>Sorting Office</b>						
Comptroller <u>Robert Shaw Esq.</u> appointed by the Kings Letter Patent					250	- -
Deputy Comptroller <u>Patrick</u> <u>Thomson</u>					50	- -
Clerk of the Connaught Road - <u>Henry Harrison</u>					60	- -
Clerk of the North Road <u>Richard</u> <u>Bolger</u>					40	- -
Clerk of the Munster Road and Alphabet Keeper <u>The Honble</u> <u>Ponsonby Moore</u> & <u>William</u> <u>Maturin</u>					40	- -
Clerk of the Munster Road full days <u>Alex Boswell</u>					30	- -
First Assistant to Aiffo <u>James</u> <u>Twigg</u>					50	- -
Clerk of the Munster Road, Bye days <u>Skeffington Hamilton</u>					100	- -
First Assistant Connaught Road	<u>Samuel Jones</u>				85	- -
Inspector of Franks	<u>Trevor Hill</u>				80	- -
Clerk of the North Road Bye Days	<u>Richard Clarke</u>				75	- -
Assistant Inspector of Franks	<u>Robert Williamson</u>				70	- -
Window Man Full Days	<u>Thomas Small</u>				65	- -
Window Man Bye Days	<u>Bill Fraser</u>				60	- -
Assistant Window Man	<u>William Donlevy</u>				55	- -
Assistant Munster Road Bye Days	<u>John Gyles</u>				55	- -
Inspector of Franks Bye Days	<u>John Palmer</u>				55	- -
Assistant North Road Bye Days	<u>Francis Hopkins</u>				50	- -
Second Assistant Munster Road Full Days	<u>Edmond Twigg</u>				50	- -
Second Assistant Connaught Road	<u>William Johnston</u>				50	- -
First Sorter full Days	<u>Francis Kelly</u>				45	- -
First Sorter Bye Days	<u>William Jacob</u>				45	- -
Second Sorter Bye Days	<u>Thomas Ramage</u>				40	- -

Second Sorter Full Days	<u>Henry Palmer</u>				40	-	-
Third Sorter on full days	<u>Arthur Webb</u>				35	-	-
Sorters for Sundays duty	<u>James Twigg</u>				10	-	-
	<u>Samuel Jones</u>				10	-	-
					1595	-	-

<b>Housekeeper, Messengers</b>							
Housekeeper	<u>Mrs. Fortesque</u>	20	-	-			
In Lieu of Coals		5	15	-			
and for Wages for two Servants		8	-	-	33	15	-
First Messenger	<u>Michael McGawley</u>				30	-	-
Second Do.	<u>John Graham</u>				27	-	-
Third Do.	<u>John Smith</u>				25	-	-
Fourth Do.	<u>Thomas Dyson</u>				25	-	-
Fifth Do.	<u>Thomas Carey</u>				25	-	-
Door Porter	<u>William Shortley</u>				25	-	-
Watchman					20	-	-
					210	15	-
<b>Letter Carriers Office</b>							
Inspector of Letter Carriers	<u>Isaac De Jon Court</u>				70	-	-
Twelve Letter Carriers at Eleven Shillings each p week					343	4	-
Two Do at ten Shillings each p week					52	-	-
Sixteen Assistant Do at time Shillings each p week					374	8	-
					839	12	-

<b>Penny Post Office</b>							
First Clerk	<u>Thomas Bond</u>				70	-	-
Second Clerk	<u>David Bourford</u>				35	-	-
Third Clerk	<u>Edward Bell</u>				30	-	-
Twelve Letter Carriers at eight Shillings each per week					250	2	-
					385	2	-

<b>Incidents</b>							
Rent of the General Post Office					97	10	-
To Mr. James Twigg for extraordinary duty so long as he shall be employed at Assist as Inspector of Franks					30	-	-
					127	10	-

<b>Incidental Allowances</b>								
To superamuted officers and others determinable upon the Deaths or other Avoidance of their offices								
			£	s	d	£	s	d
Michael Echlin late Assistant to the Munster Road						30	-	-
Thomas Goodwin Late Accountant in lieu of his late Salary on the Establishment as Accountant						150	-	-
William Fortescue Resident Surveyor in lieu of Enrolments resulting to him as Deputy Treasurer to the late Post Master								

