Correspondence, power and the state:
An Historical Geography of the Irish Postal Service, 1784-1831

Garry Prendiville

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

University of Dublin

2006
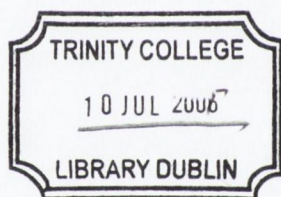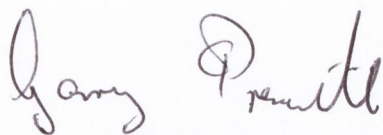
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. Except where otherwise acknowledged, it is entirely my own work. The Library of Trinity College may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

Garry Prendiville, September 2005

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mark Hennessy, for all his help and advice over the years I have been in college. His ideas and counsel were always eagerly sought and his breadth of knowledge and challenging suggestions made it a pleasure to work with him. It was down to Mark that the time I have spent in Trinity doing this Ph.D. was made considerably less painless by his thoughtful guidance and his willingness to discuss any topic or idea I might have wanted to focus on. My thanks go to him

Secondly, I would like to thank the staff of the Geography Department, particularly Terry Dunne and Mabel Deniston who have helped me out with various problems down through the years. I would also like to thank the Broad Curriculum scholarship for allowing me to complete the final years of my research in some degree of financial security. I would like to thank the staff of the Old Library TCD, in particular the staff of the Manuscripts Reading Room. Thanks also go to the staff in the National Archives of Ireland for the patience and professionalism in dealing with my queries and requests. I would also like to say a big thank you to the staff of the Royal Mail Archives in London and make a particular mention of Andy Dunne. His help was invaluable in researching the vast archives at Freeling House. I told you it would be finished one day Andy!

I would like to thank Stephen Ferguson, Heritage Director at An Post, and An Post themselves for generously providing the funding for me to stay in the UK so that I could complete my research. I would also like to thank Professor Mike Heffernan for publishing parts of this thesis in article format. His comments and the comments of the three referees helped me focus on the important aspects of the research.

My thanks also go to Dave Lambert, Mike Curry, Gillian Spraggs, Graham Seal and Derek Gregory and all those senior academics who were kind enough to assist me in answering the seemingly endless questions I had about various aspects of my research. I

to her that I dedicate this thesis. I think of you always still Laurs and I wish you could be here to see the things I have done.

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Summary

The aim of this thesis is to outline an historical geography of the Irish postal service during the period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In order to do this the thesis charts the growth of the Post Office during this period by providing a narrative of the development of the postal network. The description of the network's development revolves around three main axes: internal growth, external growth and structural change. The 'story' of Post Office growth during the period 1784-1831 is told under these three headings. That 'story' involves the examination of such issues as how mail was delivered, how many post offices there were and where they were situated, how fast the mail travelled, how efficient the system was, how much it cost to send a letter, the detailing of the transport links between Britain and Ireland and the depiction of how the Post Officer operated as a bureaucratic structure. It is in doing so that the thesis provides a solidly empirical basis for the reconstruction of the detail of how the postal service operated during this period.

The second part of the thesis is of a more theoretical character. The issues of power relations and the contemporary state are consistent themes throughout this thesis and it examines the question of the changing conception of government and the new forms of governmentality which were emerging around this time and how these questions impacted on the postal service in particular and information circulation in nineteenth century Ireland more generally. Linking in with the theme of the changing nature of the state the question of how centre-local relations were changing is also addressed. The relationship between central and local government was changing and local ruling elites saw the growth of the postal network as both a method and an opportunity to make their voices heard by the colonial authorities. The issues of negotiation and petitioning were of particular importance as the importance and level of correspondence increased. Finally, this thesis examines the question of resistance to the growth of the postal network.

What this thesis does is to synthesise an historical geography of the early nineteenth century Irish postal network by juxtaposing empirical study with theoretical analyses. In much the same way as the narrative part of the thesis focuses on three main themes so the theoretical perspectives outlined in the second part centres around the themes of governmentality, negotiation and resistance.

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Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

"It was but the echo of some possible truth, a timely reminder: don't be too certain of learning the past from the lips of the present. Beware of the most honest broker. Remember that what you are told is really threefold: shaped by the teller, reshaped by the listener, concealed from both by the dead man of the tale."[1]

1.1 Aim and objectives

This study has two principal aims. The first is to outline a geographical narrative of the growth and development of the postal network in Ireland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The second is to set this growth and development in the broader context of the changing nature of the colonial state and show how the postal network both facilitated those changes and how its relationship with government altered over the course of the early decades of the century. In doing so it is hoped to contribute to our understanding of both the material geographies and the geographies of power in Ireland around the turn of the nineteenth century, with the central focus being on the developing, and symbiotic, geographies of the postal network and the state.

Writing a historical geography of the postal service during this period involves the study of a series of interlinked and complex themes. These themes arise from posing certain questions, questions which are definite and explicit in nature but it is in answering them

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[1] Nabokov, V. 2001 *The real life of Sebastian Knight,* Penguin, London, 44

that a knowledge and awareness of wider themes becomes apparent and vital. Answering such seemingly basic questions as 'how did people post their letters?' and 'how long did it take a letter to get from Dublin to Cork?' provides a solidly empirical basis for re-creating the geography of the post. The first part of this study outlines the narrative of Post Office growth and expansion and permits the situating of the postal service among the social, economic and cultural structures in Ireland at that time. The conceptual issues which are dealt with in detail in the latter stages of the thesis constitute the focus of analysis for the second part of this study. They include such concerns as geographies of power and class; the changing nature of the contemporary state in Britain and Ireland; the emergence of specifiable yet fluid forms of governance and their formulation; the relationship between centralised and local power structures; and their creation and transformation of narratives of resistance and silence.

This chapter will begin by setting the general context of Ireland at this time with an emphasis on the changes which were occurring in both government and society. This will be followed by a discussion of the literature of, firstly, Irish postal history and secondly, an examination of the literature within the discipline of geography on postal communication and communications in general. The theoretical basis of the research will then be summarised followed by a discussion of the primary sources which were used in creating the narrative of the postal network and its implications. The final section deals with the methodology employed in this thesis, provides a brief breakdown of its structure and, finally, a statement of the aims of the research.

1.2 The nineteenth century, the state and society: contextualising their changing geographies

There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that the end of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries was a period of considerable volatility and change in Ireland. This background of flux was not solely characterised by instability but by a multitude of structural attempts to modify those changes so that they could become controllable and so instability could be replaced by flexible technologies of both codification and structuring. These new technologies could then be used to govern and control society so that a new, productive and less unruly ordering of society would be made possible.

The ruling classes which predated the Act of Union of 1801 and beyond were part and parcel of the new surfaces of emergence[1], being component agents of the state-society matrix. Yet the impetus for change came not from these embedded agents of local power structures but rather it was a top-down imposition. The British state was another element of change as well as being an agent of it, a massive part of the complex of interactions which were occurring in Ireland at that time.

For the best part of 120 years, from the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688-9 onwards, government in Britain (and Ireland) was practically invisible by the standards of today's

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[1] Foucault, M. 2000 *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Routledge, London, 40

monolithic, invasive state. The machinery of government in both Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth century was weak when compared with the comprehensive forms of government which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet the changes which took place were also a redefinition of what government *ought* to be. Their aspirational nature does not, however, undermine the fact that the changes brought about were implemented as a result of perceived threats which the state felt it necessary to counteract (for example, the rumblings of social disturbance which continued in the period after the Act of Union). However, the characteristic of the age in both Britain and Ireland was change; consistent, rapid, unusual change. This change and the resultant changing geographies are the subject of this thesis.

1.2.1 The legacy of the eighteenth century

The closing decades of the eighteenth century were characterised to a large extent by violent conflict. The sweeping tides of sectarian hatred and violence, not to mention the war between Britain and France, brought about a powerful desire on the part of the British colonial authorities to stabilise the situation within its own borders. In light of this, the extension of a modicum of independence to the sister kingdom (Ireland) was something which would come back to haunt the authorities in Dublin Castle.

The parliamentary independence which was granted to Ireland in 1782 and the repealing of the 1720 Act, which gave the British parliament the right to pass laws for Ireland, came about principally as a result of concerted pressure from elements within the Protestant ruling elites who believed that the restrictions on trade imposed by the British parliament were severely detrimental to Irish commerce. So, in 1782 'Grattan's

Parliament' was instituted which was supposed to provide greater control for the Irish over their own affairs. However, the parliament itself was massively unrepresentative of the population for whom it legislated. Most of the parliamentary seats were sinecures and the degree of patronage and corruption was huge. Catholics were not allowed to take seats in the parliament and, despite the fact that the franchise was extended to them in 1793, the contingent property qualification meant that the vast majority of Catholics possessed no vote and thus had no say in the creation of the laws which bound them. Around this time, the rescinding of several protectionist trade acts meant that there was a surge in the Irish economy in the 1790's. Business was good as merchants, in Dublin in particular, saw substantial increases in trade.[1]

Notwithstanding such good times for the capitalist classes there was a storm brewing. The United Irishmen, led by men such as Wolfe Tone and Edward Fitzgerald and inspired by the republican ideals of the French Revolution, initiated an insurrection in 1798 to rid Ireland of its colonial oppressor and establish an independent Irish republic. The rebellion started badly with miscommunications and poor organisation meaning that risible attempts were made to seize strategic points within Dublin. The surrounding counties of Meath, Kildare and Wicklow fared little better and it was only when one hundred soldiers were defeated in open battle by a contingent of United Irishmen that the rebellion began to gain momentum. The Rising of 1798 was a vicious, bitter affair with regular army detachments operating in tandem with loyalist militias against the guerrilla formations of the United Irishmen.[2] The militias frequently committed appalling atrocities against their opponents who in their turn retaliated with equal ferocity. Fighting

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[1] Cullen, L.M. 1981 *An economic history of Ireland since 1660,* Batsford press, London
[2] Whelan, K. 1998 *Fellowship of freedom : the United Irishmen and 1798*, Cork University Press, Cork

was at its most intense in the south-east of the country. In what may seem like a bizarre twist to anyone looking back at it today many of the Ulster units of the United Irishmen were composed of Presbyterians which was a stark contrast when one considers that the vast majority of Loyalist militia members were Protestant. Despite this revolutionary ecumenism, the Rising was crushed after the defeat of rebel forces at Vinegar Hill in Wexford. The reprisals that followed enraged and revolted even the British army commanders.

The 1798 Rising was the catalyst, and the perfect excuse, for government action and the colonial authorities saw the quasi-independent parliament as something which must be dissolved with direct rule being the only solution to stabilise Ireland. Thus the Act of Union was passed through both parliaments and on the first of Janaury 1801 Ireland and Britain were "...joined in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland".[1] The abortive uprising led by Robert Emmet in 1803 did little to threaten the new union. Britain and Ireland were now one political, economic and legislative bloc (although the social and cultural differences were frequently stark) and would remain so for over a century. The immediate aftermath of the Act of Union was not startling by any means. The parliament in Westminster and the bureaucratic apparatus of Whitehall did not pay a great deal of attention to how Ireland should be governed in the first decade of the nineteenth century beyond the issues of Catholic emancipation and the related issues of law and order. The principal focus was on the seemingly endless war with France, a war which only culminated conclusively with victory for British and allied forces at the battle of Waterloo in 1815. With this safely concluded, the attention of the authorities began to

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[1] McDowell, R. B. 1989 'Administration and the public services, 1800-70' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A New History of Ireland: Volume V, Ireland under the Union 1801-70,1*, Claredon Press, Oxford, 538

focus more comprehensively on how Ireland was to be governed.[1] There was not, however, a conclusive causative link between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the emergent forms of governmentality. Reform of government structures and practices had been occurring on a small scale during the opening years of the nineteenth century depending on the efficacy and energy of whoever was Chief Secretary at the time. Stages of reform were carried out, albeit not at a level as sophisticated as what was to follow during the 1820's and beyond.

With the passing of the Act of Union all of Dublin Castle's problems became all of Whitehall's problems and this is a point worth re-iterating. In the nineteenth century the 'divine right of parliaments' became the guiding principle of democracy but the key to understanding the processes and modes of state formation which took place lies in recognising the significance of the increasingly powerful and complex structures of bureaucracy, particularly in terms of the relationship between bureaucracy and colonial expansion. The period after the end of the Napoleonic Wars saw a colossal re-alignment of power structures and the emergence of immensely powerful forms of governmentality. These forms of governmentality, their conception, origins, nature and implementation constitute the main theme of chapter five.

To set the scene as to what was occurring in Ireland at the same time, one must bear in mind that agrarian, political and economic disturbances were consistent occurrences – from the Thresher disturbances of 1806 to the Caravats and the Shanavests to the Ribbonmen to the Terry Alt disturbances – and the implementation of specific forms of

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[1] MacDonagh, O. 1983 *States of mind : a study of Anglo-Irish conflict 1780-1980*, Allen and Unwin, London

coercion, 'police' governmentality, was a primary occupation of the colonial administration.

The period after the Napoleonic Wars saw the creation of a series of new state agencies and structures through and by which knowledge or information flowed. The National Boards of Education were created in 1824. They instituted a National schools system which was the first attempt to provide a system of education on a nationwide basis. The Ordnance Survey mapped the island on a hitherto unprecedented magnitude using the six inches to one mile scale. It was then, and remains to this day, one of the most comprehensive mapping projects ever initiated by the state.[1] The Griffith Valuation was a project consisting of assessing the gross worth of every piece of property and landholding in the country.[2] It was, in essence, an attempt to work out the fiscal value of the entire island. There were other mechanisms which were deployed to ensure that Ireland's national economy was enmeshed in the metropolitan economy: the merging of the Irish and British Treasuries in 1817, the merging of the Boards of Customs and Excise in 1823 and the 1825 Currency Act which assimilated Irish currency to the British.[3] The reforms and re-evaluation of the Post Office were a part of the changing geography of the state as it sought to create and redefine structures of knowledge and power in early nineteenth century Ireland. The postal network was both a scrutinised object and a facilitating network in the establishment of new state geographies of power and knowledge.

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[1] Andrews, J.H. 2002, *A paper landscape: the Ordnance Survey in nineteenth-century Ireland,* (2nd. Ed.) Four Courts Press, Dublin

[2] Jones Hughes, T. 1965. 'Society and settlement in nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Irish Geography*, 5, 79-96

[3] Ó'Gráda, C. 1989 'Industry and communications, 1801-45' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A New History of Ireland: Volume V, Ireland under the Union 1801-70,* Clarendon press, Oxford, 137-155

Within Irish historical geography there have been a number of areas of research which have detailed the historical geographies of nineteenth century Ireland. The focus of most of the research to date could be said to be the 'land'. Migration[1], agriculture[2], the landholding structure[3], the Famine[4] and settlement[5] are some of the areas which historical geographers have concentrated on. Over the past twenty years or so the social and political structures of the nineteenth century have begun to receive attention as valid topics of study within Irish historical geography.[6] There are other texts which deal with the historical geography of the nineteenth century[7] and which give a broader overview of the geography of Ireland during the period. However, for the most part the links between the structures of the state and the changing geographies of the nineteenth century have remained largely unexplored.

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[1] Houston, C. J. and W. J. Smyth 1990. *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement: Patterns, Links and Letters*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto

[2] Donnelly, J.S. jr. 1975. *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork : the rural economy and the land question,* Routledge and Kegan Paul Press, London

[3] Andrews, J. H. 1987 'The struggle for Ireland's public commons' in P. O'Flanagan, P. Ferguson and K. Whelan (eds.) Rural *Ireland. Modernisation and Change 1600-1900*, Cork University Press, Cork; Hughes, T. J. 1986. 'The estate system of landholding in nineteenth century Ireland' in W. Nolan (ed.) *The shaping of Ireland*, Mercier Press, Cork

[4] Crawford, E. Clarkson, L and Kennedy, L. 1999. *Mapping the Great Irish Famine*, Four Courts Press, Dublin

[5] Hughes, T. J. 1965 'Society and settlement in nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Irish Geography*, 5, 79-96

[6] Proudfoot, L. J. 1993 'Spatial transformation and social agency: property, society and improvement, c. 1700 to 1900' in Graham, B. J and L. J. Proudfoot (eds.) *An historical geography of Ireland*, Academic Press, London; Whelan, K. 1983 'The Catholic parish, the Catholic chapel and village development in Ireland' in *Irish Geography*, 16, 1-15

[7] Aalen, F. H. A. 1978. *Man and the landscape in Ireland*, Academic Press, London; Evans, E. 1981. *The personality of Ireland: habitat, heritage and history*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast; Freeman, T. W. 1951. *Pre-Famine Ireland: a study in historical geography,* Manchester University Press, Manchester

1.3 Historical studies of the Irish postal service

The history of the Irish Post Office is not a topic which has received a great deal of attention from contemporary historians. The number of significant books and articles published on Irish postal history is less than half a dozen.[1] Reynolds' book is the major work in the field and in it she describes the earliest origins of the postal service from the fifteen century up until the creation of *An Post* in post-Independence Ireland. The histories of postal communication which have been written to date have been largely descriptive, analysing the postal service on a rather one-dimensional level using broad brush strokes to paint a coherent yet largely uncritical picture of the Irish post office. The other works consist of studies in philatelic history or are relatively slight texts which do not engage in a more complete analysis of the history of the postal network.

Topics such as the routes used by the Post Office, how they came about, who used it, how it worked internally as well as externally, the relationship with government, its operations on the ground, rural receiving houses, the question of resistance, employment and revenue are all issues which are dealt with in a certain amount of detail by the histories mentioned below. These subjects give us some idea of what the structure of the post

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[1] Cooke, C.J 1935 *Irish Postal History, sixteenth century to 1935*, S.N. Press, London; Feldman, D. 1975 *Handbook of Irish postal history to 1840*, Feldman, Dublin; Holland, F.C. 1940 *The postmarks of Great Britain and Ireland, 1660 to 1940*, S.N. Press, Cheltenham; Reynolds, M. 1983 *A history of the Irish Post Office*, MacDonnell White Press ,Dublin; Smyth, T. S. 1941 *Postal history : a story of progress*, Easons, Dublin; Watson, E. 1917 *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 between travellers*, Albemarle Press, London

office was. However, the narratives are weighed down by an over-emphasis on the personalities of the post office, the men who were its guardians and its keepers. Reynolds, for example, focuses a great deal on the individuals who made up the Post Office hierarchy through the years. From Evan Vaughan to Isaac Marley, from the Lees family to William Mulready the history within the narrative seems to take a back seat to potted autobiographies which tell us anecdotes and personal histories whilst not eliciting a great deal of the institutional history of the Post and its cultural, social and economic impacts. There have been several articles published on Irish postal history yet very few were relevant for the time period of this research.[1] The only relevant work in this context on the early nineteenth century Irish Post Office is Bayly's article in which she details the lives and careers of two of the Post Office's most influential figures. It is heavily critical of its two subjects and it branded both father and son corrupt and inefficient albeit men who did perform useful service in their careers in the Post Office.

There has been scant work done on analysing how that system impacted upon the wider social and political landscape of Ireland. The difficulty, essentially, is that useful though these texts are in sketching in some of the detail of the postal network, there is an absence of critical analysis. They are narrative histories, straightforward works of description. They are too cursory in their treatment of the subject to provide penetrating insights into the workings and significance of the Post but do provide a level of detail which is useful in reconstructing those workings and that significance. This approach is not inherently a

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[1] Anon 1856 'The Post Office' *Irish Quarterly Review*. 23, vi, 499-540; Bayly, Beatrice Butler 1953 'John and Edward Lees' *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. XIII, no. 3 and 4, 138-147; Salmon, J. 1899 'The early Irish Post Office' in *The New Ireland Review*, 7, 4-15

bad thing and the books themselves make no claim to provide any theoretical analysis of their subject matter. Yet the fact remains that they do not bring a great deal of depth or substance to the issue at hand.

Another difficulty with the literature on Irish postal history is primarily one of spatial or geographical focus. Some of the most useful texts in researching this topic have been ones which dealt primarily with the British Post Office.[1] Robinson's work, for example, contained some very practical details of the Irish Post Office and its history not found in works by Irish authors. Yet at the same time the work only gives a chapter over to dealing with the Irish mails. These books were intended to concentrate on Britain, and useful though they were, they regarded Ireland and the Irish Office as an adjunct to the larger British office.

1.4 Geography and the post: a review of literature

Postal communications have not received a great deal of attention from geographers. The approach generally taken has been to examine postal systems as networks and to attempt to show how those networks operate through examining concepts of distance, intercommunication technology and location theory. Abler and Falk, in a series of essays,

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[1] Joyce, H. 1893 *The History of the Post Office from Its Establishment down to 1836,* Allen Lane, London; Robinson, H. 1948 *The British Post Office: A History*, Greenwood Press, New Jersey; Robinson, H. 1964 *Carrying British Mails overseas*, Allen Unwin, London

were prominent in this regard.[1] They examined the postal network of Sweden in terms of

relative distances and time space convergence. They focused on the degree of

connectivity which the evolution of a postal network would grant or prevent over time.

What they prioritised in their approach was the physical and theoretical delimitation of

the network a postal system both comprised and represented and in doing so test the

viability of the diffusion model of innovation as developed by Torsten Hägerstrand. What

they discovered was that large amounts of mail traffic came from regions within Sweden

which possessed commercial or industrial nodes and from metropolitan areas. Thus

commercial and administrative structures dominated the use of the post which indicated

that population distribution alone did not impact significantly on the levels of mail

transmissions but that the geography of its use was affected by a functional primacy

which could and did shift but the pattern appeared to follow rather than facilitate this

shift. Abler and Falk performed a series of regression analyses in order to determine the

variance in mail revenues. They found that up until 1950 information primacy became

increasingly evident throughout the century (1870-1850) and that rural areas accounted

for much less mail traffic than centres of administrative or commercial importance. As

they themselves noted, such a distribution is not particularly surprising and that the *a*

priori expectation would anticipate that economic and administrative nodes would

dominate postal activity.

