APPENDIX (J.)

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History of the Post Office in Ireland.

Posts from England to Ireland were first established by Charles I., which we are told were much improved by Cromwell. It was ordered in 1654 that packets should ply weekly between Dublin and Chester, and between Milford and Waterford. These latter, as well as the Dublin packets, did ply at first, but they were soon withdrawn, and were not re-established for 160 years. The postage from London to Dublin was then 6*d*. Cromwell’s regulations with regard to the Irish post office were confirmed at the Restoration. In 1662 the line of the packets between Portpatrick and Donaghadee was established, and direct communication between Scotland and the North of Ireland has been maintained without intermission since that date. The service, however, has not always been done in a very complete manner. For some years previous to 1780 the mails were carried in an open boat; and 1*l*. 1*s*. was paid for each trip.

For the nest century after this the annals of the Irish post office are very poor. It may, indeed, be doubted whether it had any minds. Could we absolutely learn and describe the very mode in which letters were conveyed en any route—could we portray the sorry beast of burden which carried the bag, the ragged boy who had it in charge, the mountain track which he perambulated, and the slow pace at which he proceeded, no doubt a striking picture might be presented; but unless we have recourse to imagination little interest can be found in the bald postal details of the times of Charles II., William, Anne, George I., and George II. From Watson’s almanac of 1756 we learn that the English packets were due in Dublin on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and that the provincial mails were despatched, some thrice and some twice a week.

But even in the early days of George III. the Irish post office can hardly be said to have flourished. Indeed its state was manifestly so poor, as to make the difference between those days and these the more absolutely wonderful. But though poor in product it was rich enough to afford ample means for the then viand system of civil service jobbing, which the stern morals of the present age so rigorously forbid.

The first report now existing in the letter books of the Irish post office is dated 1774, and it sets forth the future duties and emoluments of certain officers called the Alphabet Keeper, and Joint Alphabet Keeper. It states that a certain Joint Alphabet Keeper had that day resigned, and that another, one William Maturin, was to be appointed in his place, to be Alphabet Keeper in conjunction with the Honourable Ponsonby Moore. The report then goes on to revoke all former orders ns to the division of the spoils of office, and makes new provisions. It then orders that the said William Maturin shall execute the entire business of the office, And that the Honourable Ponsonby Moore shall be totally exempted from nay attendance on that duty.

It is then further ordered that in consideration thereof the said Honourable Ponsonby Moore shrill allow to the said William Maturin the sum of £l50 per annum out of the proceeds of his office, and that the said Honourable Ponsonby Moore shall have all the remainder. What was the value of the sinecure it is impossible to learn, for the emoluments arose from payments made by the merchants, and from a privilege of distributing newspapers. Tim report is signed by Lord Clermont, then Postmaster General, as he was called in Ireland, or Deputy General, as he was more properly called in England.

In time same year n letter was written by Mr. Todd, the Secretary to the Genera! Post Office in England, addressed to Mr. Walcot, the then Secretary in Ireland. This letter communicates to Mr. Walcot the fact that Mr. Barham, the then agent at Dover, lied resigned on account of age, and that Mr. Walcot was to be transferred to that place. But it also stipulates that Mr. Barham is still to have and keep tilt his death, the neat, clear, and full income of the place, whether by salary or perquisites; and that Mr. Walcot, who is thus to become agent at Dover, is still to keep, during Mr. Barham’s lifetime, the full income of his employment as Secretary in Dublin, both by salary and perquisites—that he is Also to keep an allowance of 83*1*. 18*s*. 4*d*. Irish for house rent in Dublin, he being the while packet agent at Dover. It also states that Mr. John Lees is to be appointed Secretary in Dublin; but where he is to look for his salary, it does not state. It may, however, be presumed that Mr. John Laos was not left in ignorance on the point.

The system of requiring persons appointed to situations M the Post Office to pay the pensions of their predecessors seems to have been quite common; and it seems also to have lain with the Postmaster Gourd to award what amount he pleased. We find that one George Skerret was appointed an Assistant Clerk to it road with a salary of 30*1*., and that he is ordered to pay one Coghill, going out as superannuated, a pension of 40*1*. This would have been but a sorry appointment, did it not also appear that Skerret was to have two thirds of the net profits arising from the English newspapers supplied to coffee houses.