General					100	-	-
John Julian Assistant Clerk in the Accountant Generals Office					60	-	-
Thomas Joyce late Clerk of the Connaught Road					60	-	-
Coghill Hagarty late Clerk of the Munster Road					50	-	-
Thomas Hill superannuated Letter Carrier					10	-	-
Francis Mercier Do.					10	-	-
Richard Hughes Do.					10	-	-
Mrs Blacker, Daughter of the late <u>Mr Martin Secretary</u> of the Post Office an Annuity of					86	13	4
To the following Clerks in the Office of the Chief Secretary of the Lord Lieutenant in lieu of their former Privilege of sending News Papers to cease on their Deaths Removals or being otherwise provided for respectively ??							
George Winstanley					40	-	-
Jasper Erch					40	-	-
William Brien					25	-	-
Richard Broughton					25	-	-
John Erch					20	-	-
Joseph Ashworth					15	-	-
Peter Le Bas					5	-	-
William Handcock					5	-	-
Compensations to the following Clerks in the Post Office on being deprived of the <u>privilege of circulating English News Papers</u>							
Henry Harrison as Clerk of the Connaught Road					27	-	-
Richard Bolger as Clerk of the North Road					28	-	-
William Maturin as Clerk of the Munster Road					84	-	-
Alexander Boswell as acting Clerk of Do.					88	-	-
James Twigg as first Assistant of Do.					44	-	-
					1012	13	4

**Establishment of the Country Post Offices in Ireland**

Post Towns	Irish Miles		Particulars of the Salaries per Annum			Total of the Salaries per Annum		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
		<b>Munster Road</b>						
		<b>Great Road from Dublin to Cork 6 Posts per week</b>						
Dublin		<u>Contractors</u> to ride 6 times weekly to and from Kilcullen				123	15	-
Naas	15 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Richard Bonner</u> no riding Duty Salary				18	-	-
Kilcullen	5 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Bentley</u> to ride six times weekly to and from Castledermot Salary for Office Duty	64 20	- -	- -	84	-	-
Ballitore	8 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Abraham Shackleton</u> no riding work or Salary						
Castledermot	4 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>George Cope</u> no riding Work Salary for Office Duty				13	-	-
Carlow	5 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Airy</u> to ride to and from Castledermot six times weekly also to ride to and from Gowran six times weekly Salary for Office Duty	24 64 40	- - -	- - -	128	-	-
Leighlin Bridge	6	<u>Nicholas Popkins</u> no riding Work Salary for Office Duty				16	-	-
Gowran	7	<u>Patrick Cuthbert</u> to ride six times weekly to and from Rosborean Salary for Office Duty	80 15	- -	- -	95	-	-
Kilkenny	7	<u>William Shaw</u> to ride six times weekly to and from Gowran Also to ride six times weekly to and from Clonmell Salary for Office Duty	28 120 45	- - -	- - -	193	-	-
Clonmell	23 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Shaw</u> to ride to and from Tallow 6 times weekly also thrice weekly to and from Carrick on Suir Salary for Office Duty	108 26 34	- - -	- - -	168	-	-
Lismore	18 <sup>6/5</sup>	<u>James Cranitch</u> no riding Work Salary for Office Duty				15	-	-
Tallow	4	<u>Page Clarke</u> to ride to Cork six times weekly Salary for Office Duty	100 16	- -	- -			
Corke	21 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Henry Fortescue</u> no riding Work Salary				210	-	-

		<b>Branches in the Munster Road From Kilcullen to Portarlington 3 Post p Week</b>							
Kildare	$4^{7/8}$	<u>Boyle Henderson</u> no riding Duty Salary				8	-	-	
Monasterevan	$5^{2/8}$	<u>Lewis Morgan</u> no riding Duty Salary				8	-	-	
Portarlington	$5^{4/8}$	<u>Richard Clarke</u> to ride to Kilcullen thrice weekly Office Duty included				34	-	-	

		<b>From Kilcullen to Maryborough 3 Posts p Week</b>							
Athy	$11^{1/8}$	<u>William Nevill</u> no riding Duty Salary				15	-	-	
Maryborro	$12^{4/8}$	<u>George Webb</u> to ride thrice weekly to Kilcullen for which and Office Duty				49	12	-	

		<b>From Gowran to Waterford 6 Posts p Week</b>							
Gowran		<u>Patrick Guthbert</u> See page							
Thomastown	$6^{3/8}$	<u>Catherine Dillon</u> no riding Duty Salary				10	-	-	
Inistiogue	$4^{1/8}$	<u>Henry Haydon</u> no riding Duty Salary				10	-	-	
Ross	$6^{4/8}$	<u>George Brehon</u> to ride six times weekly from Rossbercan to Waterford also once weekly to Wexford Salary for Office Duty	56	-	-	16	-	-	92
Waterford	$10^{2/8}$	<u>James Shaw</u> no riding Duty Salary				94	-	-	