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[1] Abler, R. F. (1971) 'Distance, intercommunications and geography' in *Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers*, 3; 1-4; Abler, Ronald and Thomas Falk (1985) 'Intercommunications technologies: the development of postal services in Sweden' in *Geografiska Annaler* 67B; 21-28; Abler, Ronald and Thomas Falk (1985) 'Intercommunications technologies: regional variations in postal use in Sweden, 1870-1975' in Geografiska Annaler 67B: 99-106

Abler and Falk's approach to the study of postal systems over time is but one way of examining the issue. That their analyses did not yield anything especially startling lends itself to the argument that in order to elucidate the themes and problems of a geographical analysis of postal communication over time another approach is required. Their findings were and are important but they did not move us very far in terms of understanding the processes and, more significantly, the impact on society of the emergence of sophisticated networks of communication. Yet Abler and Falk did make the more general point that geographers should take note of the modification effect on relative distances that intercommunication technologies possess. However they argue for a more general introduction into geographical thought of the awareness of this effect. They attempt to redefine the units of distance which they claim are inadequate to do the job of spatial mensuration (that is, miles, kilometres, hours and minutes). They put forward the idea that distances require more precise terminology and that distances should be divided into globe distances, effort distances and metaphysical distances. They argue for a rethinking of geographical concepts of distance, both inductively and deductively, based around the friction of distance. They saw the case for creating a balance between the more anthropomorphic theoretical concepts and systems theory approaches. The importance of their work lies in the appreciation of the variability of distance which an intercommunications system such as the Post inherently possesses. One point which they make quite forcibly is that intercommunications systems are not mediums of exchange. For them, exchange implies a loss of something in its transfer, a relation of reciprocity in which one gained something for what one lost. For Abler and Falk a postal system is a

two way 'asking and telling' system, in which the sender loses nothing, rather than a conduit of one-way information sending.

'The friction of distance' is the title of a paper written by Derek Gregory published in the Journal of Historical geography which provided the initial inspiration for this research.[1] In the article Gregory points out that geographers have used information and information circulation to examine other objectives and that little has been done on the context or consequences of information circulation. This research project mirrors Gregory's own desire to recover the economic, political and cultural implications of the historical geographies created by information circulation. Gregory's paper dealt with the period after 1840 in the aftermath of the introduction of the Penny Postage system Gregory touches on some of the themes dealt with throughout this thesis – the Privileged post system, the abuse of Franking – but one area which he does focus on – that of the clandestine carriage of mail to avoid postal duties –is not dealt with in the subsequent chapters, principally due to the almost total lack of data for the time period concerned. Gregory highlights the existence of a hierarchical system of illegal mail conveyance which filled in the gaps left by the national Post Office network. This system, at the same time, provided for a degree of integration in Britain's space economy which those gaps in the official network appeared to prevent. Geographers have done some work on the postal network in Britain in the early modern period. Brayshay has outlined the financial aspects

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[1] Gregory, D 1987 'The friction of distance? Information circulation and the mails in early nineteenth century England' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13, 2, 130-154

of the postal rate system in the late 16th century in Britain.[1] He points out that although

the system of postal routes was initially the Royal (that is, state) mail and was intended to

gather intelligence and supply wider security needs, it came to serve wider economic and

social purposes. In more recent years, Curry and Downey[2] have examined

intercommunications networks in terms of their wider social repercussions. Although

both of these geographers have examined the post more as an aside and focused on other

intercommunication systems (telephony and radio in Curry's case and telegraphy in

Downey's) they have provided useful insights into the nature and operation of

intercommunications systems from a conceptual perspective in geography.

In short there is an appreciable gap in the geographical literature regarding postal

networks in terms of their nature and function and, most importantly, their social and

political implications.

1.5 Theoretical approaches

The implications and significance of the development of the early nineteenth century

postal network allow considerable scope in relation to theoretical analyses of the

relationship between the Post, the state and society. The format of this thesis therefore

hinges around three key concepts: governmentality, negotiation and resistance (see

chapters 5, 6 and 7). To this end the work and thought of two social theorists are utilised

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[1] Brayshay, M. 1991 'Royal Post-Horse Routes in England and Wales: The Evolution of the Network in the late-Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Century', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 4, 373-389; Brayshay, M, Harrison, P and Chalkley, B. 1998 'Knowledge, nationhood and governance: the speed of the Royal post in early-modern England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24, 265-288
[2] Curry, M. 1998 *Digital places: Living with geographic information technologies*, Routledge Press, London; Downey, G. 1999 'Information networks and urban spaces: The case of the telegraph messenger boy,' in *Antenna* 12:1

along with a more general model of social resistance which was initially developed by Eric Hobsbawm the Marxist social historian.

1.5.1 Governmentality, discourse and knowledge: The work of Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault's work and thought has been, and remains, of particular interest to geographers because his theorisation of the forms of power which emerged, particularly in the nineteenth century, grants space a vital role as both a tool and a field of social control.[1] There is an extensive literature within geography which grapples with and attempts to apply Foucauldian theory to the study of various areas of the discipline. This literature is too great to even list here but we shall look at a few salient examples which deal with some of the issues raised in this thesis.

Foucault could perhaps be usefully but imperfectly described as a post structuralist theorist. He rejected what he saw as the negative and totalizing modes of thought which went together to make up modernity (Marxism, structural anthropology etc). Thus the Enlightenment Project, with its attendant concepts of 'universals' (human rights, personal freedom) and their basis, Cartesian rationality, was something which Foucault implicitly rejected. He focused on the discontinuities and specifics, prioritised the local over the general and sought to examine and respect those micro elements of history with multiple forms of macro analyses. Fragmentation and disconnection are key concepts in Foucault's thought.

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[1] Hannah, M. 2000 *Governmentality and the mastery of territory in nineteenth- century America*, Cambridge University Press , Cambridge

The concept of discourse is an important one in Foucault's work. For Foucault discourse was not everyday, ordinary conversation between people but the specific speech acts, of experts within the human sciences.[1] Foucault developed his ideas on discourse in his work on the history of the social sciences.[2] He saw discourses as systems of representation and it was the rules and practices that produced meaningful statements that Foucault saw as regulating discourses. Discourses defined the objects of knowledge and were essentially groups of statements which provided a language for discussing a particular topic in a particular historical period. In relation to the Post the correspondence carried on between local rural elites and the colonial authorities in Dublin Castle bore the hallmarks of a discourse in that the techniques and institution and social forms involved are derived from social, economic and political factors into apparent unities. Foucault refined his analysis of discourse and treated and framed them as statements within procedures of direct validation made by significant groups of informed individuals.[3] Foucault developed theories on the emergence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of a new form of power based on surveillance. He traced the development of the disciplinary society and showed how insidious and effective certain techniques of ordering were made by the state. So effective, in fact, that they were plausibly argued not to be systems of control at all but rather common organisations of reform for the benefit (supposedly) of all. This period of thought in Foucault's work was the precursor to his later, not fully completed theories of governmentality which are the central theme of chapter five.

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[1] Peet, R. 1998 *Modern geographical thought*, Blackwell Press, Oxford
[2] Foucault, M. 2000, *Op. Cit.*
[3] *Ibid*

Several geographers have attempted to write Foucauldian geographies, both in practice and conceptually. Foucault's treatment of the Benthamite 'perfect prison', the Panopticon, as both spatial metaphor and practical tool has proved extremely useful in illustrating his view on the emergence of the new forms of power. In the Panopticon the prisoners would be held in rows of multi-storey cells which would be backlit. The prison would have a tower in the centre for the guards. The behaviour and activities of the prisoners would thus be subject to constant scrutiny and with a rigorous and carefully selected program of punishments, the prisoners would be encouraged to regulate their own behaviour.[1] Foucault placed this model at the centre of the institutions he examined and showed how, at the same time that the individuals living within the Panopticon not only regulated their own behaviour of their own 'volition' but that the state (or, their metaphor, the Prison warden) collected a great deal of valuable data relating to the behaviour and psychological profile of the inmates. This conjunction of knowledge and power is classic Foucault and has, as Matthew Hannah points out, become something of an archetype in critical research on social control.[2]

Besides the usefulness of his theorising of governmentality and his flexible yet powerful concept of discourse, Foucault's work is of direct relevance to historical geography because of his passionate commitment to the dissolution of absolutes within the study of the past. Foucault believed that geography fragmented the totality of history as written by those generalist historians who sought to reconstitute the driving principle behind social

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[1] Foucault, M. 1979 *Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison*, Penguin Press, Harmondsworth
[2] Hannah, M. 2000, *Op. Cit.*

organisation. Foucault railed against those who thought that simply by placing well defined boundaries around a spatial area that a chain of causal events could be re-established simply by writing about them. "Things turn out differently in different places" was the mantra with which Foucault sought to puncture the balloon of total history. Grand historical narratives ignored the differences and specifics of space. The local and the particular were the objects of study which history should concentrate on. Foucault himself did not take into account the importance of 'place' in his critique of 'fundamental' history. Yet his prioritising of the confusion, contradictions and conflicts which cropped up spatially rather than temporally, provided geographers with a natural entry point into his thought. As Chris Philo states

"What I would add is that imagining Foucault as less the 'geometer of power' and more the patient 'archaeologist of substantive geographies' is something that apparently resonates with his own views, notably when he highlights the value of proceeding with a clear attunement to real, worldly spaces ('external spaces') full of substance-ridden things (people, animals, forests, rivers, slopes, buildings, roads, railways: the list is endless) all jumbled up together and related to one another through spatial relations".[1]

1.5.2 Social groups, negotiation and the state: Pierre Bourdieu

The second social theorist whose ideas have influenced some of the conclusions of this research and who we encounter in chapter six is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu shared some practical and intellectual similarities with Foucault in terms of his opposition to grand theoretical narratives such as Marxism. Bourdieu did not 'systematize' his thought in the

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[1] Philo, C. 1992 'Foucault's geography' in *Society and Space* 10, 157

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same way that, for example, Wallerstein did but rather his conceptual analysis grew out of empirical research and the application of a wide variety of ideological and intellectual positions. It was the practices which occur in the social world, Bourdieu believed, that must be unified in theory. Like Foucault, Bourdieu gave primacy to the relations and functions of power in social life. For Bourdieu power was not a separate domain of study but stood at the heart of all social life.[1] Bourdieu's theorisation of how fields of conflict interlock and how actors contest and pursue their own interests within these fields is of interest here. The reproduction of class power through the reproduction of and reinforcement of existing social stratifications is a major theme in Bourdieu's work. The formation of groups and their struggle to maintain their position in the social order is something which Bourdieu saw as being central to understanding the sociological and intellectual basis for social reproduction. Bourdieu connected agency and structure as a dialectic and argued that the relationship between human agency and social or economic structure should be viewed as a collective unity connecting culture, structure and power.

For this research Bourdieu's concept of the 'field' is of great importance. A field is a structural system of positions within society within which the agents in the field contest and manoeuvre to take advantage of and control specific resources and their access to them.

> "...a field (is) a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents and institutions, by their present and potential situation... in the structure

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[1] Swartz, D. 1997 *Culture and Power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 6

of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific

profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other position".[1]

Bourdieu uses the concept of 'field' as a spatial metaphor and is thus particularly useful

when attempting to frame the relations of power and access to capital which the actors

within, in this instance, the postal network contest for.

Bourdieu refines the Marxist definition of capital by relating it to all modes of power.

Although Bourdieu does ground his definition of capital in a modification of the labour

theory of value, he does not distinguish between capitalist and non capitalist forms of

labour. He conceives of capital as power relations founded on quantitative differences in

the amount of labour they embody. Therefore work specific to capitalism is not

distinguished from the accumulated labour embodied in the social capital of, for example,

a politician's networks of acquaintances. Bourdieu sees a vast range of labour types

which can constitute power relations and which can, under certain conditions, be

converted into one another. He lists various forms of capital which will be dealt with in

detail in chapter six but for the purposes of this discussion the main types are cultural

capital, economic capital, social capital, symbolic capital. There are other types of capital

which are of relevance for this research, the two principal categories being informational

capital which was a form of cultural capital and finally, statist capital which,

frustratingly, Bourdieu never fully defined in his work, only sketching an outline of what

he thought the concept entailed. Bourdieu also developed a conceptual framework for the

emergence of social groups. He placed a great deal of importance on the recognition and

thus the nomination of a particular group. These ideas will be dealt with in greater detail

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[1] Quoted in Jenkins, R. 2002 *Pierre Bourdieu,* Routledge Press, London, 85

in Chapter 6 but his conceptualisation of the struggle and contestation of different groups particularly useful in elucidating the issues of power and negotiation which arose out of this process.

While Bourdieu has not had anything like the impact on geographical research and thought that Foucault has had and continues to have, Bourdieu's work is beginning to be used by scholars and researchers within geography. For the most part his theories have been deployed in order to analyse social structure and class formation, particularly in urban geography in terms of gentrification and the middle classes.[1] The research thus far has focussed on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* with little attention being given to the agency/structure and social reproduction processes embedded in power relations. In historical geography work done on Bourdieu's thought is sparse but there has been some.[2] Harvey uses Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* to analyse the construction of identity and ecclesiastical organisation during the Medieval period. He employs *habitus* to ground the rhetoric of legitimisation, particularly in relation to its use by ecclesiastical authorities. Jenkins examines the autobiography of an Irish Protestant settler in nineteenth century Toronto as a case study and a test for Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* and practice.

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[1] Allen, C. 2004, 'Bourdieu's *habitus*, social class and the spatial worlds of visually impaired children' in *Urban Studies*, 41(3): 487-50; Butler, T. and G. Robson, 2003 'Plotting the middle classes: gentrification and circuits of education in London' in *Housing Studies* 18(1):5-28; Gerber, J 1998 'Beyond dualism – the social construction of nature and the natural and social construction of human beings' in *Progress in Human Geography* 21(1):1-17 Ley, D. 1996 *The new middle class and the remaking of the central city*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; Savage, M. et al 1992 *Property, bureaucracy and culture : middle class formation in contemporary Britain*, Routledge Press, London.
[2] Harvey, David C. 2000 'Continuity, authority and the place of heritage in the Medieval World' in *Journal of Historical Geography* 26(1) 47-59 and Jenkins, W. 2003 'Between the lodge and the meeting-house: mapping Irish Protestant identities and social worlds in late Victorian Toronto' in *Social and Cultural Geography* 4(1):75-98

There is, therefore, a gap in geographical knowledge and practice. The micro geographies created by the discourse and power relations inherent to the early nineteenth century postal service provide a valuable testing ground for the applicability of some of Bourdieu's theories to Irish historical geography.

1.5.3 Resistance and the post: social banditry and state responses

The penultimate chapter of this research deals with the notion of resistance. Armed and active resistance was a defining feature of colonialism throughout Irish history but as chapter seven shows, the resistance proffered was not always directed at the colonial authorities. Class struggles frequently manifested themselves in violent outbursts which only tangentially included the Imperial state as a source of grievance. Nevertheless the state and the postal service did encounter violent resistance in their development. Rural crime, in terms of highwaymen and bandits, may not have constituted explicit conscious geographies of resistance. But to the colonial state the status of the difficulties its agencies encountered on the ground may have only mattered in overall political terms as it was the fact of the difficulties rather than their motivation which directly concerned them. The literature on the topics of crime, resistance and their resultant geographies is dealt with in the body of chapter seven and will not be covered explicitly here. What is intended is merely to introduce the topics and to mention briefly those works which are the most relevant in the context.[1] Probably the most complete marriage of empirical research and theoretical depth in the historical geography of resistance and banditry is

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[1] Hobsbawm, E, J. 1974 'Social Banditry' in H.W. Landsberger (ed.) *Rural Protest: Peasant movements and Social Change*, MacMillan Press, London, 142-157; O'Malley, P. 1979, 'Social Bandits, Modern Capitalism and the Traditional Peasantry: A Critique of Hobsbawm,' *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 6, 4: 489-499

McQuilton's study of the Kelly Outbreak.[1] In it McQuilton traces the geography of the activities of the bandit and bushranger Ned Kelly. McQuilton critiques Hobsbawm's model of the social bandit and shows that banditry can be a function of settlement and not necessarily a phenomenon which requires a 'traditional' rural peasant setting. The upheaval created by the transformation of the landscape and the social inequities which followed meant that the conditions for social banditry were established. Yet as McQuilton points out the 'Outbreak' owned nothing to famine, war or the social structure of a traditionalist peasant society.[2]

1.6 Sources

There were three main primary sources containing the research material utilised in this thesis. The source material used was collected and annotated by the colonial government although some of the sources do contain material which was drafted by private groups and individuals on their own behalf. That fact notwithstanding, the sources which were consulted are first and foremost governmental ones. It is important to bear this fact in mind when reading and analysing the material they contain. All historical sources contain some form of bias, a degree of subjectivity which the researcher must acknowledge. It is not only the researcher's job to read the sources and to analyse their content but to also work against the grain, so to speak, to see what the sources do not contain, to see what they are not saying. The reliance on governmental data thus possesses inherent dangers

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[1] McQuilton, J. 1979 *The Kelly Outbreak 1878-1880: The Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne
[2] *Ibid*, 188

when it comes to the teasing out the picture the source material is purporting to represent. One must doubt, always, the nature and contents of the material one is using to avoid the trap of blind reliance on purported 'fact'. However, this is not to say that the sort of material collected by state agencies is inherently redundant. Far from it, for as we shall see the nineteenth century state was assiduous in the collection of all kinds of data and its subsequent codification and tabulation. Any body of recorded material will have gaps and silences within it. These gaps can be as a result of the destruction or deterioration of the physical records, for example the 1922 burning of the Customs House in Dublin which destroyed a great deal of state archival records. Yet there are also the wilful absences which are there from the very start of the archive record. The nineteenth century state was greatly concerned with gathering and using social information but this gathering and using contained priorities within it. The state did not archive all of the material it gathered as more and more data was gathered, other records were deemed insignificant and destroyed as the priorities of the state changed. The unprecedented levels of inquiry which transpired in the early half of the nineteenth century and were manifested in parliamentary inquiries and Royal commissions meant that huge amounts of data on social questions were gathered. The nineteenth century state wanted to make its society more productive and less unruly.[1]

One of the primary problems in relying on data from one root source is that it has the potential to restrict the analysis and the breadth of the conclusions which may be drawn. However, the reading of the source material with a critical eye helps the researcher to see

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[1] Driver, F. 1993 *Power and pauperism : the workhouse system, 1834-1884*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Corrigan, P. and D. Sayer, 1985, *The great arch: English state formation as cultural revolution* ,Blackwell Press, Oxford

further than the tabulated facts and figures. By applying the principles and ideas of a theoretical framework one can link seemingly trivial and narrow pieces of data to wider issues. This then allows for a more rigorous reading of the source material itself, a reflexive process which provides the researcher with many intellectual starting points from which to construct an argument. The creation of knowledge was a motive factor behind the gathering of the data used in this research. The state was attempting to adjust and maintain one of its apparatuses, an apparatus which would assist it in the creation of a productive and stable society. The richness of the source material the state gathered is there for any researcher to see and is vital in creating any narrative of early nineteenth century Irish society.

1.6.1 The Parliamentary papers

The bulk of the data gleaned from the parliamentary papers came from the reports of the Treasury Commissioners and from the reports of standing committees of the House of Commons. Of the Treasury Commissioners Reports two major reports received the most attention: *The Nineteenth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenues arising in Ireland and Great Britain (Post Office Revenue in Ireland)*, the *22nd Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Collection and Management of the Revenues arising in Ireland and Great Britain (Packet Establishments and Home stations)*. The nineteenth report was 951 pages long and was published in 1829. The 22nd report was 781 pages long and published in 1830.

These reports were a part of a much wider investigation into the operation and efficiency of government which was begun in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars and continued throughout the 1820's and up into the 1830's. The investigation culminating in the Nineteenth report started in 1823 and continued, sporadically, until its publication in 1829. The report was intended to examine the Post Office bureaucracy in Ireland but with a very specific aim in mind. The object of the report was

> "...to submit the grounds for recommending that the Departments of England
> and Ireland should, with respect to management, be consolidated, and as a
> consequence of that recommendation that the general practice for the united
> Department should be frowned upon that which has been found to be beneficially
> adopted in the former country".[1]

This tallies with the fact that many parliamentary reports were initiated in order to provide legitimacy for one viewpoint or another "...select committees and Royal Commissions were not in the 1830's intended to provide dispassionate enquires, but rather were seen as making the case for a preconceived change."[2] The 1830 report consisted of the deliberations of a specially selected group of Treasury Commissioners (senior figures within the Treasury Department) who were assisted in the preparation of the report's findings by two appointed experts; a Mr. Johnson who was a superintendent of mail coaches and a Mr. Hume who was an inspector of franks. The Commissioners, like the committees of the House of Commons, were thorough in their investigations. The investigation took the form of a standing committee which sat in London. The committees firstly examined previous official documentation relating to the subject it was

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[1] *The nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII, 3-4
[2] Daunton, M. *Royal Mail: the Post Office since 1840*, Athlone Press, London, 1985

investigating and then called witnesses to testify before it, drawing the witness pool from as wide a variety of experts as possible.

The report was a comprehensive scrutiny of the 'establishment' of the Post Office, of its bureaucratic structure. Each office within the Post Office structure, from the Postmaster General down to the Housekeeper's department, was examined. The office's duties were described and these descriptions included the names of the officers, the nature of the office, the date of its appointment, the duties each officer performed, their attendance, salary and all other "emoluments and advantages."