Thus, when any place became vacant, it seems to have been the practice of the Postmaster General to remodel the incomes of all the men, taking 5*l*. from one here, and giving it to another there; allowing a salary of so much to an Assistant Clerk of a road, on condition that he pay so much out of it to a Deputy Inspector of franks; and ordering that Mr. So and So should be appointed to one situation, with the express understanding that he should accept the salary attached to another.

In 1777 the salaries of the Dublin Post Office were about 4,500*1*.; out of this the Deputy General had 1,000*1*., the Secretary 400*1*., the Resident Surveyor NU, the Accountant 200*1*., and the Postmaster General’s Clerk 112*l*. No other officer drew a salary amounting to 100*1*. per annum; wild, however, they all netted by supplying newspapers to coffee houses, &c., the letter book does not tell us. At this time the wages of the Letter Carriers in Dublin ran from 6*s*. to 1l*s*. a week.

In 1780, it became known that the Irish office was to be separated from that in London. So the then Secretary, thinking it right to set his house in order before the change, begged permission to have certain arrangements, which were even then thought scandalous, removed from the office books. A certain sum of 80*1*., Was allowed to the Seeming “*as for* ” house rent. He alleges that it was a very awkward circumstance that in the face of such an allowance for house rent he was known to be residing in the office apartments allotted to him; and he goes on to explain that he had never received a penny of the 80*1*., but that it had all gone to a certain Mrs. Blacher, the daughter of his predecessor’s predecessor. He then points out the great anomaly of one of his Clerks receiving a sum of 8*l*. per annum “*as fo*r ” a font post. from Strabane to Donegal, the same 8*1*. going wholly and entirely into the Clerk’s pocket, How the letters really got them-selves carried between these towns is not mentioned. A. certain sum of 20*1*. is paid to this same Clerk “*as for* ” prints for the Postmaster General. To this, however, the Secretary does not object;

The Lords of the Treasury were pleased to sanction the arrangements proposed for getting rid of these awkward circumstances.

In 1782 there was great commotion in the office. Mr. Lees had resigned his situation as Secretary, and Mr Armit, his nephew, had been appointed; a brother of Mr. Armit’s was also appointed as Junior Clerk. Shortly afterwards the Lord Lieutenant complained to the Secretary-of-State in London that the Secretary of the Irish Post Office had, in conjunction with his brother, opened his Grace’s secret correspondence. Whereupon His Majesty ordered that both the Secretary and the Clerk should be dismissed. This order having been given and obeyed, the Deputy General was then sent over by the Postmasters General to inquire into the matter. The result was that the Lord Lieutenant withdrew his charge, that the Messrs. Armit were acquitted and restored, and that one very strong and pointed circumstance was made to appear—Mr. Armit, junior, who had been represented as being equally culpable with his brother, lied never joined the office, and had never been in Ireland.

In 1784 mail coaches were introduced into England, and in the same year the Irish Office as a department *per se* was established. There were two Postmasters-General, with a joint salary of 5,000*1*. Mr. Lees was re-appointed as Secretary, and Mr. Armit became Accountant.

At this date the whole expense of the office, including salaries of provincial Postmasters, and the conveyance of the mails was 15,000*l*.; out of this 5,500*l*. only was allotted to the provinces, and this stun included the conveyance of the mails through the whole of Ireland, as well as the salaries of the Postmasters. The service then (1784) represented by 6,6001, now (1836) costs upwards of 134,000*1*., or more than 24 times as much, and is divided as follows:—

Conveyance of Mails by Railways £65,505

Do. by Coaches and Cars 27,168

Do, by Foot Messengers 10,334

Salaries and wages paid in Provincial Offices - 31,122

£134,129

Nothing can give a clearer idea of the state of the country at that time (1784), as compared with its existing condition, then n review of the postal accommodation then afforded to the provinces. All mails were conveyed, or supposed to be conveyed, by the Postmasters, to whom was allowed a certain sum for the service. There were no contracts, end, as far as I can learn, no fixed rules as to time. Three miles and a half an hour seems to have been the pace acknowledged to have been sufficient. The bags were usually conveyed by boys. In the immediate neighbourhood of the Metropolis seine sort of cart was used, but with this exception the bags were carried either on ponies or mules, or on feet.