		<b>From Clonmel to Ennis 3 Posts p Week</b>							
Cashel	$11^{5/8}$	<u>Elizabeth Smithwick</u> to ride five times weekly to Clonmell for which & Office Duty				55	-	-	
Tipperary	$9^{5/8}$	<u>John Collins</u> to ride thrice weekly from Cashel to Cullen Office Duty included				32	-	-	
Limerick	$21^{5/8}$	<u>Exham Vincent</u> to ride thrice weekly to Cullen and thrice to Ennis Office Duty included				121	-	-	
Six Mile Bridge	$8^{7/8}$	<u>Elizabeth Creagh</u> no riding Duty Salary				10	-	-	
Ennis	$11^{5/8}$	<u>Christian Bolton</u> no riding Duty Salary				10	-	-	

		<b>From Clonmell to Waterford 3 Posts</b>							
Carrick on Suir	$10^{5/8}$	<u>Catherine English</u> to ride thrice weekly to Waterford for which and Office Duty				51	-	-	

		<b>From Limerick to Tralee</b>							
		<b>1 Post per Week</b>							
Rathkeale	14	<u>Mary Enraght</u> to ride once weekly to Limerick Office Duty included					13	-	-
Tralee	36 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>J.W. Graves</u> Foot Post once weekly to Limerick and twice weekly to Cork Office Duty included					40	-	-

		<b>From Clonmell to Charleville</b>							
		<b>2 Posts per Week</b>							
Mitchelstown	21 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Edward Coghlan</u> to ride twice weekly to Clonmell Office Duty included					30	-	-
Charleville	14	<u>Mary Hallaghan</u> to ride twice weekly to Michelstown Office Duty included					20	-	-

		<b>Mitchelstown to Mallow</b>							
		<b>2 Posts per Week</b>							
Mallow	15 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>John Lynch</u> to ride twice weekly to Mitchelstown Office Duty included					24	-	-

		<b>Tallow to Youghall</b>							
		<b>6 Posts</b>							
Youghall	10 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Edward Smyth</u> Foot Post six times weekly to Tallow Office Duty included					40	-	-

		<b>Tallow to Middleton</b>							
		<b>3 Posts</b>							
Castlemartyr	4 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>George Evans</u> to ride thrice weekly to Tallow Office Duty included					12	-	-
Middleton	4 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Martin Delany</u> foot post thrice weekly to Castlemartyrs Office Duty included					9	-	-

		<b>From Cork to Kinsale</b>							
		<b>3 Posts</b>							
Kinsale	11 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Margaret Furzer</u> to ride thrice weekly to Cork Office Duty included					40	-	-

		<b>From Cork to Tralee</b>							
Millstreet	22 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>William Nash</u> no riding Work nor Salary							
Tralee	26	<u>J.W. Graves</u> see the foregoing Page							

		<b>From Cork to Killarney</b>							
		<b>3 Posts</b>							
Killarney	37 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>Daniel Lea</u> foot Post twice weekly to Millstreet to be paid by the inhabitants and once weekly to Cork to be paid by the Kews Printers there Salary for Office Duty					3	-	-

		<b>From Cork to Bantry</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Bandon	13 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Wye</u> to ride twice weekly to Corke for which and Office Duty				28	-	-
Bantry	26 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>John Clarke</u> Foot Post twice weekly to Bandon Office Duty included				13	-	-

		<b>From Dublin to Wexford</b>								
		<b>3 Posts</b>								
Bray	10	<u>Ann Foster</u> no riding Duty Salary				8	-	-		
N. T. Mount Kennedy	8	<u>John Armstrong</u> no riding Duty Salary				7	-	-		
Wicklow	7	<u>Solomon Williams</u> to ride thrice weekly to Dublin also thrice to Forey Office Duty included	58	-	-					
			50	-	-	108	-	-		
Arklow	12	<u>George Percival</u> no riding Duty Salary				9	-	-		
Gorey	9 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>John Boyce</u> to ride thrice weekly to Enniscorthy Office Duty included				48	-	-		
Enniscorthy	14 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Henry Fill</u> to ride thrice weekly to Wexford Office Duty included				41	13	4		
Wexford	11 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Miller Clifford</u> to ride once weekly to Enniscorthy Office Duty included				30	-	-		
		<b>Total Munster Road</b>						<b>£2303</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4</b>