Being a report by the Treasury Commissioners, the revenue collected and expended as recorded in Post Office accounts was, for the Commissioners, a fair proxy for the size and extent of the Post Office Establishment. Much is made in the report of the fact that there was considerable divergence between the two Postmasters General, Lord O'Neill and Lord Rosse, as to who was the primary Postmaster in relation to the duties for the office. Lord Rosse believed himself to be the one to discharge the duties while Lord O'Neill believed that the duties and the responsibilities were to be shared out equally. The lack of communication between the Postmasters General and the Secretary of the Post Office was also highlighted and it was with a degree of dry irony that it was noted that the two men (the Postmasters General) had never actually met.

The report is comprehensive and very useful in sketching in the details of the day to day duties of the Post Office bureaucracy. The picture it paints is one of a bloated and under worked system of employment whereby the duties of each Post Office official were not

overly onerous yet at the same time the bill for wages was distressingly high. Many of the observations made within the report are backed up by quotes taken from the evidence of Post Office employees with the Secretary of the Post Office, Sir Edward Lees, featuring prominently in the report. While the Irish Post Office was undoubtedly poorly run and contained many inefficient and corrupt practices it should be remembered that the report, from the outset, was intended to provide a reason for the consolidation of the Irish and British Post Offices. The details of the Post Office Establishment are outlined in Chapter four with each office described in detail along with an extensive discussion of the nature and extent of the corruption which the Commissioners were ostensibly aiming to root out. With this in mind the 1830 report does build up a thorough picture of the inner workings of the Post Office Establishment. This is itself important because in the absence of understanding the duties of each office and officer it is very difficult to describe how the Post Office actually worked. It is that detail which was so useful in the reconstruction of the bureaucratic channels and procedures which underpinned the operation of the Irish Post Office.

The second Treasury Commission report concerned what was known as the Packet establishment and the Home stations. The 22nd report of the Treasury Commissioners dealt with the nautical lines of postal communication which were known as the Packet lines and their respective ports of call or home stations. The report was part of the investigation into the circulation of correspondence within the United Kingdom. The initial stages of the report contain some general descriptions of the situation of the report itself within this wider investigation and how a separate examination of the packet

service was justified. As was noted in previous reports on the state of postal communication between Britain and Ireland, the packet establishment was highly expensive to run. The sailing ships (later steam ships) which travelled between Ireland and Britain incurred heavy expenditure. These heavy costs were the source of growing discomfort amongst senior Treasury Department bureaucrats who communicated their concerns to parliament, concerns which were repeatedly voiced in this report. The report itself was an attempt to discover how wasteful the operators of the packet ships were in terms of the deployment of the ships, the arrangements for collection of postal revenue and the upkeep and physical maintenance of the harbours which comprised the packet stations. In order to do this the Treasury Commissioners examined each packet station individually.

The packet establishment at Holyhead, Kingstown (today Dun Laoghaire), Howth, Milford, Haven, Liverpool, Waterford, Portpatrick, Donaghadee and the Isle of Man were all described within the report. The focus was placed on the three main packet lines – The Holyhead to Dublin packet, the Milford Haven to Waterford packet and the Donaghadee to Portpatrick packet. Each section begins with a physical description of the packet harbour itself and its geographical location in relation to its sister harbour in either Britain or Ireland. The advantages and disadvantages which arose from both of these factors are discussed as well as their impacts on costs. The report details the history of each station as a packet harbour: how long it had been in operation, the traffic levels it had been capable of carrying (or incapable as the case may be) and the number and nature of the vessels which sailed out of them. Within each description there is a fulcrum around

which the discussion of both the generalities and the specifics of the packet ships turn and that fulcrum was the introduction of steam ships on the packet lines. Even though the report does examine the state of repair of the packet stations what it actually focuses on is how efficient and effective the introduction of steam ships actually would be in terms of time saved, revenue and the costs of running the ships .

The report took evidence from ships captain's, engineers, proprietors of the ships themselves, packet agents (postal employees who operated the packet stations) harbour masters, ship builders and local worthies who lived in the proximity of the packet stations. Expense, the detailing of money outlaid and revenue collected, was the motive force behind the report but in navigating between the fiscal imperatives of market forces and the provision of a usable public service the report attempts to strike a rather unusual balance. It bemoans the over employment that the packet establishment maintained and it critiques the rather murky circumstances surrounding the awarding of packet ship contracts. It was heavily censorious of what the Treasury Commissioners saw as the profligate waste when it came to the maintenance expenses of the packet lines. Yet at the same time it recognised the public benefit of the packet service and that the public benefit it so clearly upheld would not be ensured by the introduction of wholesale private enterprise on the packet lines. The report details the employment profiles of each packet establishment with each job description and its wage levels included among its pages. The name, tonnage, date of contract, power of engine and the total construction costs of each packet ships is also included. Another source of data on the packet lines was the *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by*

Milford Haven.[1] The report examined the state of the packet establishment at Milford Haven, assessing the value of the existing packet establishment at Milford Haven with a view to closing it down. The report was published in 1827 and deals in detail with the station at Milford.

A further source of data from the Parliamentary Papers was the *1831-1832 House of Commons Select Committee report on postal communication with Ireland.* The report is 398 pages long including the minutes of evidence and the appendices. The summarised report is only 31 pages long, the bulk of the remaining pages containing detailed witness statements of evidence. The committee was made up of parliamentarians and lay experts like Captain William Dalymple, a Royal Navy Captain. The remit of the report is best summarised by this sentence found in its opening pages where it states that

> "...facility of communication is of so much importance to both countries, that any Expenditure which may be necessary for affording it to the fullest extent should rather be considered as an outlay of Public Money for National purposes, than for the better management of a particular department or the accommodation of a particular district."[2]

The report differed in many ways from previous reports on the Irish Post Office. The principal difference was that in the 1832 report the question of expenditure and revenue, though important, was not paramount. The report was a survey, not of the Post Office itself as a bureaucratic structure, but of the actual processes of the circulation of letters in rural and urban areas. The flaws and failures of the contemporary system of mail

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[1] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III
[2] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland,* 1831-32, *H.C.* 1832 (716) XVII, 3-4

deliveries were of particular concern in this report but as it was a report on Post Office

communication *with* Ireland the issue of the Packet Ships and the lines of communication

with England were dealt with first. The packet stations at Holyhead, Liverpool,

Portpatrick, Milford and Waterford were all examined with the details of the revenue

arising from each being included. For example it was noted that in 1825 £4,498 160s 11d

was received from passengers at the Milford station but by 1831 this figure had fallen to

£1,519 120s 8d a loss attributed to the poor state of repair of the packet harbour at

Dunmore East in Waterford.[1] The report goes on to briefly sketch out the journey times

of the recently introduced steam packets. The report recommended that an expert in

shipbuilding be appointed to the office to decide on whether or not to purchase or

introduce a steam ship for a particular line instead of the Secretary of the Post Office. The

committee also recommended that a more radical suggestion be considered – that of

turning the management of the packets over to the Admiralty.

From considering the packet lines the report then moved on to deal with Irish internal

communications. The report was particularly concerned with the time taken to deliver the

mail from England on its arrival at the Packet stations to the Principal towns of Ireland. It

noted with considerable gravity that the English correspondence was of much more

significant relevance to the merchants and traders living within these towns then was the

case previously. On the basis of evidence taken from the numerous witnesses who sat

before the committee the report concluded that the Post Office should pay a great deal

more attention to the lines of communication between the Port towns and the Principal

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[1] *Ibid*, 17

towns. It frequently highlighted the haphazard and *ad hoc* arrangements for the delivery of internal mail and argued for better management and streamlining of the current system. The point that the English correspondence was the most important was consistently hammered home. Examples were given within the report of just how convoluted some of the lines of delivery were. It recommended changing specific routes and was particularly critical of the system of Cross Posts then in operation with the corruption inherent in the system coming in for scathing comment.

The report itself is a very useful précis of the evidence of the various witnesses but it is only really in the minutes of evidence and appendices that the meat of the story is found. The nearly 400 pages of evidence and appendices contain considerable detail of the workings of the postal network itself and some, frequently damning, insights into the operations of the Post Office. Unlike previous reports, the 1832 report was a qualitative summary of the state of the Post Office first and foremost. The agenda of the committee was a little hazy and it appears that a genuine examination of the state of postal communication within Ireland resulted. This is in contrast with, for example, the 1829 Treasury Commissioners report which from its very outset had a specific point to prove. However, at the back of the minds of the committee seems to have been the idea that the Irish Post Office was corrupt and hopelessly efficient. The tone and tenor of the questions posed to the witnesses was, in many cases, quite obviously leading somewhere. The desire on the part of the committee was one whereby every large town, particularly those of commercial importance, would be connected as intimately as possible with each other and with England. The report itself is the least problematic of the parliamentary material

used as it conveys a broad swathe of information within the appendices yet at the same time a concise summation of the overall findings is contained within the report itself. It is the most useful of the all of the sources used in this research in painting a picture of how mail actually travelled from one part of Ireland to the other.

Other parliamentary records which were used include the *9th report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Fees and Gratuities* which described the state of the Irish Post Office in the aftermath of the 1807 reforms initiate by the then Postmaster General, Lord Clancarty. The report performed basically the same task on a smaller scale of the 1829 Report. This is despite the fact that in the 1829 report it was claimed that the 1809 report was even more comprehensive. This is somewhat misleading but in the context of the carefully couched, flowery prose of the parliamentary reports it is not surprising. The *1805 Post Roads Act* was also considered in some detail even though it is a piece of legislation which was more significant for the fact that it was passed than for the changes to the post roads that came about as a result of the legislation. However, the Post Roads Act is important in that it provided the basis of a post road network which would later become the comprehensive system of communication that we would recognise today.

The parliamentary papers were suffused with voluminous detail, a common feature of the investigations of government in the early nineteenth century and ever since. They were the first of their kind, complex, sophisticated tracts of data, commentary and conclusions full of insight and information. Something which has to be acknowledged when dealing with the parliamentary papers is the question of how the reports were formulated and for

whom. The information contained within them was collected for a purpose and that purpose was more often than not to prove a point that the state wished to make.

1.6.2 The Royal Mail Archives and the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers

The last two collections of primary source material were the Letter Books of the Ireland Office of the Royal Mail and the Chief Secretary's Office Registered papers. The two contain distinct overlaps in terms of the material they hold which can be somewhat confusing. In researching the contents of both the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers and the Royal Mail Archives it was discovered that the contents of the Chief Secretary's Office Papers were frequently duplicated within the Royal Mail Archives.

The Royal Mail Archives collection is held at Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London. The Archive contains records of the Post Office and the Royal Mail stretching from the seventeenth century to the present day. Due to the fact that the Post Office was a government department the archive is a Public Record equivalent to the Public Records Office at Kew. The documents held by the Royal Mail Archives are either loose leaf pages or bound volumes. The system of filing organises the records into POST collections with the relevant POST collections for Ireland being POST 15 (from where most of the research material was taken) POST 31 and POST 58. POST 15 contains what are called the Letter Books of the Inland Office and cover the period 1794-1836. Since the initial research was conducted a large amount of the relevant material which was held under the POST 15 designation has been transferred to the POST 14 collection. The Letter Books consist of memoranda and files on the general workings of the British Post Office (including Ireland) and contains several items on the mail coach system. Included

within POST 15 are commentaries on the rural postal systems including deliveries routes, letter carriers, facilities, salaries and allowances. However the bulk of the most interesting material refers to correspondence related to revisions of the rural post. The correspondence between local groups and the Irish Post Office, and the subsequent correspondence between the Postmasters General and Dublin Castle, provide fascinating insights into the workings of the Irish Post. There were, however, difficulties with using the Royal Mail Archives. The first was that the comprehensive records of the expansion, alteration and cessation of postal services (which included collection deliveries, sub offices, receiving houses, sorting offices, letter carriers, letter receivers and sub postmasters) deals mainly with the mid nineteenth century which is outside the scope of this research. The volume of detail contained within the Royal Mail archive is vast and only those documents which were of immediate relevance to the early nineteenth century Irish Post Office were studied. However, the richness of the archive provides great potential for future research on the topic.

The office of the Chief Secretary was initially an administrative sinecure which, during the eighteenth century, began to grow in importance and power as the office of the Lord Lieutenant, titular lead of the colonial government in Ireland, waned in influence. The office of the Chief Secretary developed into a centralised bureaucracy which supervised the machinery of the Irish colonial administration. The Chief Secretary's office was the conduit through which government departments in England communicated with the Irish counterparts. The records, the papers of the Chief Secretary, spanned a considerable spectrum of subjects from charters of Corporations to dispensations for Fellows of Dublin University to political intelligence. The records themselves are held today in the National

Archives in Bishop Street Dublin 8. The Papers were assembled together and filed under the year and number of the relevant incoming communication. The post office, along with prisons and various issues of public order, was accorded a separate section in the bound catalogue volumes with the subject of each communication being listed alphabetically.

The records contained within the Chief Secretary's Office relating to the Post Office mostly deal with the correspondence that went on between the Chief Secretary and the Postmasters General. Unsurprisingly records of this correspondence were also held within the Royal Mail Archives which makes perusal of a great deal of Chief Secretary's Office Papers somewhat redundant. A substantial part of the material which is not contained in the Royal Mail Archives relates to fairly innocuous and uninteresting correspondence between the Lord Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary. As such the Chief Secretary's Office Registered papers did not contain as much material of value for this research as was hoped.

1.7 Methodology and structure

This thesis is essentially divided into two parts, although there are subdivisions within that separation. The first part establishes and outlines the narrative of the growth and the development of the postal network. This is intended to set the scene of the early nineteenth century Irish postal network. It is primarily empirical in character. It tells the 'story' of the development of the Irish post office by providing the empirical data and framing it in such a way as to allow the reader to know the nuts and bolts, the minutiae of the mails and how they worked. There are three chapters within the first section. Chapter

two deals with the geography of the postal network its practical and material components. How post was delivered, where the mail coaches served, how fast the mail travelled, how many post offices were there and where, the mail routes, what constituted a post office, how efficient the system was and how much did it cost to send mail. It describes the network in detail so as to provide the reader with a clear picture of what the postal network was actually like. Chapter three focuses on the links with Britain and how mail was carried between Ireland and Britain, through the Packet Lines. In this chapter the importance of communication with Britain (and especially London) becomes apparent as the colonial authorities were anxious to ensure as speedy and secure a link as possible between the metropolitan centre and the periphery. The lines of sailing, where the ports were, how much they cost to maintain, the operation of the Packet offices, who used it and why and how these packet networks changed over time are all issues which are dealt with in this chapter. The final chapter in this section describes the bureaucratic structure and operation of the Irish post office: how it worked, what the duties were, who was responsible to whom. The related issues of corruption, inefficiency and patronage are all central themes in this chapter, as they were to the parliamentary committees investigating the post office. The chapter shows what was involved in the centralising processes of state formation and how the reform of the Post Office was a direct outcome of these processes. These three chapters make up the first half of the substantive part of the thesis. They rotate around the common thread of the description of the network but from three different perspectives: internal, external and structural. The last may seem more suited to a history thesis but it is a necessary component in any description of the early nineteenth century postal network.

The second part of the thesis is primarily theoretical in its focus. It too contains three chapters but in each different issues arising from the description of the network are analysed and placed in a wider context. Chapter five deals with the question of governmentality and the new and applicable knowledges the post could and did create. The nineteenth century state was anxious to promote the growth of the postal network and this desire is contextualised by examining the issue of state formation and the processes and strategies inherent to that formation – governmentality. In this chapter a theoretical exegesis of Michel Foucault's theorisation of the process of state formation is expounded, how the act and art of government changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, what strategies were developed as a result of these changes, how the state hoarded and used the new information flows it created and their impacts on the postal service. This chapter focuses on how the state's conception of what the Post should be and where it should go was changing. Those changes were part of a wider set of changes the state instituted in the Ireland of the time and this chapter attempts to situate the postal network within that complex of state change and societal shift. Chapter six looks at the processes of negotiation which occurred between local groups and the colonial authorities in Dublin Castle and the GPO. In this chapter the issue of petitioning is paramount as those who saw the post as a vital tool for furthering their interests actively lobbied the state for access to the postal network. The process of communication which took place between the central government and the local groups is outlined within this chapter as it attempts to highlight the significance of this dialogue in terms of the power relations within early nineteenth century Irish society. For the most part those who lobbied the state were members of local ruling elites (gentry, merchants, clergy etc) who recognised

the need to make their voices heard when it came to the decisions relating to the deployment of the network. This chapter outlines the relationship between the local and the centre and how that relationship could be modified or even negated by the physical process of communication, correspondence. Also in this chapter the concepts of capital as developed by Pierre Bourdieu are applied to the discourse which took place and how social groups would be formed by 'nomination' and 'speaking' and how the postal network was both an end and an aid in that process.

The final chapter in this section deals with the question of resistance and the mail network. It differs slightly from its previous two counterparts in that the chapter begins with a discussion of several themes relevant to resistance and the theoretical model which was used to analyse the data gathered about attacks on the mail lines. The question of what constitutes crime and what constitutes resistance is considered and Eric Hobsbawm's theoretical model of the social bandit is outlined. The disturbed nature of early nineteenth century Ireland is described and the question of whether or not Ireland had a tradition of violence is addressed before detailing the geography and nature of the resistance the state encountered in its deployment of the mail coach and horse post systems. The point is made that the attacks do not necessarily have to have a political character before they can be regarded as resistance. Violent and direct interferences with the state's activities could be easily classified as resistance. This second part of the thesis is theoretical in tone and character and it hinges on three central points in relation to the postal network: its conceptualisation, its contingent significance and its opposition. It is intended to provide a theoretical framework for analysing the postal network of early

nineteenth century Ireland, its geography and its importance by examining it using intellectual tools developed by several different thinkers.

In light of this the seven main aims of this thesis are

(1) To chart the growth and expansion of the postal network in Ireland during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, specifically from 1795 to 1830.

(2) To examine the relationship between the development of the postal service and the changing nature of the British State and colonial government in Ireland.

(3) To situate the Post Office within the economic, social and cultural structures which existed within Ireland at the time and, in doing so, to demonstrate that the postal service was, simultaneously, a structure *and* an agency.

(4) To describe how the moves to extend the postal service were hampered and in some cases violently resisted by certain groups.

(5) To outline how the post was used as a tool of negotiation as well as communication and assisted in the formulation of alliances and social groups in early nineteenth century Ireland.

(6) To attempt to elucidate those voices which are notable for their absence in the official state records, principally focussing on the use of the post by subaltern groups.

(7) To examine the concept of correspondence and how it impacted upon and shaped the notions of identity, class, imperialism and government.

Chapter 2

New technologies in the circulation of information: The postal network

Chapter 2 New technologies in the circulation of information: The postal network

2.1 Introduction

The end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth witnessed significant scientific and technological changes in both Britain and Ireland. Some were far reaching; others were more immediate in their effects. The changes which occurred at this time were to have momentous implications for the transmission of goods, people and, most importantly for this research, information. Two aspects of these changes directly affected the Post: the expansion of the existing postal network and the creation of a mail coach system. Both of these advancements were technical innovations in the circulation of information in early nineteenth century Ireland. They were to have lasting impacts on how the nature of the mails was perceived and how correspondence was transmitted. The mail coach network facilitated, and was facilitated by, improvements in the system of roads which were in a deplorable state at the end of the eighteenth century. The expansion of the postal network itself was part of an on-going process of rejuvenation of the Irish Post Office which was started in the early years of the nineteenth century.

The focus of this chapter is on the actual network of the postal system, how it operated, where it went and how efficient it was. In this chapter we shall also examine the origins of the mail coach system and how and where it developed, from its earliest beginnings in the late eighteenth century to the zenith of its usage in the 1830's. The system of mail coaches which was instituted in Britain was copied to a certain extent in Ireland but not replicated. There were significant differences. Several figures were instrumental in

shaping the mail coach network and we shall deal with these individuals as the evolution of the system unfolded. The postal system changed a great deal over the fifty or so years of independence for the Irish Post Office and it is these changes which form the basis for not only this chapter but the entire research project. The chapter will be divided into two main parts: the first will look at the postal network on the ground and how it evolved over time. The second will examine the origins and introduction of mail coach network.

2.2 The network on the ground

2.2.1 Introduction

How many post offices were there at any one time? How long did it take a letter to go from, for example, Galway to Cork? How much did it cost? How did one go about posting a letter? How frequent were collections? How frequent were deliveries? All of these questions are central in reconstructing the historical geography of postal communication in nineteenth century Ireland. They point to something which may seem obvious but can be overlooked when attempting to grapple with the broader themes which emerge from answering these questions. All of these emergent themes must be addressed if there is to be any critical analysis of the postal communication. But a description of the activity is as important as any scrutiny of the nature of it as a function. The description is the building block, the nuts and bolts of any coherent analysis and without it the words written on any subject echo fairly hollow.

2.2.2 The system

In 1784 the network of receiving houses and post offices was widely, if highly unevenly, distributed. Throughout the eighteenth century the postal network had been growing, although creeping across Ireland's landscape might be a more accurate description. Like much of the bureaucracy of the state in the eighteenth century, the post office was not a department which prioritised zeal and energy among its senior figures. A distinctly laissez faire attitude prevailed amongst the employees of the Post office with there being little in the way of leadership from the management. Corruption and nepotism were commonplace in eighteenth century life in both Britain and Ireland. Even the very highest levels of government were not free from the canker of patronage. The postal service was no different from any other area of official activity. Having said that, it was not the case that the Post office was a colossal scam set up purely to line the pockets of its agents and officials. It had a duty and it performed a function. It also catered for a fairly limited sector of the population. Only the wealthy could afford to regularly correspond and thus the network was characterised by underdevelopment throughout most of the eighteenth century. Poor roads also contributed to the difficulties in establishing regular postal routes as traversing the ill maintained and frequently dangerous Irish turnpikes increased the costs of sending a letter by a substantial factor, not to mention the costs involved in carrying it.