In 1788 it was represented to the Lord Lieutenant that robberies were committed on the first stages out of Dublin, the mails being conveyed in open carts, driven by boys from 12 to 16 years of age; and that the mails were thus “an easy prey to the gangs of villains who infest every road leading into Dublin.” Therefore they propose that covered carts shalt be built, end “stout resolute men” employed to drive the carts. The question of the covered carts rind the stout resolute men was, however, superseded by the mail coach system, which was then on the eve of adoption.

At this time, the bags were carried to Cork, Belfast, Limerick, and Waterford six days a week; and three days a week to Galway, Wexford, Derry, and Enniskillen. There were three posts also to Ennis, which was the only town in the county One, except the village of Six-mile-bridge, which had any post at all, There were three in the week to Tralee, end three to Killarney; but for these last the Government refused to pay anything. The Postmaster bad a salary of 3*l*., but the mail was carried by foot messengers, who were maintained at the cost of the inhabitants, and of the newsprinters in Cork,

Carrick-on-Shannon was the only town in county Leitrim receiving a mail, and this it did twice a week. Now it has two every day. The county of Mayo was penetrated twice a week only, a post-rider going as far as Castlebar, and a foot messenger thence to Newport, and another to Killala. There was no office at Westport, and none at the now flourishing town of Balling. Except at the county town, there was no Post Office in the whole county of Sligo; and there were but 10 in the province of Connaught, where there are now 171.

The great northern line of posts was called the Dublin and Donaghadee road, on which Belfast was situated. Donaghadee, as the port for Scotland, was a place of considerable importance. It line now fallen into a very sear and yellow leaf; hopes, however, are entertained of its revive.

There were three post towns in county Derry — Derry, Coleraine, and Magherafelt; the two latter of which were served twice a week only. in the county of Donegal also there were three offices — Ballyshannon served three times a week, and Raphoe and Letterkenny, twice. No other trace, however, of a post to the town of Donegal can be found than that of the foot messenger, whose wages of 8*l*., paid regularly to a clerk in Dublin, the Secretary had mentioned a few years previously as one of the awkward circumstances to be disposed or Could the full history of that allowance for a foot post through the mountains of county Donegal be obtained, it would be very interesting. The distance was 30 miles; the road, a mountain track. How did the clerk in Dublin obtain recognised permission to pocket that one special allowance of 8t per annum, and leave the town of Donegal steeped in Cimmerian darkness?

In 1790 the mail coach system was introduced into Ireland. It was at first confined to the Cork and Belfast roads, And the two contracts were limited to seven years. In the official report from the Postmaster General, recommending the measure, it was stated that Messrs. Greer and Anderson, of Newry, would run mail coaches through to Belfast for the sum paid for the mail rides. It appears that Mr. Anderson’s name was inserted for some purpose now hardly intelligible, as there was no such person concerned in it. The offer, however, was accepted, and Mr. Greer and his son have been employed in the service on the same road from that date up to the present indent. The same report includes a tender for the Cork line also. The mileage allowance for the road to Belfast was 475*1*. for 60 Irish miles; that for the Cork road 1,478*1*, the distance being 126 miles—thus the whole cost was under 2,000*l*.