		<b>Connaught Road</b>						
		<b>Great Road from Dublin to Galway</b>						
		<b>3 Posts per Week</b>						
Leixlip	8	<u>William Bruce</u> no riding Duty or Salary, one penny for Letter in and out						
Maynooth	3 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Margaret McGawley</u> no riding Duty, Salary				12	-	-
Kilcock	2 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Hale</u> to ride thrice weekly to Dublin also once weekly to Trim and once weekly to Clonard Salary for Office Duty	69	9	-			
			8	-	-			
			9	-	-			
			11	-	-	97	9	-
Clonard	11 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>John Cusack</u> to ride weekly to Kilcock also once weekly to Philipstown and once weekly to Mullingar Salary for Office Duty	18	13	14			
			11	6	8			
			10	-	-			
			6	-	-	46	-	-
Philipstown	15	<u>George Thorn</u> to ride thrice weekly to Clonard Salary for Office Duty	22	-	-			
			5	-	-	27	-	-
Tullamore	7 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Joseph Manly</u> to ride thrice weekly to Philipstown Salary for Office Duty	18	-	-			
			10	-	-	28	-	-



Ballyboy	10 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>George Jackson</u> to ride thrice weekly to Tullamore also thrice weekly to Birr Office Duty included	21 21	- -	- -	42	-	-
Birr	9 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>William Wilkinson</u> to ride once weekly to Balliboy also twice to Eyrecourt and twice weekly to Nenagh Salary for Office Duty	23 25 10	- 3 -	- 4 -	58	3	4
Banagher	6 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Christopher Sharp</u> no riding Work Salary				8	-	-
Eyrecourt	5 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Benjamin Usher</u> to ride once weekly to Birr To Loughrea twice weekly Salary for Office Duty	8 26 6	- - -	- - -	40	-	-
Loughrea	16 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Ormsby</u> to ride once weekly to Eyrecourt Salary for Office Duty	13 7	- -	- -	20	-	-
Galway	18 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Elias Tankerville</u> to ride thrice weekly to Loughrea Salary for Office Duty	45 25	- -	- -	70	-	-

		<b>Branches in the Connaught Road From Kilcock to Ballyshannon 3 Posts per Week</b>						
Summerhill	5 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Creagh</u> no riding Duty Salary				2	-	-
Trim	5	<u>Edward Malone</u> to ride twice weekly to Kilcock and once to Navan Office Duty included				27	-	-
Navan	7 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Shore</u> to ride twice weekly to Trim for which and Office Duty				20	10	
Kells	7 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>George Holdcraft</u> to ride thrice weekly to Navan Office Duty included				20	10	-
Virginia	9	<u>Susana Eceleston</u> to ride thrice weekly to Kells and thrice to Navan Office Duty included				47	-	-
Cavan	13 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>George Maxwell</u> to ride once weekly to Virginia and twice to Lismaskea Office Duty included				26	13	4
Belturbet	7 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Catherine Finlay</u> to ride once weekly to Virginia and twice to Lismaskea Office Duty included				30	-	-
Lisnaskea	11	<u>William Lloyd</u> to ride once weekly to Belturbet and twice to Enniskillen Office Duty included				32	6	8
Enniskillen	8 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Matthew Armstrong</u> to ride thrice weekly to Lisnaskea Office Duty included				32	-	-
Ballyshannon	21 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Henry Crawford</u> to ride thrice weekly to Enniskillen Office Duty included				47	-	-

		<b>From Kells to Old Castle 3 Posts per Week</b>						
Old Castle	7	<u>John Coyle</u> to ride thrice weekly to Kells for which and Office Duty				14	6	8

		<b>From Cavan to Killeshandra</b>						
		<b>3 Posts per Week</b>						
Killeshandra	9 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Robert Tronson</u> to ride thrice weekly to Cavan Office Duty included					20	- -

		<b>From Belturbet to Ballyconnell</b>						
		<b>3 Posts per Week</b>						
Ballyconnell		<u>A.M. Adbert</u> to bring the Mail thrice weekly to Belturbet Office Duty included					5	- -