With a lack of leadership, a system of frequently corrupt officials, a road network in a bad state of repair and a (financially as well as physically) dangerous landscape it is not surprising that the spread of post offices and the creation of post towns were piecemeal at

best. The sporadic development of the postal network in the eighteenth century was not in accordance with any grand plan or carefully allocated design. Rather, the impetus for the location of postal 'nodes' (towns or post offices) came from the localities rather than the centre. It was local communities (or, rather, local ruling elites) which pushed for and negotiated the creation of a new postal node. This issue will be dealt with in much greater detail in a subsequent chapter but it is worth bearing in mind that this process of local activation of the nodes highlights the absence of centralised planning in relation to the layout of the postal network.

The network grew in the eighteenth century according to a reactive pattern. This process continued well into the nineteenth century but increasingly there was more executive involvement in the decision making process as the century wore on. The activation of nodes was a top down rather than bottom up procedure by the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The people in charge had begun looking at a map and were filling in the gaps as they saw them. 'Filling in the gaps' may not be the most scientific way to describe the development of the postal network between 1784-1831 but it does describe what occurred. The skeletal outlines of what would become a fully comprehensive communications system by the latter decades of the nineteenth century existed in the 1780's (see figure 2.1). The distribution of postal towns in 1784 was dispersed across Ireland's landscape in a pattern which characterised the network throughout most of the eighteenth century. The network was at its most dense in the east, the north-east and the midlands. The Atlantic periphery was very poorly served by the network as is shown by the large gaps in the pattern in the north, west and south-west.

As we move into the 1790's, however, the pattern of the network began to change (see figures 2.2 and 2.3). The north and south of the country began to see more and more post towns being created as the density of the existing network was increased. After the turn of the century and up until 1805 there was not a great deal of change in the postal network with very few post towns being created (see figure 2.4). Yet in the immediate aftermath of the Post Roads Act of 1805 the network pattern shifted (see figure 2.5). The focus for establishing postal towns moved westward and we see a greater concentration of postal nodes in Galway, Mayo and Sligo. At the same time postal towns were set up the in south, particularly in Cork. By the period 1810-1814 the pattern of establishment was somewhat bunched with Limerick, Cork and the northern midlands seeing the majority of the new postal establishments (see figure 2.6). The period between 1815 and 1819 was one of lull in terms of the re-organisation of the postal network as, much like the period immediately after the Act of Union, a relatively small number of postal nodes were created (see figure 2.7). By 1825 we see the postal network pattern which was to remain unchanged until 1831. By comparison with the pattern in 1784 the network was considerably more solid and could deliver letters to far greater numbers of towns and villages. Yet there remained substantial gaps in its distribution which would be there for a number of years to come. Gaps, for example, like the ones in Kerry, Mayo, Limerick and Donegal. The Atlantic periphery was not a priority for the Irish Post Office, a fact which could probably be put down to the prevalence of Irish speakers in these counties and the fact that, in economic terms, these areas were not of particular significance. The network was concentrated on the more prosperous, Anglophone areas of the country, that is, the south, east and North, particularly the north-east which was really the only area of

intensive industrialisation within Ireland.[1] The consequences and mechanisms of the network pattern is something which we shall now consider.

The major factor that explains the distribution of the postal towns is that the policy of the Post office was to locate postal towns along pre-existing roads. When one sees a map of the existing road network in 1831, the pattern of postal distribution becomes somewhat more explicable (see figure 2.9). This was done in order to minimise the costs involved in building new roads on which to carry the mails. The flexibility, or weakness, of government in the eighteenth century meant that there was no system of taxation, at the level of the central state, to provide for the construction of such roads. So the postal network evolved in a linear fashion following existing routes and was only really able to establish nodes where they were convenient to the road network.

This process was only ameliorated by a greater focus on the necessity of having a fully operational system of communication which emerged in the early nineteenth century. The factors behind this new impetus are debateable and are discussed in detail throughout the body of the text. However, what can be said for certain is that there was a distinctly centralising element to the process. The network in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was always organised to provide a link with Dublin. The pattern of the network did not alter significantly as a result of any new policy but rather the methods for governing it changed and the policy of location became far less haphazard and much more comprehensive. It was really still only a filling in of the gaps left in the eighteenth century network pattern. However, the apparently straight lines of road which radiate out from Dublin are somewhat misleading when one gets to the level of the local. Very few, if any, roads follow the geodesic route between origin and destination. The vast majority

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[1] Cullen L.M., 1981 *An economic history of Ireland since 1660*, Batsford Academic Press, London

of routes (to the present day) only approximate to the shortest straight line between origin and destination. This was even more so the case with roads in the nineteenth century. The 1805 Post Roads Act provided for the construction of roads and routes according to comprehensive surveys carried out by appointed officials of the town. Very few of the routes proposed under the legislation were ever built. As we shall see out of the roads that were built the attempt was always made to join two points with a minimum distance or gradient. The point of conjunction here is the idea that there existed an amorphous planning system of roads and routes from the beginning of the eighteenth century. This is not to say that there was any form of centralised planning authority as we conceive of it today but that there is a body of evidence which suggests that the planning of roads on a large scale in Ireland emerged in the eighteenth century.[1] The cost of road building was the key factor in any of the decisions.

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[1] Andrews, J.H 1964 'Road planning in Ireland before the railway age' in *Irish Geography* V(1), 17-41

Figure 2.1 The distribution of the postal network in 1789. Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII

Figure 2.2 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1790 and 1794 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII

Figure 2.3 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1795 – 1799 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII
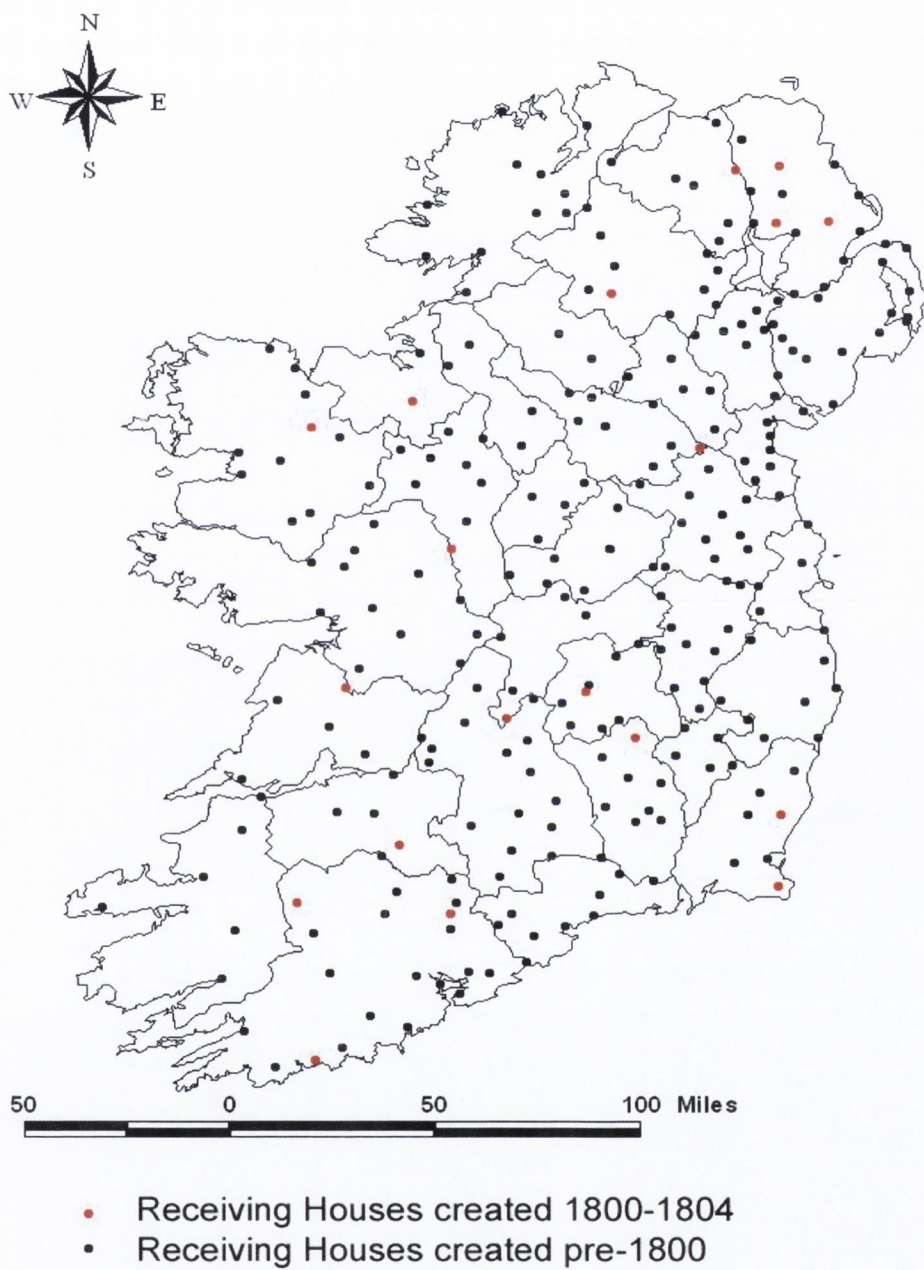
Figure 2.4 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1800-1804 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII
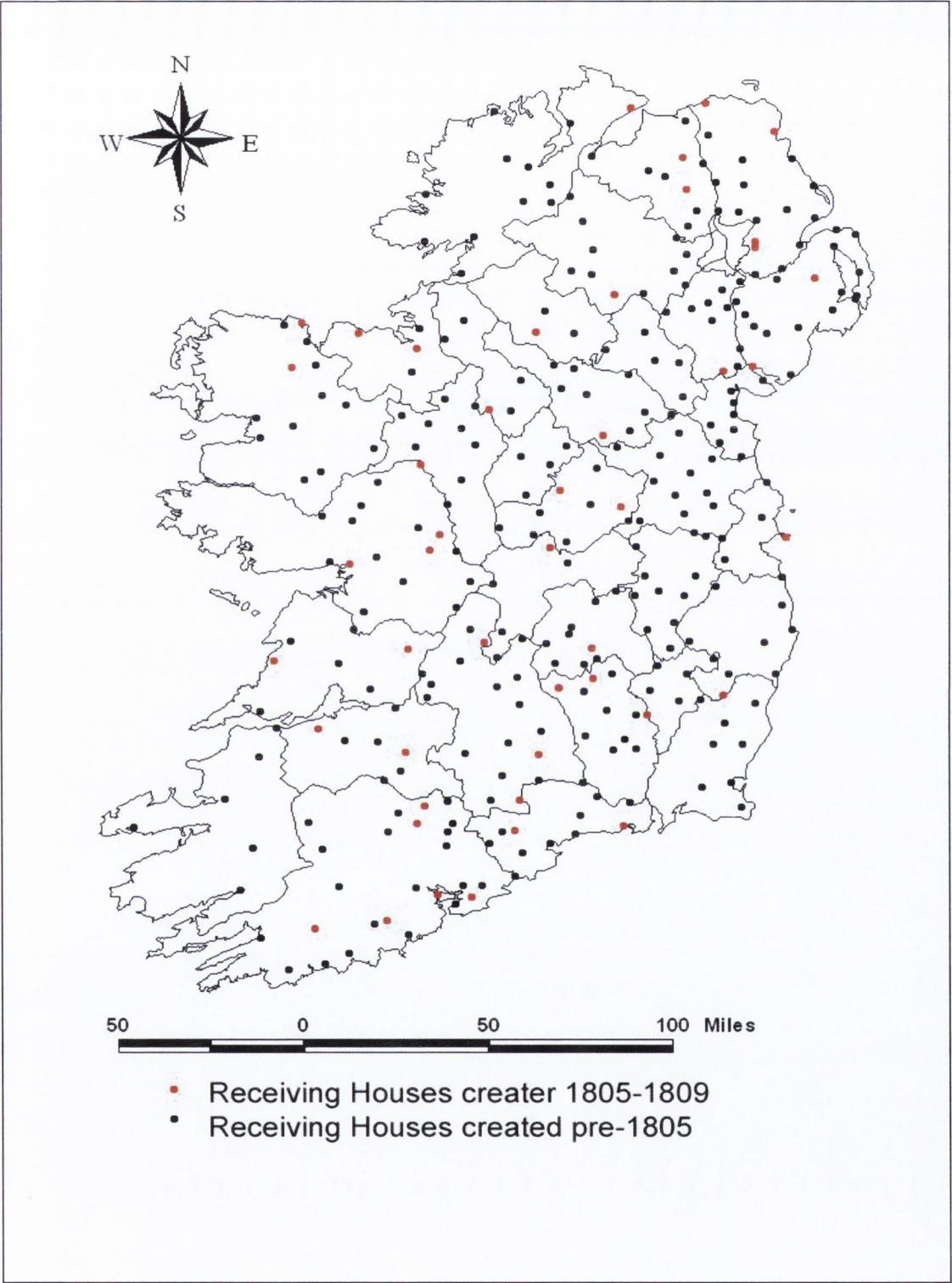
Figure 2.5 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1805 and 1809 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII
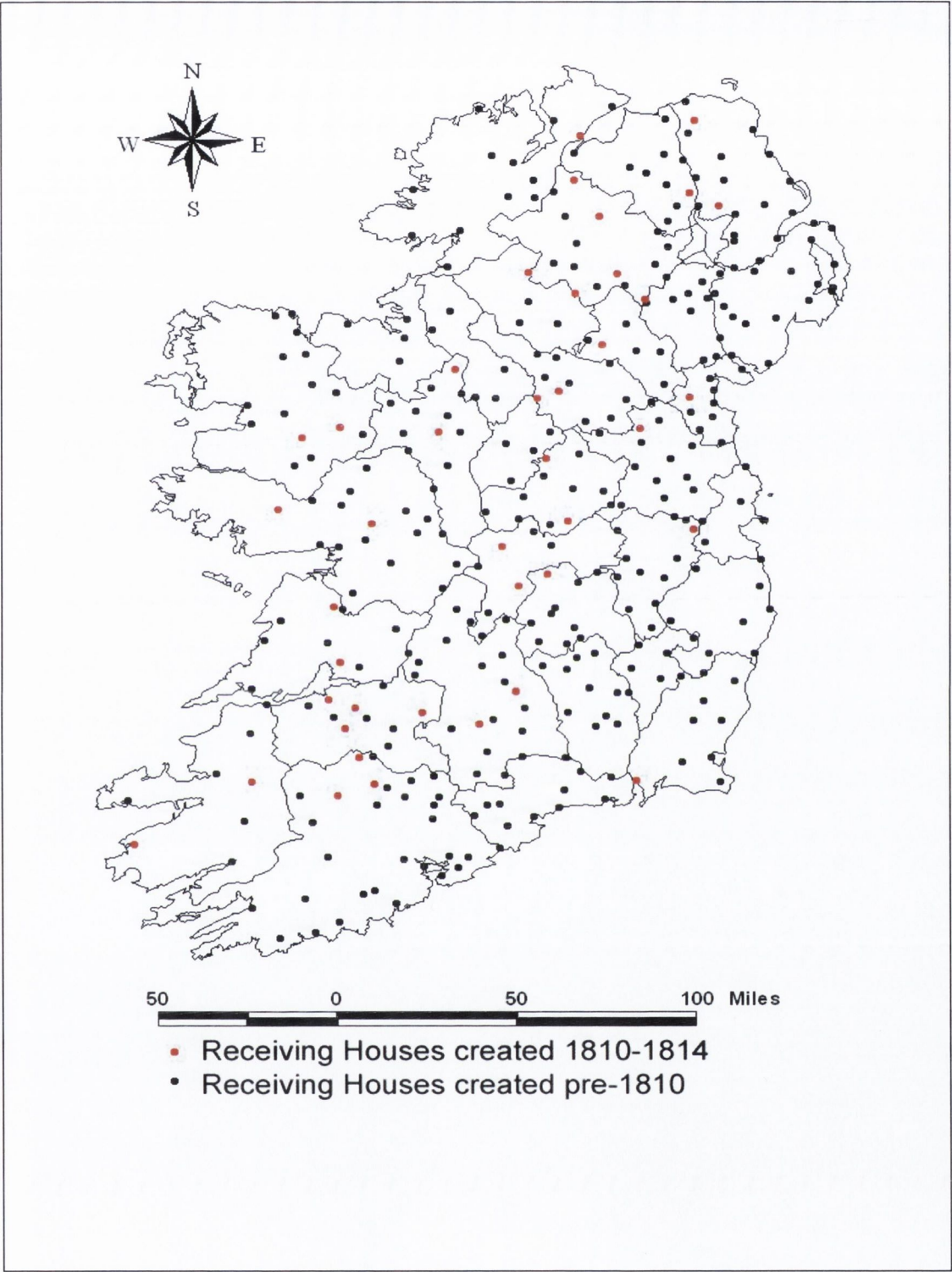
Figure 2.6 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1810-1814 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII
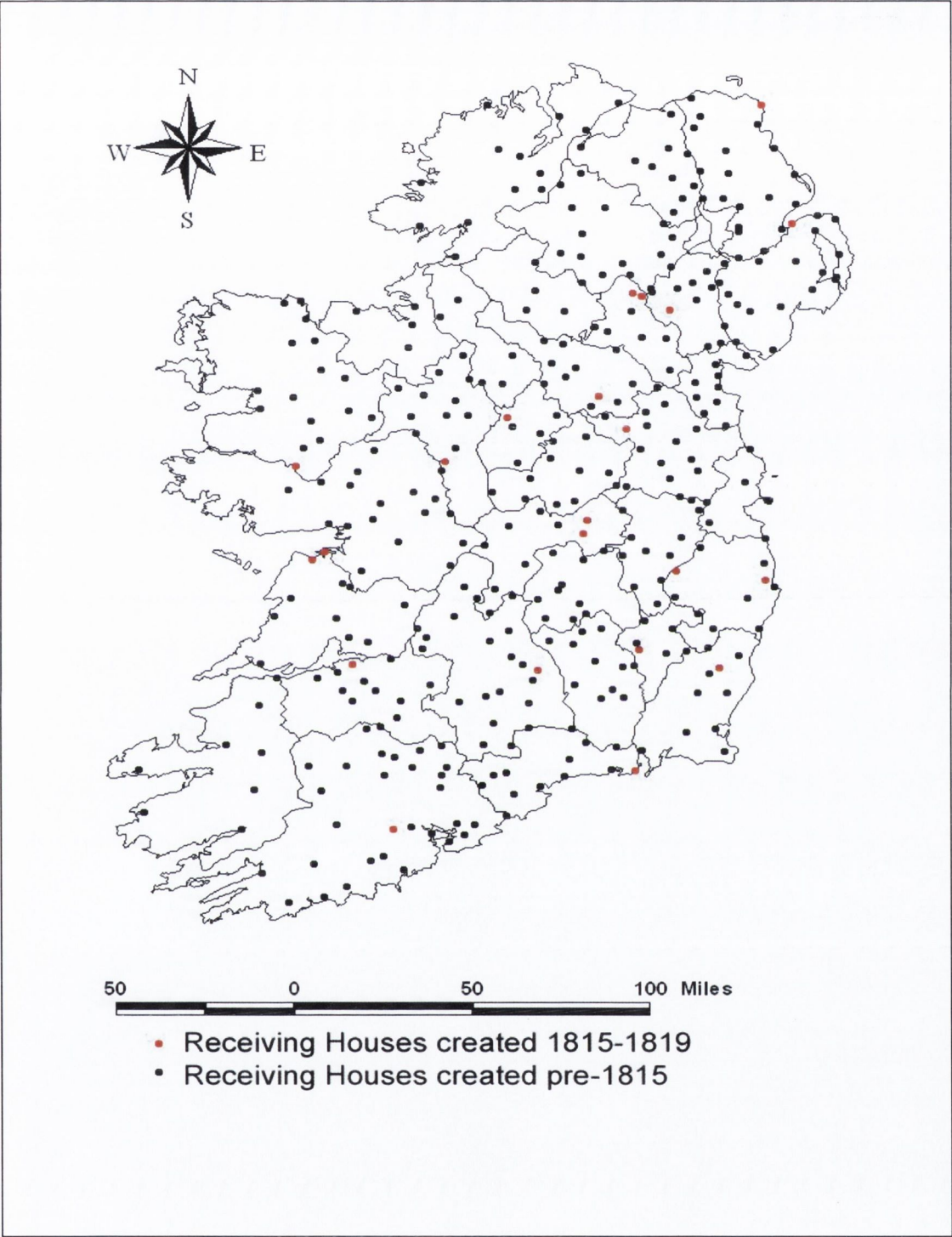
Figure 2.7 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1815-1819 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII
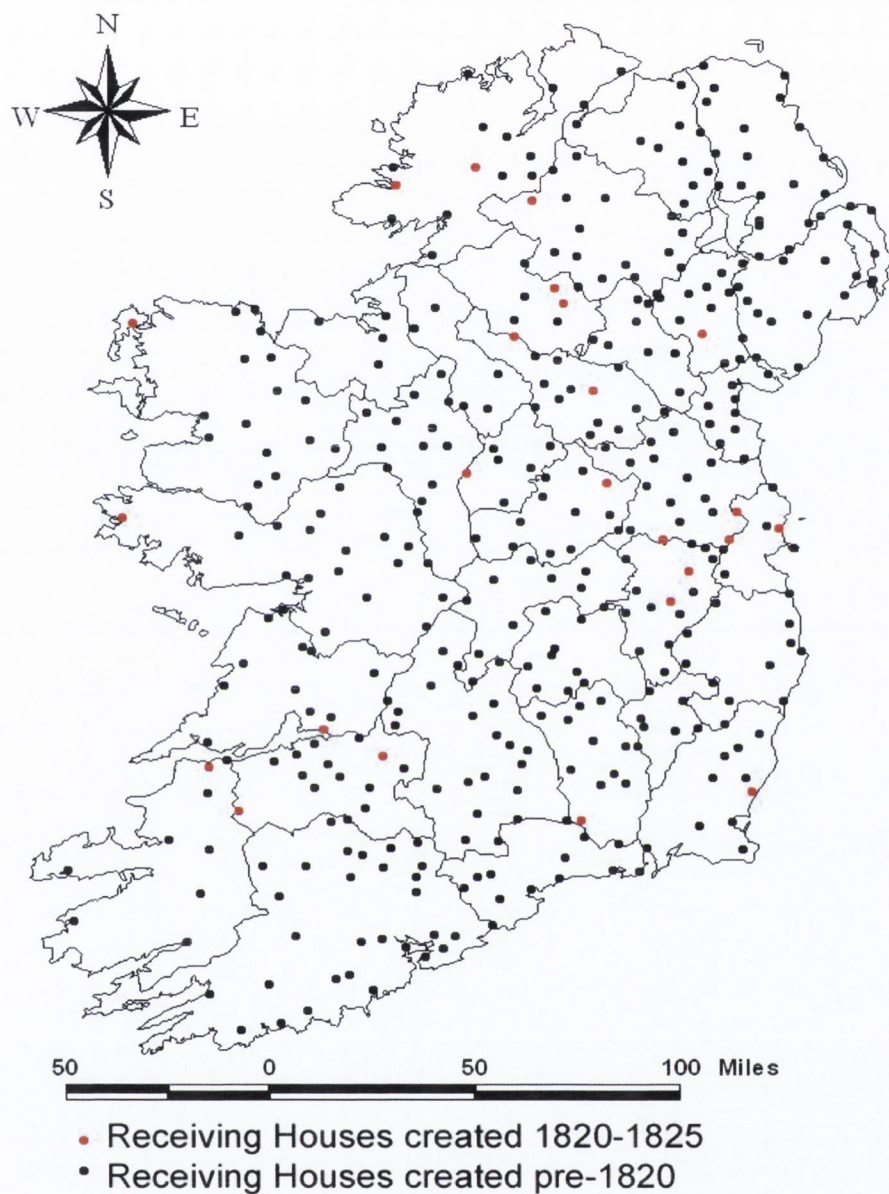
Figure 2.8 the change in distribution of the postal network between 1820-1825 Source: *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland)*, H.C. 1829, (353) XII

Figure 2.9 Distribution of mail coach roads in 1832 source: Andrews, J.H 1964 'Road planning in Ireland before the railway age' in *Irish Geography* V(1) 24

2.2.3 Activating the network

We now turn to the question of postal towns and receiving houses. The issue is what, in the period in question, actually constituted a post office and what constituted a postal town. The nature of postal communications could perhaps be best described as, in the eighteenth century in any case, contingent. It was contingent in the sense that if there was an existing road network then a postal route may have been planned along it (although there were not postal routes on every line of road). If there was a town of sufficient size or commercial importance or one with influential resident then it became a post office. If suitable premises existed for being a receiving house then one was created. This last incidental was probably the least significant when it came to the siting or creation of a receiving house for a postal town. The nature of society–state interaction can be convincingly represented as haphazard but perhaps a better way to describe it would be fluid or unstable. The postal network fitted into this state-society paradigm as it evolved over the course of the nineteenth century.