In recommending the measure, the Postmaster General pointed out that this sum might be well expended, and with due regard to economy; as any apparent increase of cost would be more than made up by diminution in the solicitors’ bills for prosecuting felons in cases of mail robberies! And in support of this surmise it was urged, that not n single attempt, to rob the mails had occurred in England since the establishment there of the mail coaches. The saving, however, and the expected halcyon period of security did not arrive in Ireland. The mail conches, though occasionally accompanied by four mail guards, ware robbed as frequently as the less aspiring riding posts,

The mail conch system gradually spread itself over the main lines of the Irish roads; and it appears that it did so quite as quickly as the roads were ready to receive the coaches, But up to a late date (1829) the practice prevailed of allowing to the Postmaster a sum for carrying the branch mails through the country; a duty which was done in a very slow and slovenly way. The Postmasters were not themselves horse owners, and consequently they let out the service to any one who would do it at the cheapest possible rate, without much regard to the manner In which it was performed. The Surveyors, it appears, had no control over the cross mails, and there was no other check than such as might exist at the head office,

In 1829, and for many years previously, the payment, for this work was Sri. the double Irish mile. The average is still much the same, being 2*d*. the single English mile, which is within a small fraction equal to 5*d*. the double Irish mile, But though the article is no cheaper, it is much better. The old system of getting the cross snails carried by any animal that the conscience of the local Postmaster thought good enough for such a service does not, however, appear to have been interfered with by the authorities, but to have been gradually amended by the commercial enterprise of a foreigner.

In 1816, Mr. Bianconi first carried His Majesty’s mails in Ireland; but lie did so for many years without any contract. He commenced in the county Tipperary, between Munro! 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, What Mr. Bianconi received was thus very small; and he could not and would not therefore run at any hours inconvenient to his passenger traffic, or faster than was convenient to him,

From 1880; when the English end Irish 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.

From that time till 1848, Mr. Bianconi continued to increase his establishment; and in the latter year he had 1,400 horses, and daily covered 3,800 miles, The opening of railways lies, however, so greatly interfered with this traffic, as to expel his cars from all the main lines, But Mr. Bianconi has met the changes of the times in a resolute spirit. He has always been ready at n moment’s notice to move his horses, ems, and men to any district, however remote, where any chance of business might show itself; and now, in the winter of 1850.1857, when nearly the whole of that district in which he was working ten years since has Leon occupied by railways, he still daily covers 2,250 miles and is the owner of about 1,000 horses; working in the four provinces, from the town of Wexford in the south-east, to the mountains of Donegal in the north-west.

Mr. Bianconi has done the State good service. By birth he is, as is well known, an Italian, but he is now naturalised, and England, as well as Ireland, should be ready to acknowledge his merits. It may, perhaps, be said that no living inns has worked more than he has for the benefit of the sister kingdom.

While on the subject of the conveyance of mails, it may be well to point out that it was reported in 1829 by the Commissioners who had then for many years boon inquiring into the Irish pot office, that the eight mail coaches then working, and which covered 1,460 miles, cost. upwards of 30,000*1*.; whereas the same conveyance over the same distance in England would, according to the evidence of Mr. C. Johnson, the English superintendent of mail coaches, have cost only 7,500*1*., or about one quarter. This was the more singular, as forage and labour were much cheaper in Ireland than in England; but it was accounted for by the fact that the whole. business was in the hands of a very few persons, and that the local innkeepers could not, ns in England, be induced to embark in the trade. To that cause may probably be added this other, that at the period In question jobbing was not yet extinct in Ireland. The excess has, however, entirely disappeared; indeed, the work in Ireland is now the cheapest, the cost in England being 2¼*d*. a mile, in Scotland 2½*d*. in Ireland only 2*d*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In no part of the United Kingdom has more been done for the welfare of the people by the use of railways for carrying mails and by the penny postage system than in Ireland. What was the state of the service in 1784 has been shown. There were then posts six days a week on only four lines of road; letters to all other places being conveyed only twice or thrice a week. Now there are daily posts to almost every village; and I know of but one important town that has not two daily mails both with London and Dublin.

I venture to annex a tabular sketch, showing what has been done for the public in Ireland since 1839; and I think it proves, as regards the Post Office, that the Government has not forgotten its paternal duties.

Anthony Trollope

House of Commons, *Sessional Papers* 1857, **4**, 354–360.

1. These were the rates in 1866; but in 1856 the average rates were, in England 2*d*., in Scotland 3*d*., and in Ireland 2*d*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)