		<b>From Clonard to Sligo</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Clonard	26	<u>John Cusack</u> see page (See Clonard ??)						
Mullingar	12 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Shea</u> to ride twice weekly to Clonard Salary for Office Duty	20 15	- -	- -		35	- -
Ballimore	11 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Henry Cunningham</u> to ride thrice weekly to Mullingar Salary for Office Duty	30 5	- -	- -		35	- -
Athlone	11 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>Matthew Stanton</u> to ride thrice weekly to Ballimore Also twice to Roscommon Salary for Office Duty	30 23 14	- -	- -		67	- -
Roscommon	15 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Guff</u> to ride once weekly to Athlone also thrice to Elphin Salary for Office Duty	13 38 9	- -	- -		60	- -
Elphin	14 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>James Crawford</u> no riding Work Salary					9	- -
Boyle	8 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Alexander Crofts</u> to ride thrice weekly to Elphin Salary for Office Duty	28 7	- -	- -		35	- -
Sligo	19 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Abraham Mathews</u> to ride thrice weekly to Boyle Salary for Office Duty	44 20	- -	- -		64	- -

		<b>Mullingar to Longford</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Colehill	12 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Jane Nugent</u> no riding work Salary					2	- -
Longford	8	<u>Thomas Webster</u> to ride twice weekly to Mullingar Office Duty included					28	- -

		<b>From Mullingar to Granard</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Granard	22	<u>John Heldon</u> to ride twice weekly to Mullingar Office Duty included					20	- -

		<b>From Tullamore to Kilbeggan</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Kilbeggan	5 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>John Faulkner</u> to ride thrice weekly to Tullamore Office Duty included					12	- -

		<b>Ballymore to Ballymahon</b>								
		<b>2 Posts</b>								
Ballymahon	8	<u>Sarah Hall</u> Foot Post twice weekly to Ballymore Office Duty included						8	-	-
		<b>Ballymore to Moate</b>								
		<b>3 Posts</b>								
Moate	6	<u>Nathaniel Russell</u> to ride thrice weekly to Ballymore to be paid by Subscription								
		<b>Elphin to Carrick on Shannon</b>								
		<b>2 Posts</b>								
Carrick on Shannon	7 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>George Henderson</u> to ride twice weekly to Elphin Office Duty included						16	-	-
		<b>Athlone to Castlebar</b>								
		<b>2 Posts</b>								
Ballinasloe	12 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>John O'Brien</u> to ride twice weekly to Athlone Office Duty included						22	-	-
C. Blakeney	12 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>John McManus</u> to ride twice weekly from Ballinasloe to Tuam Office Duty included						31	-	-
Tuam	20	<u>Charles Bradley</u> to ride twice weekly to Castlebar Office Duty included						38	-	-
Castlebar	26 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Henry Sheridan</u> no riding Duty Salary						8	-	-
		<b>Tuam to Ballinrobe</b>								
		<b>2 Posts</b>								
Ballinrobe	15 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>James Gale</u> Foot Post twice weekly to and from Hollymount Office Duty included						5	-	-
		<b>Castlebar to Newport</b>								
		<b>2 Posts</b>								
Newport	9 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>James Hennen</u> Foot Post twice weekly to Castlebar Office Duty included						6	10	-
		<b>Castlebar to Killalla</b>								
		<b>2 Posts</b>								
Killalla	24	<u>John Joynt</u> Foot Post twice weekly to Castlebar Office Duty included						16	-	-
		<b>Dublin to Dunshaughlin</b>								
		<b>3 Posts</b>								
Dunshaughlin	14	<u>Laurence Kellet</u> to ride thrice weekly to Dublin for which and Office Duty						43	-	-

		<b>Birr to Roscrea</b>							
		<b>2 Posts</b>							
Roscrea	9 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>Eleages Dudley</u> Foot Post twice weekly to Birr Office Duty included					14	-	-

		<b>Birr to Barrusakane</b>							
		<b>3 Posts</b>							
Barrusakane	11	<u>William Gason</u> Foot Post thrice weekly to Moderany Office Duty included					3	-	-

		<b>Birr to Ennis</b>							
		<b>3 Posts</b>							
Nenagh	16 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>James Frith</u> to ride twice weekly from Nenagh to Limerick and once from Birr to Limerick Office Duty included					59	3	4
?? (Tipperary)	12	<u>Susanna Eccleston</u> no riding Work Salary  See Munster Road Page					5	-	-

		<b>Loughrea to Gort</b>							
		<b>2 Posts</b>							
Gort	11 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>John Egan</u> to ride twice weekly to Loughrea Office Duty included					14	-	-
		<b>Total Connaught Road</b>					<b>£1428</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>