In the eighteenth century the construction of a purpose built post office was really only undertaken for the cities and large commercial centres of Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Galway (Galway being an important departure point for the transatlantic mails and Cork in particular possessing significant trading links with other European countries). For the most part a post town would not have the grander ambitions of these towns and cities. In particular, among the smaller settlements a receiving house rather than a purpose built post office would have been the norm. Due to the convenience and their status as social centre, the usual location of a receiving office was a public house. The publican would be

contracted to the Post office to run a receiving house for letters to and from the district. In the earlier part of the eighteenth century and in some cases into the very early years of the nineteenth century a post town receiving house would consist of no more than a shelf in the local pub or in extreme cases merely a canvas sack from which mail would be collected and deposited. Initially, the system of receiving houses and post offices was characterised by its crudity and, frankly, sloppiness. We will go into the more sophisticated elements of what constituted a postal town and how the local employees were contracted and what their duties were in detail.

In 1795 there were 230 officially designated postal towns in Ireland. By 1830 this number had risen to 426.[1] So in the period of independence for the Irish post office the number of postal towns had nearly doubled. This seems like a considerable leap but to put it into perspective by the end of the 1880's, another 50 years or so later, there were 1600 postal towns in Ireland which gave the Post office, and the State, exactly the kind of blanket coverage in terms of communication that they desired. However, to return to the topic of the receiving houses, the latter decades of the eighteenth century saw a shift towards the provision of better services in terms of local postal organisation. Greater interest began to be shown by senior post office figures in how the postal system was being run on the ground. By our standards today this shift is very slight but it marked the beginning of the something which would culminate in a professional, efficient postal service. Publicans ceased to be the only ones who were given the contracts to be the local postmasters (although the practice did continue albeit on a reduced scale as time went on). Local postmasters (and, significantly, postmistresses) began to be employed. Now

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[1] *Nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII

shops were turned to in order to provide postal services. The Post Office paid shopkeepers to maintain an area of other shop exclusively to cater for postal transactions.[1]

As the century wore on, Post Office 'Establishments' with specifically appointed offices were created. Purpose built post offices began to be built in the early years of the 1800's with premises being purchased for the postal establishments to cater exclusively for Post Office business. However, the actual physical form of each post office establishment varied. The largest towns and cities had large offices for transacting post office business with shops and public houses operating as receiving houses for the Penny Post (in Dublin initially but later in the nineteenth century other cities had their own) as well as for the General Post. As the century progressed these pubs and shops were replaced by post offices proper. In more rural areas this would not be the case in the early part of the nineteenth century although the presence of a post office would later come to be a integral element of rural village life. The post office in rural areas in the nineteenth century had a multi-functional purpose mirrored in today's postal network. The General Letter Offices were frequently part of a hotel for example Cahercreen, Kilkenny. Yet it was only until the period 1840-1845 that the system of sub-Post offices, Post offices and General Letter offices were re-organised and the establishments themselves were re-designated according to the level of postal activity with certain post towns being downgraded to sub-Post offices whilst others were officially designated Post Offices.

2.2.4 Postmasters and Postmistresses

[1] Smyth, T. S. 1941 *Postal history : a story of progress*, Easons, Dublin

The job of handling the post was usually just one of several duties of a local postmaster or postmistress. Innkeeper, chemist, bookseller, hotelier or shopkeeper were all typical activities of the local Postmasters. The actual tasks of handling the mail were not particularly onerous. In rural areas there was no system of delivery as all mail which arrived in the post offices had to be collected. The postmaster would sort the mail and take receipt of the money which covered the letters' postage. They would then maintain an account of credit and debit which they sent to the General Post Office in Dublin every week. These duties were quite similar to the duties of any postmaster working in Britain. The major difference between British and Irish postmasters was that in Ireland the postmasters were responsible for the contracting of the cross lines. The cross lines system was set up to allow for the transmission of mail between towns and villages which did not have a post office or were not situated along the main mail coach routes. It was the local postmaster who appointed the contractor of the mail carts and the horse posts. This practice was frequently criticised as it was felt that the postmasters supplemented their income by accepting bribes from individual contractors in return for awarding the contracts. After an investigation this privilege was taken away from the local postmasters and given to the Riding Surveyors in order to achieve greater efficiency.[1] The mechanism of appointing Postmasters themselves was also one which came in for some criticism. The old practice, as stated by Sir Edward Lees in his evidence to the 1829 parliamentary Committee was that "…upon any Postmaster becoming vacant, the Secretary wrote in the name of the Postmaster General, in whose patronage the office was at the time, and in his Lordship's name the principal person interested in the place was called upon to nominate

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[1] Reynolds, M. 1983 *History of the Irish Post Office,* MacDonnell White Press, Dublin

the Postmaster...no parliamentary purposes, or any other, should lead to a deviation from it (this practice)".[1]

The problem, essentially, with this practice was that frequently individuals whom the 'principal person' favoured for one reason or other, and who had no experience or background in an area would be appointed to those areas which inevitably lead to difficulties. The jobbery and corruption related to the appointment of postmasters did not stop at 'principal persons' however. The *Impartial Reporter*, a local newspaper for Enniskillen carried a campaign for one of the fifty applicants for the job of local postmaster on the behalf of an applicant of whom they approved.[2]

The issue of arrears was a vexed question for the Post Office. As all letters were paid for on their delivery to the recipient as opposed to upon receipt by the Post Office, the Deputy Postmasters were supposed to submit detailed accounts of the transmission and receipt, noting the cost and distance travelled, of each letter. Frequently, the deputy postmasters were found to be in arrears. For example, the outstanding postal balances on the 5th of July 1822 were £16,000 which exceeded by £5,800 the amount that Deputy Postmasters ought to have had on their hands. Also there was £4,000 due from dismissed and deceased Deputies and £12,000 due from insolvents.[3] The large discrepancies in arrears which were highlighted in the parliamentary investigations gave rise to concern which in turn affected policy regarding the appointment of deputy postmasters. It was felt that a much more stringent policy of appointments, involving more rigorous background checks should be implemented particularly with regard to the solvency and fiscal

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[1]*Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland)*, 1829, (353), XII, 83 + Appendix 113
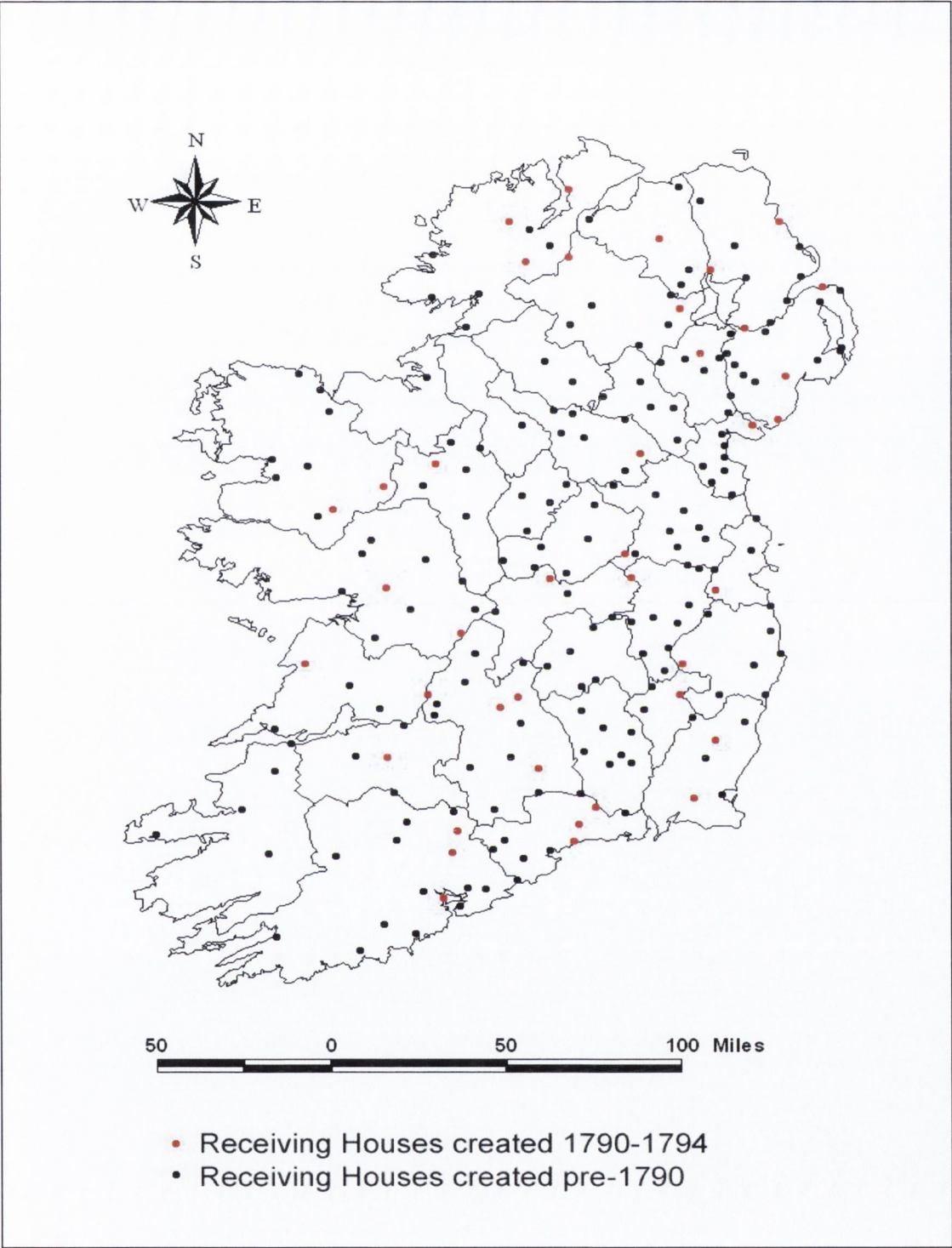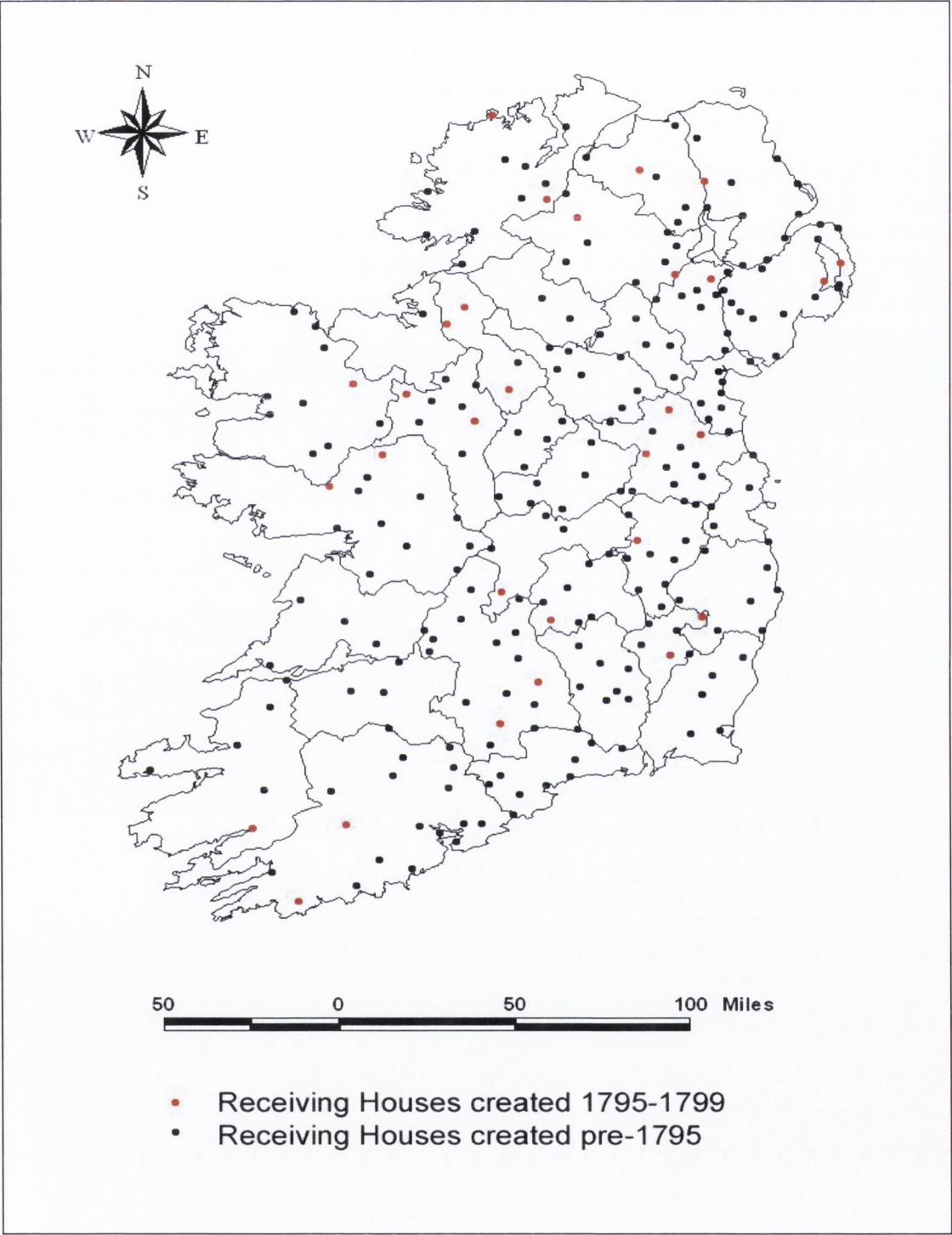[2] Reynolds, M 1983 *op. cit.*
[3]*Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland)*, 1829, (353), XII,83-84

rectitude of the applicants. This, at least, was the theory of the change. However, despite these attempts to screen future employees, the financial irregularities and jobbery which marred the early nineteenth century Post Office continued after the reforms of the 1830's albeit on a much reduced scale.

A point of interest in regards to those who actually filled the position of deputy postmaster was the number of women who filled the jobs. In 1812 out of the 325 deputy postmasters and mistresses listed 18% of them were women.[1] This is, by the contemporary standards of government employment, a very high proportion of female employees. Women from a certain social background and class, for example Maria Edgeworth, possessed a voice in the creation of letters but in relation to the activity of sending and receiving correspondence there was also another group of women who were involved in the sending and receiving of correspondence. It was this group that made that process of transmission possible for the towns and villages they served. It also highlights the fact that despite the heavily masculine tone of the Post Office, the postal network and letter writing in general it was not the sole province of the male world. Women had a role to play in the mechanism as they and their history could be described as the subaltern history of the past. That they are never paid any great attention in any of the records or the parliamentary investigations is entirely in keeping with the tone and content of the records. But they are undeniably there as a group nonetheless.

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland), 1829, (353), XII*

2.2.5 How mail was delivered

In this section we shall examine the issue of how the private citizen actually received and sent their letters.

2.2.5.1 Dublin

Dublin was the principal centre of mail organisation. The General Post Office was located there, all postal routes were organised and laid out to provide a link with Dublin and it had the first system of Penny Postage in the country. So it is hardly surprising that any discussion of how letters were conveyed should begin with Dublin. For the period being dealt with here Dublin possessed, like London, a system of Penny Postage. The system of charging one penny to send a letter or a package weighing less than four ounces had operated in London for some time before its introduction in Dublin. The Penny Post system in Dublin was modelled on the London system but on a much reduced scale. It was a Postal Act of 1765 which legalised Penny Posts for any city or town. Private, illegal Penny Postage systems had been in operation in London previous to this.[1] The idea behind the Penny Postage system was to increase the benefit of swift postage to the urban area whilst at the same time maximising revenue. Thus, in October 1773, a Penny Post System was instituted in Dublin.

> "The Penny Post Office (is to be located) in some convenient part of the said city
>
> of Dublin, and other offices, to be called receiving houses for penny post letters
>
> in the said city or county of the same city, and in parts adjacent to the said city

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[1] Robinson, H. 1948 *The British Post Office: A History*, Greenwood Press, New Jersey

and suburbs, not more than four miles distant from the General Post Office therein."[1]

The system was intended to be separate from the General Letter Post but would later come into conflict with it. Initially the number of deliveries was two daily within a four mile limit of the city centre. Eighteen receiving houses were nominated.

How the Penny Post worked was that there was a box with a slot in each receiving house in which would be placed the letters intended for delivery the following day. At 5pm a messenger would collect them and stamp them as Penny Post. The letter carriers would then deliver the letters around the streets of Dublin. In the beginning there was no great enthusiasm among the shopkeepers and publicans of Dublin to have a Penny Post receiving house on their premises as, despite the extra trouble it carried, it carried no extra remuneration. Lord Clancarty, the then Postmaster General, instituted a series of reforms of the Penny Post along with several other reforms of the postal system.

In 1810 the number of Penny Posts receiving houses had increased to fifty seven and the number of daily deliveries was increased from two to four. The Penny Post made money in the period after the Clancarty reforms and became considerably more efficient. The reorganisation of the system and the increase in the number of deliveries took place under the guidance of the then Comptroller Edward J. Baynes who stated with some pride that

"So secure and expeditions in the Delivery of Letter by this office, that two persons residing in the most distant parts of the city from each other, may between seven in the morning and eight in the evening, write four letters and

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[1] 5 Geo.III, c25, sect. 17

receive three answers, and the answer to the fourth by nine o'clock on the next

morning."[1]

2.2.5.2 Dispatch and arrival

Postal Town	Distance by which the mails are conveyed – miles and furlongs	Rate of Postage – shillings and pence	Time between dispatch from Dublin and arrival - hours and minutes	Time between arrival and dispatch of the next mail - hours and minutes	Time between despatch and arrival in Dublin - hours and minutes	Total time between despatch from Dublin and receipt of reply - hours and minutes
Cork	125m 7f	11p	22h	16h	22h	60h
Belfast	80m 1f	9p	13h 15m	8h	13h 15m	35h
Waterford	75m 6f	9p	12h 40m	9h 40m	12h 40m	35h
Limerick	93m 6f	9p	22h 13m	13h 47m	23h	59h
Derry	118m 4f	10p	21h	17h	21h	59h
Newry	50m 1f	7p	8h 5m	18h 50m	8h 5m	35h
Sligo	103m 7f	10p	16h 30m	2h	16h 30m	35h
Clonmel	82m 4f	9p	14h 20m	7h 30m	14h 10m	36h
Galway	104m 6f	10p	16h 30m	2h	16h 30m	35h
Kilkenny	57m 4f	8p	10h	15h 50m	10h 10m	36h
Wexford	74m	9p	13h 30m	8h	13h 30m	35h
Drogheda	22m 4f	4p	3h 38m	3h 44m	3h 38m	35h
Armagh	65m 6f	9p	11h 50m	11h 20m	11h 50m	35h
Athlone	60m 1f	8p	9h 17m	16h 23m	9h 20m	35h
Nenagh	74m 6f	9p	12h	10h 55m	12h 5m	35h

Table 2.1 The fifteen highest earning post towns in 1821, their distance from Dublin, the rates of postage charged and the time taken in between both delivery and dispatch. Source: *The nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII, Appendix no. 86, 371-378

Table 2.1 details the time it took to travel between Dublin and fifteen different postal

towns. The towns listed are those which earned the highest amount of postal revenue in

1821 which will be discussed in following section. The table shows a degree of

uniformity in the total time it took for a letter to be sent, processed and a reply received

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[1] Reynolds, M. 1983, *op. cit.* 26

for all fifteen postal towns. However, there were anomalies within the data shown here which require some explanation. The table above is used as an illustration of the time taken and the distances covered by the Post. It is not definitive but it does rather neatly allow for some points to be made which apply to the postal network as a whole. For example the time taken in sending and receiving a response between Dublin and Sligo is thirty five hours while the same action between Dublin and Newry takes an identical amount of time, despite the fact that Sligo is twice as far away from Dublin as Newry is. The reason for the delay is not poor roads or an excessive number of ports of call on the journey but the availability of a return mail coach. The Sligo mail coach departed for Dublin two hours after the Dublin coach arrived but anyone wishing to send a reply to a letter from Dublin in Newry would have to wait nearly nineteen hours before the next mail coach departed. This was despite the fact that Newry earned more revenue as a postal town than Sligo did. Corkonians had to wait sixteen hours for a return mail coach to depart despite the fact that it earned the most of all the post towns. There were several locally specific reasons for the delay in mail coach departures although for the most part the blame for the lag-time can be firmly laid at the door of the Post Office. The inefficient organisation of the mail coach network and the convoluted routes letters had to take were responsible for the delays which merchants and traders complained so bitterly about. That centres of such commercial importance should have to suffer the delays table 2.1 details highlighted the lack of planning on the part of the Post Office hierarchy.