		<b><u>North Road</u></b>							
		<b>Great Road from Dublin to Donaghadee</b>							
		<b>6 Posts per Week</b>							
??		<u>Contractor</u> to ride six times weekly to Balbriggan and once weekly from Balbriggan to Drogheda					95	-	-
Balbriggan	15 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Joseph Hickey</u> no riding Duty Salary					10	-	-
Drogheda	8 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Robert Wynne</u> to ride five times weekly to Balbriggan and once weekly to Dunleer Salary for Office Duty	35	-	-				
			5	-	-				
			45	-	-		85	-	-
Dunleer	6 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>John Tyans</u> to ride five times weekly to Drogheda and six times weekly to Dundalk Salary for Office Duty	23	-	-				
			56	-	-				
			10	-	-		89	-	-
Lurgan Green	7 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>William Rogers</u> no riding Duty Salary					12	-	-
Dundalk	3 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>William Byrne</u> to ride six times weekly to Newry Salary for Office Duty	44	-	-				
			26	-	-		70	-	-
Flurry Bridge		<u>Margaret Lowdown</u> no riding Work Salary					10	-	-
Newry	9 <sup>7/8</sup>	<u>David Carlile</u> to ride six times weekly to Banbridge and thrice weekly to Market Hill Salary for Office Duty	48	-	-				
			22	-	-				
			70	-	-		140		
Loughbrickland	8	<u>Agnes Anderson</u> no riding Work Salary					15	-	-

Banbridge	2	<u>Robert Harrison</u> to ride six times weekly to Hillsborough and thrice weekly to Moira Salary for Office Duty	48 30 15	- - -	- - -	93	-	-
Dromore	6	<u>William Gowan</u> to ride thrice weekly to Ballynahinch Salary for Office Duty	20 20	- -	- -	40	-	-
Hillsborough	3 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Margaret Rickhards</u> to ride six times weekly Belfast Salary for Office Duty	48 20	- -	- -	68	-	-
Lisburn	3 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Jane Stewart</u> no riding Work Salary				52	-	-
Belfast	7	<u>Elizabeth Fortesque</u> to ride thrice weekly to Carrickfergus Salary for Office Duty	20 100	- -	- -	120	-	-
New-townards	7 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Merry</u> to ride thrice weekly to Portaferry Salary for Grey Abbey receiving House Salary for Office Duty	32 5 5	- - -	- - -	42	-	-
Donaghadee	7 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>John Smith</u> to ride six times weekly to Belfast Express Horse to carry Scotch Rails to [Belfast] Salary for Office Duty	80 10 50	- - -	- - -	140	-	-

<b>Branches in the North Road</b>								
<b>Dunleer to Coot Hill</b>								
<b>2 Posts</b>								
Ardee	5 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Edward Gunnel</u> no riding Duty Salary				6	-	-
Carrickmacross	9	<u>Arthur Tidgeon</u> to ride twice weekly to Dunleer. Office Duty included				19	-	-
Coothill	14	<u>Anne Blayney</u> to ride twice weekly to Carrickmacross. Office Duty included				17	-	-

<b>Newry to Down</b>								
<b>3 Posts</b>								
Rathfriland	7	<u>Andrew Magee</u> to ride thrice weekly to Newry. Salary included Salary to Castlewellan receiving House	23 5	- -	- -	28	-	-
Down	16	<u>Margaret Dowdall</u> to ride thrice weekly to Rathfriland Office Duty included				42	-	-

<b>Newry to Tanderagee</b>								
<b>2 Posts</b>								
Tanderagee	10 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>John Roche</u> to ride thrice weekly to Newry. Office Duty included				25	-	-

<b>Newry to Derry</b>								
<b>3 Posts</b>								
Armagh	14 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>John Burgess</u> to ride thrice weekly from Market Hill to Dungamon Office Duty included				51	-	-
Dunagmon	10 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>William Thompson</u> to ride thrice weekly to Omagh Office Duty included				59	-	-
Omagh	22	<u>James Wallace</u> to ride thrice weekly						

		to Strabane Office Duty included				41	-	-
Strabane	14 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>Robert Porter</u> to ride thrice weekly to Derry Office Duty included				35	-	-
Derry	11 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Henderson</u> no riding Duty Salary				40	-	-

		<b>Armagh to Monaghan</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Tynan	6 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Ann Pilkington</u> to ride thrice weekly to Cloghan Office Duty included				15	-	-
Monaghan	7 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Rogers</u> to ride thrice weekly to Armagh Office Duty included				36	-	-