All mail dispatched from Dublin was dispatched in the evening after it had been collected and sorted. Dublin was the "…seat of Government in Ireland and of the Courts of Law"[1]

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[1] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 22

and was thus always uppermost in the minds of the senior figures within the postal bureaucracy. Belfast and Cork were the only two places to which mail was sent more than once daily from Dublin. Belfast had some of its mail delivered by stage coach which set out at 7am but the letters from London were never delivered on it as they did not arrive in time to meet the coach. Cork possessed a far more reasonable service which left daily at noon. This service was discontinued in the early 1820's however, not long after it was set up, by the Post Office.[1] The reasons for not utilising the existing stage coach networks to transport the mails could be characterised as being typically myopic and really only ones a bureaucrat could think of as a prime reason: that of irregularity. Postal officials were vehemently opposed to the usage of stage coaches to carry the mails as they felt that the practice would lead to irregularity of the times of dispatch. This was the reason that was touted in any case.

The Post Office did not like the idea of the mail being carried by private individuals who were most likely capable of anything, up to and including the heinous crime of "fingering" the mail bags on the coach.[2] This is an example of how little any bureaucracy likes allowing any aspect of its operations to be outside of their direct control.

However, a distinct and damning criticism (and one of the major reasons for the committee's existence) arising from the parliamentary committee's report was the delay in mail reaching its various destinations. The government at the time (and at most times hence) was particularly concerned with the impediments in the system which prevented metropolitan mail, mail from London, reaching the provincial centres of Ireland in what

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[1] *ibid*
[2] *Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, Minutes Of Evidence , 1832, H.C. 1832 (716) xvii, 94

they regarded as due course. The privileging of the Dublin mails, which could not be sent until the evening, over the London mails, which arrived early in the morning and lay in the sorting house all day, caused considerable friction. The presence of two mail coaches daily on all eight lines from Dublin would have solved the problem but manning two mail coaches was rejected by the Post Office as being too costly. The other option, that of using the private stage coach system was, as we have seen, anathema to the senior Post Office bureaucrats. Yet it was not simply design flaws in the overall system which the agencies and inspectors of the State took issue with. The system as it played out in real space and time caused considerable concern too. The routes the mails took meant that the mails from, say, London to Castletown in Cork would have to undergo a circuitous route in order to reach their destination. A letter would be

> "…forwarded by the Milford Line to Cork, and if there be an average passage it
> arrives at Waterford by six o'clock, p.m., it is detained in the Post Office until
> five o'clock the next morning, it is then forwarded onto Cork, not by the regular
> Waterford and Cork mail, which is not despatched until 8h 15m., but by the
> Limerick mail as far as Clonmel, here it meets the Dublin mail to Cork, which
> takes on the Waterford bags and reaches Cork at five o'clock, it is thence
> forwarded on to Castletown, a distance of 90 miles beyond Cork, and is charged
> 16d. Had this letter been directed to Cork, it would have been charged 17d."[1]

Another example of the inefficient, excessively convoluted network follows when the report states

> "The distance from Waterford to Tralee by Cork is 496 miles and the charge for
> postage is 4d*; but a letter sent by this route is first detained 12 hours at

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[1] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 24

Waterford and subsequently 13 hours in the Cork Post Office; consequently the inhabitants of Tralee prefer to have their letters sent by Holyhead (517 miles) at an extra charge of 1d on each letter. In the same way Skibereen and all those towns to which Cork is the centre for distribution of the mails, pay less than Cork for their letters, though they must have previously passed through Cork".[1]

These are just two of the examples of the inefficiency and poor management in the postal system which the State wished to eradicate. It was felt that the lack of an overall focus in relation to the network coupled with lax management meant that such inefficiencies as described above could exist throughout the system.

It is clear from a reading of the sources that the lack of development on the part of the Post Office officials was something the State intended to rectify. The arrangement for the cross posts and the lines of delivery between the main mail coach routes were routinely described as 'defective'. The solution to their poor management, which until this point had been in the hands of the local post master/mistress, was a simple one: surveillance. Inspectors were appointed to supervise the awarding of cross line contracts to obviate the possibility of corruption and hence inefficiency. This is an excellent example of the happy meeting of two seemingly contradictory ends: the amelioration of the public good through the activation of a form of direct state surveillance and control. But this should not take attention away from the fact that the state was actively considering ways in which the shift in emphasis on links with Dublin to an emphasis on links with London could be achieved. The reports indicate that amidst the criticisms (usually aimed at the local level not at the upper echelons of the hierarchy) and prescription was an array of practical suggestions for achieving that shift. These practical suggestions obviously dealt

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[1] *ibid*, 25

with the day to day traffic of the extant postal network. The reports note how an improved line of communication between the south of Britain and the south of Ireland would greatly benefit all concerned. It notes the lack of emphasis on the ports of Milford Haven and Waterford and how the Milford line could solve a number of the inefficiencies prevalent in the current system. The lines of post between, for example, Limerick and Waterford were delayed by being detained for thirteen hours in the Cork Post Office. This was done in order to meet the Dublin mails. It was inefficiencies such as these that the State wished to eradicate.

2.2.5.3 Costs and Revenue: The changing raison d'etre of Postal Communication

The Post Office was a Board of Revenue. It was an organisation which existed primarily for the generation of profit. This meant, in practice, that the Post Office would not embark on any venture, be it the creation of a new post town or the laying of a mail coach route without the expectation of a sizeable return on their initial investment. There were specific exceptions to this practice of course as we shall see, particularly when it came to the process of creating a new postal town. However, for the eighteenth and much of the early nineteenth centuries the Post Office regarded itself, and was in turn regarded by government, as a profit making business. This approach, as has been mentioned, altered as the changing nature of government and the State itself meant that the nature and conception of the Post Office, both internally and externally, was affected and its role as a public service took precedence over its commercial raison d'etre.

Postal Town	Pounds	Shillings	Pence
Cork	10,527	7	0
Belfast	7,176	0	6
Waterford	4,237	14	9 ½
Limerick	4,057	3	11
Derry	2,490	0	7
Newry	2,063	17	11
Sligo	1,713	8	3 ½
Clonmel	1,593	10	10 ½
Galway	1,549	15	9
Kilkenny	1,326	9	6 ½
Wexford	1,313	6	10 ½
Drogheda	1,286	15	9
Armagh	1,271	11	11
Athlone	1,245	8	1
Nenagh	751	4	½

Table 2.2 Summary of the fifteen highest earning post towns in 1821 source: *The nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland)*, H.C. 1829, (353) XII, Appendix no. 87, 379-385[1]

Table 2.2 gives the fifteen postal towns earning the highest revenue in 1821. As can be seen from the table Cork and Belfast far outweigh the other towns in the amount of correspondence which they dealt with. Over half of the fifteen earned under £2000 which merely highlights the importance of Cork and Belfast to the Post Office Establishment. The difficulty with this table is that the data it displays shows revenue collected and not postage sent or received. Revenue here is being used as a very general proxy for the amount of mail that was sent as the exact figures for the amounts of letters sent and received could not be ascertained.

The question of rates and revenue is an important consideration. As there was no prepaid postage during this period all monies accruing from the post sent had to be collected at the destination. The cost of sending a letter from England to Ireland was credited to the

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[1] Dublin is not included in this table as it is not listed in any of the tables detailing postal revenue. The various receiving houses in Dublin were not listed either. This is most likely due to the fact that Dublin was not regarded as a 'postal town' *per se* by the Post Office bureaucrats and as such data on revenue collected was not included in the Commissioners report.

Irish Post Office. The reverse occurred when sending a letter in the opposite direction.

For much of this period the rates of postage between Britain and Ireland differed but in

the 1820's the streamlining measures introduced meant that the same rate of postage was

paid as if the letter had never left Great Britain. So rather than one rate of postage being

levied on a letter as it travelled through England and a second, separate rate being levied

on the same letter as it travelled through Ireland, the rates of postage were made uniform

in 1826.

As can be seen from Table 2.3 the scales of postage varied greatly and were essentially a

step function of distance. What is interesting to note from this table is how consistently

the charges increased and how rapidly. Journey times shortened as prices rose. This

would seem to be an obvious principle to many observers but when placed in its

historical context the actuality was that it was not simply distance, and all of its

associated difficulties and problems, which determined the postal rates. It was during this

period that the British government sought to maximise all potential and existing revenue

flows (for example the introduction of the first Income Tax in 1799). So the rates were

consistently increased and the distance bands were continually subdivided, a process

which was occurring at the same time in Britain.[1] The reason for these price hikes was

that the Napoleonic Wars were sucking up a great deal of the financial resources and, to

put it simply, the Exchequer needed the cash. However these increases, indeed the

practice of paying postal rates at all, were regarded with grudging suspicion and outright

hostility in many cases. Private individuals simply refused to pay the charges resorting to

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[1] Gregory, D. 1987, 'The friction of distance? Information circulation and the mails in nineteenth century England' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13(2), 130-154

Previous to the Union		Subsequent to the Union				
1784	1797	1803	1805	1810	1813	1814
Under 15 miles 2d	Under 15 miles 2d	Under 15 miles 2d	Under 15 miles 3d	Under 15 miles 4d	Under 10 miles 2d	Under 7 miles 2d
Between 15-30 miles 3d	Between 15 and 30 miles 3d	Between 15 and 30 miles 3d	Between 15 and 30 miles 4d	Between 15 and 30 miles 5d	Between 10 and 20 miles 3d	Between 7 and 15 miles 3d
Above 30 miles 4d	Between 30 and 50 miles 4d	Between 30 and 50 miles 4d	Between 30 and 50 miles 5d	Between 30 and 50 miles 6d	Between 20 and 30 miles 4d	Between 15 and 25 miles 4d
	Between 50 and 80 miles 5d	Between 50 and 80 miles 5d	Between 50 and 80 miles 6d	Between 50 and 80 miles 7d	Between 30 and 40 miles 5d	Between 25 and 35 miles 5d
	Over 80 miles 6d	Over 80 miles 6d	Over 80 miles 7d	Over 80 miles 8d	Between 40 and 50 miles 6d	Between 35 and 45 miles 6d
					Between 50 and 60 miles 7d	Between 45 and 55 miles 7d
					Between 60 and 80 miles 8d	Between 55 and 65 miles 8d
					Between 80 and 100 miles 9d	Between 65 and 95 miles 9d
					Over 100 miles 10 d	Between 95 and 120 miles 10d
						Between 120 and 150 miles 11d
						Between 150 and 200 miles 1s
						Between 200 and 250 miles 1s 1d
						Between 250 and 300 miles 1s 2d
						Add 1d for every 100 miles additional

Table 2.3 A statement of the different scales of postage in Ireland from 1784 to 1826 *The nineteenth report Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* H.C. 1829, (353) XII, Appendix no. 84, 361

a multiplicity of tactics to avoid incurring the charge, frequently flagrantly abusing the privileges of government officials and parliamentarians. The high cost of sending letters was argued as being a brake on economic progress by those who utilised the post the most frequently. The commercial and mercantile interests were those who complained loudest about the exorbitant, as they saw it, cost of sending mail.

2.3 Mail transportation networks – mail coaches and horse posts

2.3.1 Background notes

In the days before the arrival of the rail network the Post Office employed three modes of transport for the delivery of letters: horse posts, foot posts and mail coaches. Of the three it was mail coaches which were able to travel the longest distances with the heaviest loads. Horse and foot posts were used to deliver the mails between the smaller post towns or else to service the cross posts.

Although the initial foundations of a mail coach system had been established in the seventeenth century with the introduction of the cross post system, there were no mail coaches operating throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Stage coaches, run by private individuals and companies, had operated on Irish roads for a considerable period of time before the nineteenth century but the Post Office persisted in using horse and foot posts (mostly teenage post boys) to deliver the mail. The reasons for this were outlined by the then Superintendent of Mail Coaches in Ireland, Charles Johnson, in his evidence to the 1831 Parliamentary Select Committee on Postal Communication with Ireland.

Q: Why should they not take advantage of established coaches in forwarding letters?

A: The Post Office has come to a fixed determination never to employ stage coaches.

Q: What is the reason for that?

A: We think it would be productive of the greatest irregularity; for instance, stage coaches are constantly changing hours and their rate of travelling; besides this, the bags would not be under the care of any regular servant of ours; no person would be responsible for it, and if it is sent by coach it is liable to the fingering of all passengers about the coach.[1]

Thus, the Post Office hierarchy would not countenance the placing of mail bags on the commercially operated stage coaches. The same policy was implemented in both Ireland and Britain, despite the administrative separation of the two Post Offices. The stage coach system carried passengers solely. But in order for the Post Office to fully avail of the benefits (the speed and punctuality) that coaches offered it was necessary for it to establish its own mail coach system for the carriage of the mails

2.3.2 The beginnings of a mail coach system in Britain

The era of the mail coach began in August 1784 when the first mail coach left Bristol bound for London. The mail coach network expanded rapidly from this beginning in both Britain and Ireland. A man named John Palmer was the individual principally responsible for the inauguration of this mail coach era. He had been a vociferous critic of the delivery system that operated in Britain in the latter half of the eighteenth century. He stated that

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[1] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, Mins of Evidence, 94

...the post at present instead of being the swiftest, is almost the slowest conveyance in the county; and though, from the great improvements of our roads, other carriages have proportionately mended their speed, the Post is as slow as ever.[1]

Palmer thought that in increasing the speed of the mails, this would enhance the ability of merchants and traders to do business and thus be of a wider, economic benefit to the country as a whole. The introduction of a mail coach system would also allow for much greater security over the mails as the horse posts and foot posts which were used at the time were susceptible to attack from armed bandits and thieves. But it was the speed of conveyance which concerned Palmer most of all. He felt that the Post Offices coaches could travel faster than the commercial stages, an assessment which was met with bemused derision and dismissive contempt when put to senior Postal officials, one Surveyor by the name of Hodgson stating "...I do not see why the Post should be the swiftest conveyance in England".[2]

Despite these objections, the Prime Minister of the day, William Pitt, was eager to test Palmer's proposals. In his capacity as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Pitt was continually alive to the possibility of securing fresh sources of revenue to fund various military ventures and to ease the national debt. Palmer's proposals found favour with Pitt as they involved the setting of new and additional postage rates for the transmission of mail which would be a new source of revenue for the State.[3] The initial trial of the mail coach was such a success that the network soon spread throughout Britain with the mail coach service being extended to Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Gloucester, Swansea,

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[1] quoted in Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.* 131
[2] quoted in Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.* 135
[3] Reynolds, M. 1983, *op. cit.*

Carmathen, Milford Haven, Worcester, Birmingham, Shrewsbury, Oxford, Chester, Holyhead, Carlisle, Dover and Exeter by the end of 1785. [1] This concerted expansion meant that the people were suddenly able to correspond much more quickly and effectively with one another over greater distances.

2.3.3 Road planning, road networks and the post

Before dealing with the emergence of the mail coach system in Ireland, it is necessary to first insert a parenthesis on the road network in the late eighteenth century in Ireland. The road network had developed over centuries, in the main, in the absence of any attempt at centralised planning. Road building was left by the central government to the individual counties whereby it was up to the county authorities to build what were known as 'presentment roads'. The presentment system was a mechanism which allowed individuals who thought a public road ought to be constructed to present their case before the governing body of the county, the Grand Jury. The Grand Jury would then deliberate on the merits and disadvantages of the proposed road. If they then decided that there was a case for a road to be built in a particular area, it would make a presentment that a sum of money, raised by the county cess, would be put aside for the construction of said road.[2] The county cess was the local taxation system and was based around the unit of land called the townland.

The Grand Jury system was much maligned as it was generally held to be corrupt and abusive of the powers granted to it. Friends and colleagues of Grand Jurors frequently

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[1] Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.*
[2] Andrews, J. H. 1964, *op. cit.*

lobbied them to have roads built on or adjacent to their lands, which raised the value of

their property.[1]

2.3.4 The Post Roads Act

The Post Roads Act of 1805 stated that the Postmasters General were required to employ

> proper and sufficient Persons to survey and make maps of several Lines of Road
>
> from Dublin to the extreme Post Towns in Ireland.[2]

These maps and surveys were supposed to not only be made of existing routes of travel

but also potential routes, particularly in relation to possible cross post routes. The

surveyors were supposed to survey the roads with an eye to reducing and thus improving

journey times. The Act granted the Surveyors the power to measure or survey any Line

for a new road, to alter any existing road and to enter any lands or grounds in the course

of their duty that they saw fit, provided that they had sought the written permission of

either the Postmasters General or the local Justice of the Peace. A discernible respect for

the sanctity of private property was deliberately included in the Act as provisions were

made for the marking down on the Survey maps of any farm, building, garden or orchard.

The Act ordered that these structures were to be avoided wherever and whenever possible

when laying out the routes.[3]

There was a great deal of emphasis in the Act on the routes linking the Port towns as they

were felt to be of great commercial and administrative significance. The first routes to be

surveyed under the Act were the roads leading from Dublin to the Port towns and from

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[1] Crossman, V. 1994 *Local government in nineteenth-century Ireland*, The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast for the Ulster Society of Irish Historical Studies, Belfast
[2] *Bill to amend Act for amending Laws for improving Post Roads in Ireland, and for rendering Conveyance of Letters by H.M. Post Office more expeditious*, H.C. Sessional Papers, 1805, (97) I, 2
[3] *ibid*

Waterford to Cork and Limerick and from Donaghadee to Londonderry. Thus, the six busiest and most important roads were surveyed in detail and considerable improvements made upon them. Under the Act, the Surveyors were to provide estimates, along with their maps, of "…making, forming and gravelling such Road through each Barony and half-Barony, and of making fences".[1]

They were also to include estimates for improving the existing lines of road and of reducing the ascents and of repairing bridges and building walls, in short anything which was be deemed necessary to protect the coach as it travelled along its route.

This innovation in road planning dovetailed with the old system of road construction insofar as each Surveyor was obliged to appear before the Grand Jury panel and answer any questions related to the survey. If the Grand Jury agreed with the Surveyor's conclusions, the money for construction would be raised in the customary manner. If they did not agree, then their objections would be forwarded on to the Postmasters General via a Clerk of the Crown and the road would be re-surveyed before the next Assizes court.[2] Included in the Act was a mechanism whereby property owners could object to the building of any post roads by making a presentment to the Grand Jury who would decide on what, if any, compensation should be awarded for damages incurred. The Act also stated that any road surveyed under its provisions would be designated as a turnpike road. Only after the compensations mentioned were paid and permission obtained from the various property owners could the verdicts be presented before the Grand Jury. After that the road would be turned over to the Turnpike Trusts or Commissioners.

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[1] *ibid*, 3
[2] *ibid*

The Post Roads Act set out stringent standards for the laying down of mail coach routes. The first Chief Surveyor to be appointed was Major Alexander Taylor of the Royal Engineers. The six sub-surveyors were appointed even before the posts had been publicly advertised, an eventuality which may have something to do with the fact that all of the surveyors, including Major Taylor, were personally known to Edward Lees, the Secretary of the Post Office. Although only a small proportion of the proposed mail coach routes were ever built as a direct result of the 1805 Act,[1] a large number of existing routes were substantially improved upon by the surveys carried out under the legislation. The Act established standards for future road building projects.

2.3.5 The beginnings of an Irish system

The almost immediate success of the mail coach system in Britain was something which attracted attention amongst the hierarchy of the Post Office in Ireland as well as among several entrepreneurs. Four years after the first mail coach left Bristol bound for London, the idea of starting mail coach routes on the Cork and Belfast mail roads was mooted. John Anderson, a Scot who had emigrated to Ireland about ten years previously, conducted surveys of the proposed mail coach routes and found that they were, in parts,

"...so extremely narrow as to render it impossible for two carriages to pass, even by daylight, without the utmost danger of one or both being overset into deep trenches on either side".[2]

Anderson was the man who held the contracts for both the Enniskillen and Cork routes, along with his partner William Bourne. It was Anderson who provided the drive and stimulus for road improvement in the days before the 1805 Post roads act and who

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[1] Andrews, J.H 1964, *op. cit.*
[2] Quoted in Reynolds, M. 1983, *op. cit.* 44

lobbied government and Post Office officials and argued volubly for the introduction of a more comprehensive system of mail coach routes. Anderson might, indeed, be termed the John Palmer of Ireland.[1]

2.3.6 Mail coach contracts

The method of contracting out the mail coach routes differed slightly from what was common practice in Britain at the time. In Britain, the contract for a particular mail coach route was a partnership between several individuals in which each individual undertook to work a certain number of miles (known as stages). The contractors paid a stamp duty on which a central accounting check was kept. None of the stages were advertised by public tender. The stages in England were not liable for turnpike tolls. The coaches belonged to the Post Office. The most succinct description of the process comes from Charles Johnson in his committee evidence.