		<b>From Tynan To Clogher</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Clogher	12	<u>Robert Crooks</u> no riding Duty Salary				8	-	-

		<b>Monaghan to Clones</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Clones	9 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Robert Nevill</u> to ride thrice weekly to Monaghan Office Duty included				12	-	-

		<b>Dungannon to Magherafelt</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Moneymore	12 <sup>5/8</sup>	<u>John Scott</u> no riding duty Salary				6	-	-
Magherafelt	4	<u>Thomas Warburton</u> Foot Post twice weekly to Dungannon Office Duty included				15	-	-

		<b>Strabane to Letterkenny</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Raphoe	6	<u>James Billingsby</u> nor riding Duty Salary				5	-	-
Letterkenny	6 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Lilly White</u> to ride thrice weekly to Strabane Office Duty included				19	-	-

		<b>Derry to Newtown Limavady</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
N.J. Limavady	12 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>William Smith</u> to ride thrice weekly to Derry Office Duty included				22	-	-

		<b>Banbridge to Colerain To Antrim 3 thence to Colerain</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Lurgan	7 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Thomas Byrne</u> no riding Duty Salary				12	-	-
Moira	3 <sup>6/8</sup>	<u>Margaret Hare</u> to ride thrice weekly to Antrim Office Duty included				30	-	-
Antrim	13 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Robert Young</u> to ride thrice weekly to Ballymena Office Duty included				24	-	-
Ballymena	9 <sup>3/8</sup>	<u>James Lendrick</u> to ride twice weekly to Colerain						

		Office Duty included				38	-	-
Ballymoney	14 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>Ann McGrothy</u> no riding Duty Salary				6	-	-
Colerain	6 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>James Thronton</u> to ride twice weekly to A.J. Limavady for conveyance of Bye Letters	13	6	8			
		Salary for Office Duty	10	-	-	23	6	8

		<b>Ballymoney to Ballycastle</b>						
		<b>2 Posts</b>						
Bally Castle	12	<u>Neale McNeale</u> to ride twice weekly to Ballymoney						
		Office Duty included				14	-	-

		<b>Dromore to Portaferry</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Ballinahinch	8	<u>John Pettigress</u> to ride thrice weekly to Newtownards						
		Office Duty included	33	-	-			
		Salary to Saintfield receiving House	5	-	-	38	-	-
Newtownards	13 <sup>2/8</sup>	<u>Elizabeth Merry</u> to ride thrice weekly to Portaferry						
		See page						
Portaferry	14	<u>Taylor Trevor</u> no riding Duty Salary				5	-	-

		<b>Belfast to Larne</b>						
		<b>3 Posts</b>						
Carrickfergus	8 <sup>1/8</sup>	<u>Samuel Gray</u> no riding Duty Salary				10	-	-
	9 <sup>4/8</sup>	<u>Catherine Gilmor</u> to ride thrice weekly to Carrickfergus						
		Office Duty included				40	-	-
		Total North Road				<b>1822</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

		<b>Abstract</b>						
		Munster Road				2303	-	4
		Connaught Road				1428	12	4
		North Road				1822	6	8
		<b>Total Country Post Offices</b>				<b>5553</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>