> In almost every case we take the strongest party we can find existing on the road where we wish to have a mail coach. All the principal mails were established many years ago, and have remained for the most part in the same hands, with such changes as time and circumstances have created. I will give an instance: from London to Holyhead the contract consists of a number of persons in one company; that is, one partnership; each man undertakes to work so many miles, called a stage, or two stages or three sometimes. They appoint a person in London to keep the accounts, which are made out monthly; they produce, after payment of the stamp duty, the mileage of the coaches, and a few other permanent disbursements, is divided among the company, at per mile. We hold it our policy always to get the strongest people we can, provided their terms are

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[1] Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.*

such as are reasonable; they always know, if there be another company, that we can apply to them, if we see cause.[1]

In Ireland, the situation differed in certain respects. The number of contractors was far fewer, partially due to the difficulty in attracting capital to invest in the poor Irish roads and partially due to the widespread jobbery and corruption which was an accepted and casual part of public life at the time. This meant that several mail coach routes were frequently held by only one or two people for their entire length. This corruption was an important factor in the awarding of several mail coach contracts as it was for most of the contracted agreements the Post Office had with outside agencies.

There were other differences between the Irish and British systems. In the Irish system the mail coaches were not exempt from turnpike tolls which were supposed to be paid by the contractor. There were penalties, unknown in Britain, for poor timekeeping. In Ireland the contractors were obliged to provide their own coaches and cars as well as horses.

One of the key problems which were identified by the parliamentary investigators in their report of 1826 was that the contracts were held for such long periods of time. Twenty, thirty sometimes even fifty year contracts were held by the various contractors. This led directly to an almost smug complacency on the part of the contractors, particularly in the beginnings of the service when there were very few alternatives for the Post Office to turn to if a contractor was running an unsatisfactory service.

2.3.7 Routes
As stated, the very first mail coach lines to begin operating in Ireland were the Dublin to Cork and the Dublin to Belfast routes. These two routes were added to by the creation of

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[1] *Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, Minutes Of Evidence , 1832, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 67

the Dublin to Limerick mail coach in 1791. From these fairly humble beginnings the network grew so much so that by the 1820's there were eight mail coaches running from Dublin on a daily basis. The coaches travelled on average approximately 1450 double miles (miles in both directions, from dispatch to arrival) daily, 570 of these miles on roads which were maintained by the turnpike commissioners and 880 on roads kept in repair by the jury presentments of the counties through which the road passed.[1] By the 1830's the mail coaches system was operating at the apogee of its activity, mail coaches departed from Dublin at 7pm for Belfast, Derry, Galway, Enniskillen, Limerick, Sligo, Waterford, Wexford and Cork, the 7pm Cork mail coach travelling through Clonmel and Fermoy (see figure 2.9, p. 16). There were also three separate day mails. One departed for Belfast at 8am, Kilkenny also received a day mail and Cork received another mail with this particular mail coach travelling via Cashel and Fermoy and leaving Dublin at noon every day.[2]

The value to an individual town, and more particularly its 'principal inhabitants', of a mail coach route running through it is indicated by the consistent requests which flooded into the Postmaster General's Office, requesting, asking and sometimes even almost pleading for a mail coach to be established to their town. The following memorial is an example of this type of request and was sent from the Chief Secretary to Edward Lees regarding the establishment of a mail coach to Sligo.

> With reference to the correspondence which has taken place with the Postmasters
>
> General in consequence of the representation of the merchants of Sligo
>
> requesting the establishment of a mail coach to that town, I am directed by the

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland), 1829, (353), XII, 28*
[2] Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.*

Lord Lieutenant to send you a copy of the observations made by the members of the County on the letters which have passed upon this subject, which it is His Excellency's desire may be submitted to the Post Masters General in order that their Lordships may take them into their early and serious consideration, and favour me with an answer thereto, for His Excellency's information.[1]

These requests were frequently argued for on the grounds of increasing the trading potential and thus the prosperity of the area in question, a factive assertion which would come to have considerable force when the Post Office was re-organised in the 1830's but were often dismissed out of hand by the Post Office on the grounds that beneficial to the areas in question a mail coach would undoubtedly be, its establishment in said area would not be *profitable*. Thus, in the estimation of the Post Office bureaucrats, the potential lack of revenue from a proposed mail coach line mitigated against its establishment. An example of this can be seen in a letter from Sir Edward Lees to the Lord Lieutenant

With regard to the establishment of a coach from Enniskillen to Belfast, it appears that every reasonable effort has been made by the Post Office to promote the object of the Merchants of Belfast; but the Postmaster General cannot but help feel that however generally useful it may be to facilitate the conveyance of passengers from one trading town to another, especially in a district such as that through which it sought to establish this sort of communication, yet that it would be quite foreign to his duty to procure that accommodation by a sacrifice of that Revenue which must be the primary object of his attention.

Under these circumstances it must be left to those persons whose personal interest and convenience depends on the this direct communication to devise some means of availing

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1818, Vol. IV, 275

themselves of the offers which have already been made by the Post Office to promote the

establishment of a coach on the line proposed.[1]

2.3.8 Mail coach guards and drivers

Mail coach guards were employed by the Post Office whilst the drivers were employed as

servants of the proprietor of the mail coach line. The same system was in operation in

England. However, in England mail guards were only paid ten shillings and sixpence per

week whilst the equivalent position in Ireland commanded a wage of thirteen shillings

per week. The main reason for this discrepancy was that it was customary for both mail

coach guards and drivers to receive gratuities or tips from the passengers on the coaches

and seeing as there were far fewer passengers carried on the mail coach lines in Ireland

than in England so the tips were fewer. There were several different rates of pay for mail

guards at the beginning of the nineteenth century, some reaching as high as seventeen

shillings and sixpence, but they were all eventually merged into one uniform rate of

thirteen shillings per week.[2]

The job of a mail guard was an arduous and frequently dangerous one, particularly in the

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Charles Johnson, the Superintendent of

Mail Coaches, was questioned as to the extent of the difficulties that the average mail

guard would have to face. Guards were, according to him, obliged to travel sixty, seventy

or sometimes even eighty miles. They were rested one journey in three. On the Dublin to

Limerick mail route there were three mail guards on duty and each guard had to be with

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1817, Vol. IV, 21
[2] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland,* 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII

the coach for up to fourteen hours at a time. When questioned as to whether he thought this was somewhat excessive or even severe, he replied "…not for robust men".[1]

Unlike England, from the beginning of the nineteenth century in Ireland it was the practice for there to be two armed guards on mail coaches. Occasionally a third guard was added on the busier routes, particularly in the winter months when bandit activity was at its most intense.[2]

Life as a mail guard (and driver) was not easy as the isolated roadways and the sporadic outbreaks of political and agrarian turmoil which characterised much of nineteenth century Ireland meant that the mail coaches were frequently targets for attack by armed robbers. Many guards and drivers were wounded or even killed in these attacks. For example in a letter from the Chief Secretary's office to Lord Drogheda, the Lord Lieutenant, three separate attacks on the Belfast, Limerick and Cork mail coaches are described

> The Belfast mail coach having been attacked in the morning of the fifteenth of January near Drogheda by a gang of armed robbers and John Toole the driver having in a very spirited manner whipped forward his horses for the purpose of saving the mail and thereby draw upon himself the vengeance of the robbers they fired at and wounded him very severely in several parts of the body.
>
> And on the night of the eighteenth of January the Limerick mail coach having been attacked at Cherryhill in the County of Kildare by a banditti of armed men who concealed themselves behind a hedge and fired at the coach as it passed but upon some of them making their appearance, the Mail Guards Thomas Conroy and James Conroy fired at them and beat them off and the coachman James

[1] *Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, Minutes Of Evidence , 1832, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 83
[2] Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.*

O'Brien having exerted himself by whipping forward his horses the mail was

saved by their joint exertions.

And on the same night the Cork Mail Coach having been attacked by a number

of armed men near Clonmell who fired several shots which were returned in a

very spirited manner by William Moore, the guard, who used every exertion to

save the mail until he was disabled by several wounds.[1]

Another example of mail guards being attacked and wounded in the course of their duties

comes from a letter from Lord Clancarty, the Postmaster General, to the Lord Lieutenant

in which he writes

The Cork Mail having been attacked on the night of the 7th of April at a place

called the Red Gap in the county of Kildare by a gang of armed robbers and

James Lodge the driver having in a very spirited manner whipped his horses for

the purpose of saving the mail and the mail guards William Aldey and William

Shortell having fired at and beat off the robbers whereby the mail was saved but

not without William Shortell having been wounded in five different parts of his

body.[2]

These are but two examples of the descriptions of attacks upon mail coach guards and

drivers which litter the correspondence between the Dublin Castle administration and the

Post Office hierarchy. Over the course of the early nineteenth century there were many

attacks on the mail coaches, some for the purposes of robbery, others for the less

commercially explicit motive of destroying an executive function of government. Life as

a mail guard was thus hazardous, a fact which was tacitly acknowledged by the Post

Office bureaucrats who were quick to highlight any examples of bravery or pluck on the

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1803, Vol. II, 93
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1807, Vol. III, 112

part of those defending, as they were seen, the Crown's mails. Such bravery was not only fulsomely praised in correspondence but frequently rewarded financially. For example, in the final part of the first letter quoted above the Postmasters General

> Beg leave to submit the meritorious conduct of three men to the consideration of your excellency and to suggest whether or not it may be expedient in justice to them as well as an encouragement to other guards and drivers to act in like praiseworthy manner to bestow such reward as your excellency may seem fit and if your excellency has no objection thereto we would beg leave to recommend that the sum of thirty guineas to be paid to each of the five persons mentioned.[1]

The key phrase here, of course, is "an encouragement to other guards and drivers to act in like praiseworthy manner" which indicates a crude attempt at paternalistic propaganda on the part of the Post Office, although this issue will be dealt with in greater detail elsewhere. But it was not only the mail guards themselves who were the beneficiaries of the Post Office's largesse. Anyone who was killed on duty frequently had a relative who was awarded a pension. The award of a pension was not automatic but rather was only awarded after representations were made on the petioners behalf, as in this example from a letter from the Chief Secretary to the Postmasters General dated 14th of November 1822 which stated that

> I am commanded by the Lord Lieutenant to acknowledge receipt of your Lordship's report on the memorial of Jane Brereton widow of the late William Brereton who was inhumanely murdered in January last between Tralee and Killarney when in charge of the mail in which your Lordships recommend that a pension be given to the said widow of William Brereton of £30 a year and I am

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1803, Vol. II, 93

to acquaint your Lordships that in consideration of the circumstances stated by

you, and detailed in the Memorial, His Excellency approves of your paying to the

said Jane Brereton out of the Revenue of the Post Office, a pension of £30 a year

to commence from the 5 day of April last.[1]

Such generosity is notable but given that one had to be severely wounded, killed or

widowed in order to receive such significant recompense it is debateable as to how

effective such tools were for propaganda purposes.

2.3.9 Charles Bianconi

During the first half of the nineteenth century Charles Bianconi revolutionised the cheap

carriage of mail and passengers by providing what he saw as a cheap and yet efficient and

moreover vitally needed means of transportation. Bianconi was born in 1786 in Tregolo

near Como in Italy and was brought to Ireland as an indentured apprentice to an Italian

print seller. After his period of indenture ran out he continued to sell prints, often walking

twenty to thirty miles a day in order to sell his wares. After much wandering around the

Irish countryside he finally settled in Clonmel, County Tipperary where he managed to

scrape together enough money to set up shop as an engraver and gilder.[2]

It was in his capacity as a peripatetic purveyor of religious iconography that Bianconi

formulated with his idea for developing a system of transport which would be cheap to

use but would also be profitable at the same time. It was in 1815 that Bianconi won his

first contract to run a car from Clonmel to Cahir which would carry passengers as well as

the mails, there were, of course, no railways. Canal barges carried passengers and were,

in the eighteenth century at least, relatively important transports carriers but for the most

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1822, Vol. IV, 108

[2] Maxwell, C. 1948 *Bianconi and his Irish cars*, Country Life Offprint, Dublin

part they were relied upon for the transportation of bulky agricultural products.[1] Stage and mail coaches ran on the main road routes but were very expensive and only the wealthy could afford to travel regularly on them. Added to this was the fact that they did not serve the smaller towns and villages, a fact which meant that smaller farmers and merchants were greatly inconvenienced and frequently prevented from travelling to markets and fairs.

Recognising the need and the potential market, Bianconi developed the idea of using what was known at the time as a 'jaunting car' to simultaneously carry mail and passengers. This type of car was well suited to the task as on it the passengers faced sideways and outwards and it carried no more than six people which meant it could be run very cheaply. These first types of cars were two-wheeled vehicles and were drawn by one horse. The eight mile distance between Cahir and Clonmel was perfect as a start-off point for Bianconi's small cars. These cars gained in fame and became known, in an obvious contraction of the contractor's name, as 'Bians' and became very popular. By 1843 Bianconi had over a hundred cars on the road covering some 3200 miles daily.[2]

Although he started his business using small, two-wheeled conveyances, Bianconi soon expanded the scope of his operations to include several different types of vehicles. The largest of the vehicles used were known as 'Finn McCouls' which were four-wheeled long cars drawn by four horses which could carry twenty passengers. The Massey Dawson named after a popular landlord, was drawn by two horses and carried eight-ten

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[1] Cullen L.M., 1981 *op. cit*
[2] McCracken, J.L. 1973 'The age of the stage coach in Ireland' in K.B. Nowlan (ed.) *Travel and Transport in Ireland*, Gill and MacMillan press, Dublin, 47-63

passengers. The last were known as the *Faugh a Ballaghs* ('clear the way') and were lighter versions of the Massey Dawsons.[1]

The travelling conditions on the Bians were somewhat on the cheap and cheerful side. Although they were of sturdy, high-quality construction and were brightly painted they possessed one great drawback in that they were open to the air and thus subject to Ireland's unpredictable weather. In wet weather the passengers were exposed to the elements and even the provision of leather gaiters only covered the lower half of their bodies. The cushions on which the passengers were obliged to sit were frequently pools of water. Yet despite this the Bians remained very popular, mainly due to the low cost of using it. Even though Bianconi sought out and remunerated highly only the best drivers he felt that the service which he provided was one which was to be for the benefit of all, particularly the less well-off in Irish society. The cost of travelling of 1 ¼ d per mile and the rate of travelling on average meant that he was providing a cheap and efficient service. If the cars were not filled with fee-paying passengers the vacancies left on the cars were used by the poor who were not charged.

To ensure efficiency and propriety on his cars, Bianconi employed travelling inspectors to travel incognito on the car routes to keep a check on the way bills. Way bills were summaries of the journeys taken which showed the drivers' names and the horses' names, the passengers names and fares charged, the goods carried and the towns the car passed through along with the times of arrival and departure.[2] These inspectors reported back to Bianconi on the performance and civility of the Bian drivers. Thus, Bianconi kept his finger on the pulse of his network of cars.

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[1] Maxwell, C. 1948 *op. cit.*
[2] McCracken, J.L.1973, *op. cit.*

Bianconi ran cars as far west as Belmullet, as far east as Wexford, as far south as Cahirciveen and as far north as Letterkenny. At the height of his career he owned some 100 cars, 140 changing stations for horses, 1400 horses and employed over 100 drivers. The routes his cars took passed through 23 counties and served over 120 of the principal towns of the midlands, south and west.[1] By the 1840's Ireland's car and coaching system was at its most extensive but Bianconi dealt with the arrival of the railways by closing down some of the more southerly lines and branching out into the remote west and north-west and thus did not operate in direct competition with the railways.[2] All of these developments took place in a period when criminal activity and rural insurgency was prevalent at specific times yet as Bianconi himself claimed in 1857

> "My conveyances, many of them carrying important mails, have been travelling
> all hours of the day and night often in lonely and unfrequented places and during
> the long period of fifty two years that my establishment is now existence the
> slightest injury has never been done by the people to my property or that
> intrusted(*sic*) to my care".[3]

By the time of his death in 1865, thirty years after the coming of the railways which forced him to discontinue some of his car routes, he was still running conveyances which covered some 4000 miles daily in 22 counties.[4]

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[1] Maxwell, C. 1948, *op. cit.*
[2] O'Grada, C. 1989 'Poverty, population and agriculture, 1801-45' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A New History of Ireland, Vol. V: Ireland under the Union, 1801-70*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 108-136
[3] Robinson, H. 1948, *op. cit.*
[4] *Ibid*

2.3.10 Horse posts

The mail coach routes were the principal means, from the point of view of the Post Office, of transporting mail for the first half of the nineteenth century. However, the postal network, much like its bureaucratic structure, possessed a descending hierarchy, a distinct division of labour which allowed the mails to be delivered in the absence of a developed and comprehensive system of roads. On the rung below mail coaches in the hierarchy were the horse posts. The horse posts consisted of a postman either on horseback with a satchel full of letters or one who drove a mail cart. This did one of two things: (1) it connected settlements which were located beyond the terminus of a mail coach route with that mail route and (2) it connected settlements which were located between the mail coach routes. These former routes were known as cross lines or cross posts. The person responsible for organising the running of the horse posts was the local postmaster in each postal town.

The actual routes of the horse posts were laid down by the Surveyor's Office. The horse posts operated a limited network and only travelled relatively short distances although perhaps the longest horse post route existed between Belfast and Bally Castle in County Antrim where the route was fifty nine miles and three furlongs in length. Usually horse post lines would only be around ten-twenty miles in distance. The rate of travelling would vary depending on the nature of the terrain but generally speaking the horse posts averaged around five-six miles per hour. The rates paid for the horse posts were per double mile and they also varied e.g. in the horse post line between Ballyshannon and Donegal the rate paid per double mile was four pence but on the line between Bantry and Castletown the rate paid per double mile was two pence. The horse posts were really a

stop-gap solution to allow a least cost method of delivery in the absence of the mail coaches. Despite this they were heavily utilised by the Post as a very substantial portion of the mails were carried by the horse posts.

The method of payment for the horse posts was that each postmaster was paid a certain amount per annum for each double mile travelled (miles in this instance are Irish miles with 100 Irish miles being equivalent to 127 English miles). The sum was usually 6L (£6) per double mile per annum. However, there was a caveat attached to this. A minimum travelling speed of fewer miles per hour was required but that was only the minimum. In several cases a higher sum was paid in order to achieve greater travelling speeds. It should be understood that although the horse posts were renowned for the regularity of their time keeping they were also prey to assault. Whilst not as vulnerable as the unarmed post boys, the horse posts were never afforded the armed protection granted to the mail coaches. The rider was employed by the horse post contractor and was thus not a post office employee. As has been noted the deputy post masters contracted for the horse posts but after a parliamentary investigation into the Post Office the policy was changed as it was found that the contractors had sub-let the horse posts.

2.4 Conclusion

Postal communication in Ireland was not a new phenomenon at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A postal service had existed, albeit in a limited and cumbersome form, for nearly two centuries prior to 1800. The network of receiving houses and post offices which had developed over the centuries was unevenly distributed. The postal service, in the late eighteenth century in particular, was being exposed as inadequate and

ineffective. There was no centralised inspectorate and patronage, jobbery and corruption were rife as a result of the lack of executive oversight.

The legacy of the eighteenth century was a creaking system of mail delivery. It was in the early nineteenth century that the postal network began to expand to provide a comprehensive system of postage. . The unwieldy nature of the postal network was due to the fact that every route in the network was laid out to provide a link with Dublin. Also it was more financially expedient to follow existing road networks than to build a road to provide a postal route. Although the Post Roads Act of 1805 provided for exactly that, very few of the proposed roads were built as a direct result of the legislation. The network was still however, spreading on an almost monthly basis. Compared to the almost literal explosion of routes in the middle of the century the changes were small but it did show that the postal service was reorganising. Postal traffic was increasing steadily along with the number and volume of mail coaches. The development of the postal network was a continual if fitful process. The network which crept across Ireland's landscape throughout the early years of the nineteenth century was slowly becoming more efficient and organised. It sought to reach those parts of the country which had hitherto lacked any direct communications link with the other towns and villages throughout Ireland. From its quite humble beginnings in the late eighteenth century to level of activity it reached by the 1830's, the network had expanded to provide a hitherto unprecedented level of access to those living in rural areas. The creation of a mail coach network was one of the principal factors underlying this change as with its introduction mail could be delivered far more quickly and efficiently than ever before. The geography of the postal network changed significantly in the opening decades of the nineteenth

century as a result of the mail coach system. The result was a working (if poorly run and corrupt) postal system which delivered more mail to more places than at any time in its two hundred year history.

Chapter 3

Writing across the water: The Packet Lines

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3.1 Introduction

The lines of postal communication between Ireland and Britain were known as the Packet Lines and were serviced by sailing ships which carried the mails between the two countries from the time of the Tudor kings. The lines of communication had been well established by the beginning of the nineteenth century although there was a lively debate as to which route was the most efficient and expeditious for the carriage of mail across the Irish Sea. The debate was mainly centred on the issue of cost – costs of building the harbours necessary to take the increased number of ships plying their trade out of the packet stations, the cost of purchasing new ships, of refitting older ones, of paying employees and the costs of constructing new roads leading to and from the packet harbours.