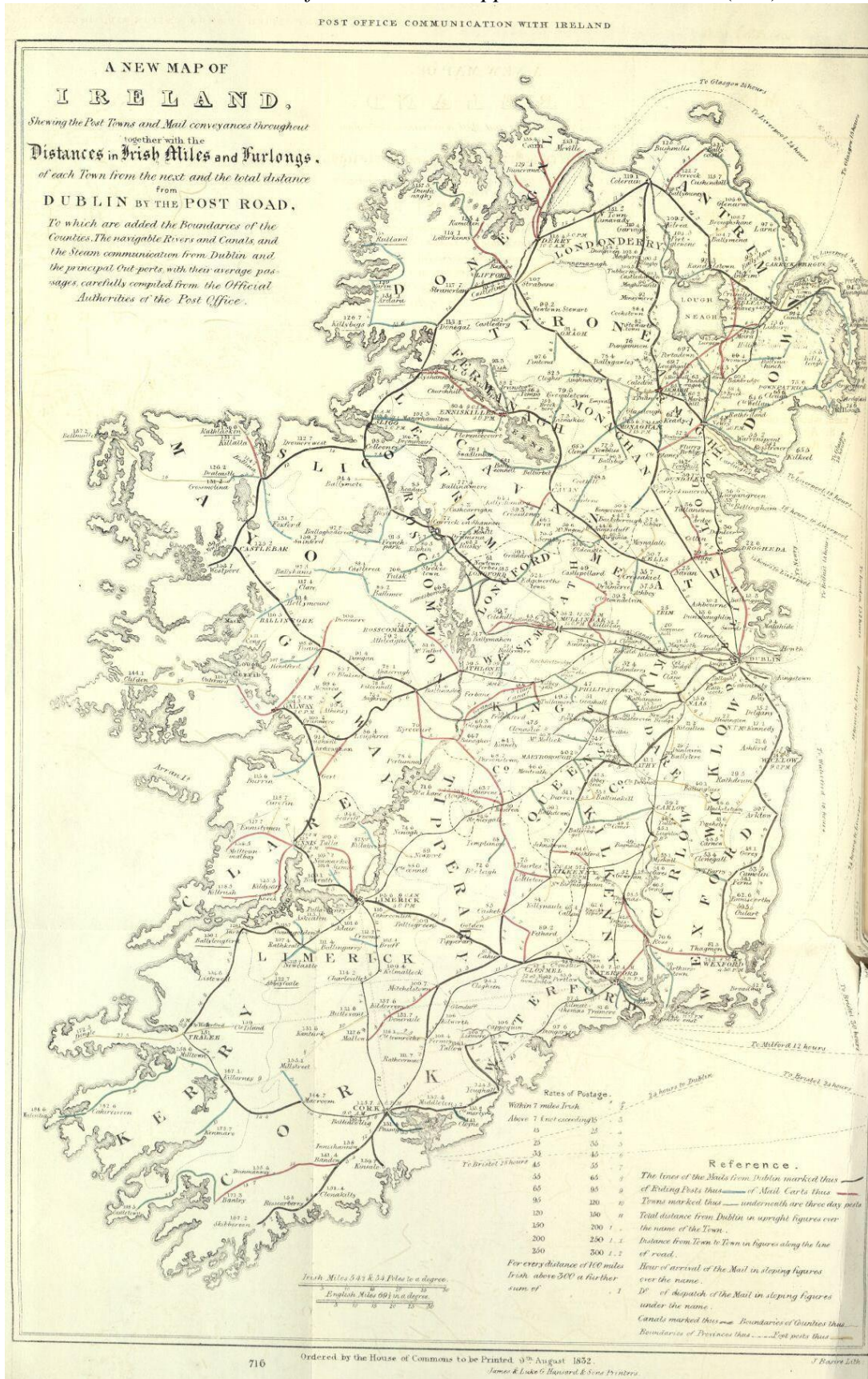
		<b>Abstract of the foregoing Establishments</b>						
		His Majesty's Post Master General of Ireland				3000	-	-
		The Secretary's Office				783	4	8
		The Treasurer's Office				610	-	-
		The Accountant Generals Office				439	19	8
		The Bye and Cross Road Letter Office				469	19	8
		The Sorting Office				1595	-	-
		The Housekeeper Messengers & Servants				210	15	-
		The Letter Carriers Office				839	12	-
		The Penny Post Office				385	2	-
		Incidents				127	10	-
		Incidental Allowances to Superannuated Officers and others				1012	13	4

		<b>Country Post Offices</b>						
		Amounting in the whole to the Sum of Fifteen Thousand and twenty seven pounds fifteen Shillings and Eight pence per Annum Given at His Majesty's Castle of Dublin on 16 <sup>th</sup> Day of July 1784 Thos. Orde						



## Appendix 5

A new map of Ireland 1832 map, showing the Post Towns and Mail conveyances throughout..... Attached to *Report from the Select Committee on Post Communication with Ireland: with the minutes of evidence, and appendix.* H.C. 1831-32 (716) xvii. 1





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John Lees's will, MS. 9876 I.

Letter of appointment of John Lees as baronet, 30 May 1803, MS. 9876 II.

##### **Author's private collection**

Unknown to Gustavous Jones, 28 Nov. 1834 (private collection in author's possession).

'Westmeath Postal History' A postal history collection in 50 volumes containing several thousand letters to or from Co. Westmeath. The collection specialises in postmarks used in that county. The earliest letter is dated 1679 and continues down to the present time

'Meath Postal history' a similar as above consisting of four volumes and several hundred letters.

'The postmarks of Ireland' a collection of Irish postmarks dating from the seventeenth to the twenty century concentrating on the postmarks of Ireland

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#### **The National Archives of the UK, Kew**

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