However, cost was not the only issue which governed the debate and hence the operation of the packet ships. Various groups within Britain and Ireland did not find the existing packet lines to either their benefit or liking and lobbied vigorously for what they regarded as their legitimate claims for increased access to the packet lines. The nature of the ships which traversed the packet routes changed over the course of the early nineteenth century. The most significant factor of this change was the adoption of steam vessels to replace the masted sailing ships as the principal means of transport of both mail and passengers by both the Irish and the British Post Offices. This change brought about

considerable improvements in regularity and shortened the journey times. However, the move attracted abundant censure, particularly for the manner in which the transition was handled. The main reason, however, for the introduction of the steam packets, and the concomitant improvements in the mail coach routes leading to the ports, was the increased necessity for stable, efficient communications links between the two islands in the aftermath of the Act of Union. Government officials and politicians on both sides of the Irish sea, for example Sir Henry Parnell,[1] continually lobbied to improve the packet lines as the requirement of travel became considerably more apparent with the increase in administrative as well as commercial traffic between Britain and Ireland.

3.2 The Packet lines

There were three main packet routes which were known as the 'Domestic Packets'.[2] The northernmost route was the Donaghadee to Port Patrick route which crossed from near Belfast to Scotland. The southernmost route was the Milford Haven to Waterford route, Milford Haven being located in Pembrokeshire in Wales and Waterford on the southern coast of Ireland. However, the most significant route was the Holyhead in Wales to Dublin route which was the packet line which carried all mail between London and Dublin. The ships which carried the mails were fairly small sailing vessels, weighing not more than one hundred tons and employing a crew of ten to twelve men.[3] The weather was a major factor in the operation of the packets, often delaying the ships by

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[1] Joyce, H. 1893 *The History of the Post Office from Its Establishment down to 1836,* Allen Lane, London
[2] Reynolds, M. 1983 *History of the Irish Post Office,* MacDonnell White Press, Dublin
[3] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III

considerable periods of time. Occasionally, the conditions in the Irish Sea were so bad as to prevent the packet ships from even leaving the ports at which they were docked. Thus, for much of the early nineteenth century, the packet ships were slow and, albeit inadvertently, unreliable. It was only in the 1820's, with the introduction of steam vessels that any significant improvement in the packet lines was seen.

3.3 The Holyhead to Dublin packet

Holyhead harbour was located approximately sixty miles from Dublin and mail had been carried between the two ports on an ongoing basis since the year 1562. The London mails would travel either on the London to Holyhead road or the London to Chester, Chester to Holyhead route.[1] It was Holyhead's very proximity to Dublin that lent it a considerable advantage when the decision to where best locate a packet station that would serve Dublin was being taken. However, its proximity notwithstanding, for many years the roads leading to Holyhead were so treacherous and badly maintained that traffic on them was invariably slow and thus Holyhead was difficult to reach. These difficulties kept the debate alive as to where would potentially be a more advantageous site for the Dublin packet. The harbour at Parkgate was frequently used as an alternative crossing point by passengers despite the fact that it was 120 miles from Dublin, twice the distance from Dublin to Holyhead. Despite these problems, Holyhead remained the principal embarkation point for the carriage of mail between Britain and Ireland

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[1] Reynolds, 1983 *op. cit.*

The land routes which led to Holyhead were, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, deplorable. It usually took somewhere in the region of forty hours for the mails to reach Holyhead after leaving London such was the parlous state of the Welsh roads, characterised as they were by their narrowness and their steep gradients. Moreover, the harbour at Holyhead was what could be described as a 'tidal' harbour where the vessels using it were frequently damaged by the unpredictable swells. As the harbourmaster at Holyhead put it

> "Their time of sailing was irregular and uncertain...In fresh gales from the eastward – fair wind for Ireland – the packets could not warp out. The difficulties in entering the harbour in heavy gales from the westward was very great...It was necessary in bad weather to keep out until daylight. The passengers in embarking and landing with their luggage experienced great inconvenience, and sometimes considerable personal risk, in small boats".[1]

By the early nineteenth century there were six packet ships sailing from Holyhead to Dublin and they berthed in Dublin at the Pigeon House. However, it was discovered that it took between seventeen and twenty hours to sail between Holyhead and the Pigeon House and only ten to twelve to sail between Howth (which was located on the north side of Dublin Bay) and Holyhead. It was decided to locate the packet station at Howth on the Irish side and to improve the roads leading from the city centre to Howth harbour.[2] The money required for the harbour at Howth to be built properly was only made available after Sir Edward Lees took control of running Irish Post Office mail boats to Holyhead in

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[1] Robinson, H. 1948 *The British Post Office: A History*, Greenwood Press, New Jersey, 185
[2] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III

1813. Although British Post Office boats had carried the mails up until this point, it was a condition of the 1784 Act which created the separate Irish Post Office that the Irish mails would be carried by British mail boats until such time as the Irish Post Office could provide its own mail boats.

Anxious not to be deprived of a lucrative source of revenue, the British Post Office agreed to build Howth harbour and to double the annual allowance of £4000 it had to pay the Irish Post Office out of the profits accrued from the packet activities. Howth then operated as the principal packet station between Holyhead and Dublin until disaster struck in 1813 when two mail packets ran aground at the entrance to Howth Harbour. The packet station was immediately transferred to Dun Laoghaire on the south side of the Bay and even after silt and other obstacles had been cleared from Howth harbour to allow safe passage, powerful business interests successfully lobbied to keep the packet station at Dun Laoghaire.

3.4 The Milford Haven to Waterford packet

The packet line between Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire and Waterford in Ireland was a relatively new one in comparison to its more senior northerly partner, the Holyhead to Dublin line. The Milford packet, as it was known, was only really developed as a regularly run mail boat service from around the late 1780's although mail had been carried between the two parts before that on a sporadic basis. Always in the shadow of its northern brother, the Milford packet was nonetheless regarded in certain quarters as being of a great deal of importance, particularly by parliamentarians. Or rather, perhaps it

would be more accurate to say that it was the *idea* of a packet line running from the south-east of Ireland to the south-west of Britain which they considered to be of great importance. The line itself was never considered to be that significant by those it might have been assumed to benefit most by its operation. For example the merchants and traders of Cork, Waterford, Bristol or Cardiff by whose activities a steady trade in coal, corn and flour amongst other goods flowed. The packet station at Waterford was moved to a harbour closer to the coast at Dunmore East in an attempt to improve the service the packet provided. However, as passengers had to row out in an open boat before boarding the packet ship in the harbour at Milford this switch did little to boost passenger numbers and thus increase the revenue.

A parliamentary committee to investigate the Milford line found that it was incompetently run and that rather than sending their mail on the seemingly obvious route of Dunmore to Milford, the businessmen and merchants of Cork, Waterford, Bristol or Cardiff often sent their mail via Dublin because the Milford to Dunmore route was uncertain and irregular. This was in spite of the fact that such a transaction would cost them an extra nine pence on every letter sent. The committee also noted that the receipts from the carriage of passengers, horses and carriages did not offset the losses incurred in the carriage of the mails.[1] The reasons for the inefficiency of the packet establishment at Milford were varied, from the remoteness of the packet stations and the poor approach roads, not to mention the almost total dearth of facilities available to passengers at both Milford and Dunmore, for example there was no inn at either harbour. But the principal

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[1] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III

reason for the failure of the Milford line was given by George Henry Freeling when he noted that

> "In the year 1823 prior to the introduction of steam vessels, one hundred and thirty one mails were out of course and did not arrive in London on the day on which they were due".[1]

He also noted that the passengers were forced to board the packets in open water which meant that this was how the mail was transferred as well, a fact which could add to the difficulties.

> "Question: The committee wish to know if any difficulty has occurred in getting the mails on board the packets?
>
> George Henry Freeling: Sometimes, when it has blown very hard there has been very great difficulty, and the packet has occasionally been delayed some time before the mail could be put on board".[2]

The Milford packet line was eventually discontinued after the amalgamation of the two Post Offices in 1831, largely due to the unsustainably heavy losses the Post Office incurred in maintaining this line.

3.5 The Donaghadee to Port Patrick packet

This packet line, along with the other two routes, had existed for a considerable period of time before the nineteenth century. The fact that the crossing between Donaghadee and Port Patrick was only twenty two miles long meant that it was the shortest of the three

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[1] *Select Committee on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III Minutes of Evidence, 16
[2] ibid, 17

packet lines. This proximity ostensibly gave the line great value, particularly as it was the

line, theoretically, most likely to remain open and usable during the stormy winter

months. Four sailing vessels plied their trade between the two ports until the advent of the

steam packets in 1825. These sailing vessels were quite a bit smaller than those in regular

use on the Holyhead and Milford routes with the vessels only weighing forty tons and

possessing a complement of five men. The sailing vessels used on the line were,

notionally, small enough and light enough to make the crossing quickly and efficiently.

However, as the report of the commissioners of the revenue on the packet stations stated

> "The uncertainty attending sailing packets were strikingly illustrated at this
>
> station. Such were the peculiar casualties of the passage, that notwithstanding the
>
> very inconsiderable distance from port to port, it was found impossible to
>
> calculate the duration of voyage with any accuracy. In a representation from the
>
> Commissioners of the Port Patrick Harbour, dated 31st May 1823, it is stated, that
>
> in consequence of storms, calms or contrary winds, the packets could not make
>
> passage; and the duration of passages is stated to have varied from two and a
>
> quarter to twenty-five hours. It had frequently occurred that eight mails were due
>
> between Dublin and Glasgow; and, owing to the great inconvenience of such
>
> uncertainty, much of the correspondence between Scotland and Ireland was
>
> conveyed circuitously by the way of Holyhead".[1]

Added to this was the fact that the approach roads leading to both the packet stations

were inadequate. Port Patrick itself was an isolated, remote port which was nearly forty

miles from London. The only way it could be reached was by roads which were nearly

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[1] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III, 57

impassable, particularly in winter.[1] Despite these obstacles, the period 1805 – 1810 saw

an average of 300,000 letters per year pass through Donaghadee. However, by the mid-

nineteenth century Donaghadee was practically derelict, replaced by other packet stations

more suited to large steam ships.[2]

3.6 The packet ships

The ships used in the period prior to the introduction of steam-powered vessels in the

1820's were sailing ships. These vessels were not large weighing only around a hundred

tons and being manned by a crew of around ten to twelve men. Obviously the vessels

were highly susceptible to changes in the weather, as they were dependent on the wind to

power their passage. This meant that in the frequently stormy and unsettled water of the

Irish Sea, the packet ships found the going heavy and were often late in arriving at their

port of call. The description provided by the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, of a crossing he

and his wife, Harriet, made from Dublin to Holyhead in April 1812 told how it took over

thirty six hours for the ship to reach Holyhead and that the crossing had been so rough

that he had been unable to eat a thing on the journey and that to add insult to injury, when

they landed at Holyhead at 2 a.m. they had

> "...above a mile to walk over rock and stone in a pouring rain before we could
>
> get to the inn".[3]

The journey between Dublin and Holyhead ordinarily took between eighteen to twenty

hours but delays such as those experienced by the Shelleys were commonplace. This,

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[1] Joyce, 1893 *op.cit.*
[2] Reynolds, 1983, *op.cit.*
[3] Quoted in Robinson, 1948, *op. cit.* 184

naturally, meant that there was great disruption to the Post Office schedule but such was the nature of the Irish Sea there seemed to be little that could be done to prevent such delays.

3.6.1 The introduction of steam ships

It had been the practice of the Post Office to run their own packet lines using their own vessels which were the property of the Crown. However, this practice had led to serious abuses of the system and corruption of the running of the mail packets, abuses which, even by contemporary standards, were shocking. £1,088,000 was spent in the years between 1770 and 1788 on the employment of packet ships.[1] This seemingly exorbitant figure is explained somewhat when one realises that the packet service was seen as a cash cow by senior Post Office personnel. Anthony Todd is a case in point here as in his capacity of Secretary of the English Post Office he received a 2.5% illicit 'cut' from the packet establishment.[2] Also, members of the Post Offices were discovered to be owners of packet boats and were thus paying themselves salaries. A report in 1788 recommended that all postal officials be banned from having anything to do with packet ownership.[3]

After these details emerged, a Finance committee established in 1798 examined the outcome of the recommended reforms of ten years previously to see how far the Post Offices had gone in their implementation. The committee discovered that the recommendations were never followed, particularly in relation to the idea that the packet vessels should be hired on the basis of public competition. The Finance committee strongly recommended (and this recommendation was actually complied with) that the

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[1] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III
[2] Robinson, H. 1964 *Carrying British Mail overseas,* Allen and Unwin, London
[3] Robinson, 1948 *op. cit.*

vessels should be hired.[1] Thus, from then on the packet lines consisted of ships which were held in private hands and the lines themselves were contracted out. The actual practice of tendering was somewhat less formal than perhaps the Finance committee had envisaged. While the vessels used to carry the mail packets were indeed privately owned, the nature of the contract between the Post Office and the vessel operators was idiosyncratically ambiguous. The contracts were not contracts in the legalistic understanding of the word but rather were more in the nature of understandings reached between the Postmasters General and the vessel operators.

> "No actual contract or agreement, it is stated, was executed. The commander received from the Postmaster General a commission during good behaviour undertaking to supply a sufficient vessel, built expressly for the service, in consideration of a certain annual payment which included the wages and victualling of a certain number of officers and men, wear and tear, and all charges and risk but that of capture by the enemy for which the Revenue was his indemnity. The rate of hire was calculated much below the cost and maintenance of the vessel, the commander (or contractor) deriving his remuneration from the profits arising from the conveyance of passengers".[2]

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[1] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III

[2] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III, 5

Seven were hired for the Dublin to Holyhead route, six for the Milford to Dunmore route and four hired for the Port Patrick to Donaghadee route. However, it was in late 1818 that the first steam powered vessels, the first being the Rob Roy a thirty horsepower ninety

Vessel	Station	Tonnage	Power of engines Horses
Escape	Holyhead	237	80
Wizard	Ditto	237	80
Harlequin	Ditto	234	80
Cinderella	Ditto	234	80
Aladdin	Ditto	230	80
Dragon	Ditto	237	80
Dolphin	Liverpool	327	140
Thetis	Ditto	301	140
Etna	Ditto	300	140
Comet	Ditto	300	140
Crocodile	Milford	237	80
Sovereign	Ditto	205	80
Vixen	Ditto	189	80
Sybil	Ditto	237	80
Dasher	Port Patrick	130	40
Arrow	Ditto	130	40

Table 3.1: Specifications of each steam packet vessel Source: *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C. 1827 (258) III*

ton steam ship, began to make regular trips between Greenock in Scotland and Belfast and in 1820 the Ivanhoe, a ship of 170 tons and two thirty horsepower engines began crossing between Holyhead and Dublin.[1]

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[1] Watson, E. 1917 *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 between travellers,* Albemarle Press, London

Initially, both prejudice on the part of the public and official disinterest governed the attitudes towards the steam ships. Yet as the steam ships began to attract passengers away from the traditional sailing packets, revenue from the packets began to dwindle. This sparked a debate within the Post Office establishments as to what to do about this new transport technology. After considerable discussion, it was felt that the most expeditious means of sending mail by steam packet was not, in fact, to continue with the previously accepted practice of hiring private vessels by public competition but instead to return to the policy of the eighteenth century and to purchase and outfit vessels which then belonged to the Crown. What concerned the Post Office hierarchy the most was the regularity and safety of the steam packets. With the consequent great decrease in journey time, travel by steam ship was far more attractive to putative passengers and, also, to businessmen who would use the steam ships to send what were known as Ship Letters. These were letters which were posted on board the already existing private steam vessels instead of by the regular sailing packets.

To begin with the proprietors of two steam vessels, the *Talbot* and the *Ivanhoe*, both approached the Postmasters General and offered to hire the vessels to the Post Office to be run by the contractors. The offers included stringent penalty clauses and contractual obligations which they would keep to if they were awarded the contract for the packet lines. After much negotiation the Post Office eventually turned down the (repeated) offers of privately contracting the steam packets and decided to obtain estimates for the construction and outfitting of vessels which would be Post Office steam ships. The reasons for this decision were somewhat unclear but perhaps some light is shed on the

matter by George Henry Freeling in his evidence before a parliamentary select committee when he said

> "…using the accounts of private vessels as a yardstick for the performance of Post Office packets is a mistake…the Post Office packets put out 365 days a year, the private vessels only go 1-3 times per week. A packet must sail at a fixed hour, the private vessels sail at the most favourable times".[1]

But perhaps the best explanation is that the Post Office officials on both sides of the Irish Sea saw the revenue generating potential of the steam ships and, to put it crudely, wanted in.

So it was that in 1821 the first Post Office steam packet set sail on the Holyhead route with further steam packets being introduced on the Milford line in 1824 and the Port Patrick line in 1825. The specifications of each vessel plying its trade on the various packet lines can be found in table 3.1. There is also a comparison of the longest and shortest voyages on the packet lines between the years 1826 and 1832 which also includes the mean of the twenty longest and twenty shortest voyages between the various packet stations in tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6.

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[1] *Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, Minutes Of Evidence , 1832, H.C. 1832 (716) xvii, 49

Year ending January 5th	Longest voyage Hours, minutes		Shortest voyage Hours, minutes		Average of twenty longest voyages Hours, minutes		Average of twenty shortest voyages Hours, minutes	
1826	19	15	5	22	14	5	5	39
1827	25	9	5	31	15	16	5	46
1828	24	6	5	32	16	40	5	48
1829	22	8	5	23	16	19	5	38
1830	23	15	5	33	17	16	5	49
1831	25	2	5	26	18	15	5	34
1832	18	1	5	14	16	19	5	24

Table 3.2: Journey times and averages of the Holyhead to Dublin packet line 1826-1832 Source: *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII

Year ending January 5th	Longest voyage Hours, minutes		Shortest voyage Hours, minutes		Average of twenty longest voyages Hours, minutes		Average of twenty shortest voyages Hours, minutes	
1827	30	25	11	54	24	37	12	50
1828	30	50	11	45	25	16	12	5
1829	33	48	11	37	27	15	12	5
1830	45	8	11	11	26	24	11	39
1831	33	34	11	21	26	52	11	37
1832	37	15	11	47	26	51	11	22

Table 3.3: Journey times and averages of the Liverpool to Kingstown packet line 1827-1832 Source: *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII

Year ending January 5th	Longest voyage Hours, minutes		Shortest voyage Hours, minutes		Average of twenty longest voyages Hours, minutes		Average of twenty shortest voyages Hours, minutes	
1826	34	30	8	13	24	23	8	38
1827	36	0	8	20	24	45	8	40
1828	36	30	8	15	26	57	8	43
1829	38	0	8	17	26	11	8	29
1830	29	0	8	13	22	51	8	31
1831	33	45	8	20	24	27	8	37
1832	32	0	8	34	23	28	8	41

Table 3.4: Journey times and averages of the Milford to Dunmore packet line 1826-1832 Source: *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII

Year ending January 5th	Longest voyage Hours, minutes		Shortest voyage Hours, minutes		Average of twenty longest voyages Hours, minutes		Average of twenty shortest voyages Hours, minutes	
1826	10	30	2	18	7	4	2	25
1827	18	45	2	10	7	54	2	23
1828	8	0	2	15	6	38	2	23
1829	9	25	2	15	6	41	2	23
1830	8	40	2	18	6	42	2	27
1831	9	10	2	20	7	0	2	28
1832	8	20	2	20	6	6	2	28

Table 3.5: Journey times and averages of the Port Patrick to Donaghadee packet line 1826-1832 Source: *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII

The efficacy and rapidity of the steam packets is highlighted when one compares, for example, the average journey time of the sailing packet on the Holyhead line, which was eighteen to twenty hours, with the average time on the same line for a steam packet which was eight to ten hours. Even more stark is the comparison between steam and sailing packets on the Milford line. As previously stated G.H. Freeling gave evidence that in the year 1823 131 mails did not arrive in London in due course as a result of the tardiness of the sailing packets. In 1827, after the introduction of the steam vessels, the packet ships were prevented from sailing on only three days in due course from Milford and on only four days from Dunmore in the same year.[1]

One point which should be mentioned is that there was a steam packet service created for a direct Liverpool to Dublin route in the year 1826 after strenuous lobbying by commercial interests in both Liverpool and Dublin. Prior to this the mail for Liverpool

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[1] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III

118

was shipped to Holyhead and carried to Liverpool by way of Chester, a journey which at its shortest took twenty four hours. But with the introduction of the steam vessels the journey time between Liverpool and Dublin was cut to around fifteen hours.[1]

Finally the notion of Ship Letters requires further explanation. Ship Letters were letters which were carried in vessels which were neither owned nor hired by the Post Office for the purposes of the packets. The measure was essentially a tax on those letters which were carried by the private vessels in an attempt to extract revenue from the private carriage of correspondence. The letters were therefore not under the direct control of the Post Office in either country, a practice which was anathema to the bureaucrats of either office. This privilege was extended to Ireland by the same Act under which the office of Postmaster General was constituted

> "By and Act of the 55th GEO. III c. 103 intituled "An Act to regulate the postage
> of Ship Letters to and from Ireland"…by the same Act the Postmasters General
> for Ireland were authorized and empowered to receive a ship letter postage upon
> all letters brought by ships and vessels other than packet boats from all places
> within His Majesty's dominions at the rate of 6d Irish currency for every single
> letter".[2]

One of the features of the new information circulation technology was the rising cost of actually sending the letters. By way of illustration, to send a single letter from Dublin to London cost one shilling and four pence. Two pence went on sending it by packet, a penny went on the toll for crossing the bridge over the Menai Straits, a penny was paid on the toll for crossing the Conway Bridge and shilling went on the internal postage within

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[1] *Ibid*, 375
[2] *Ibid*, 65-66

England.[1] This type of charging led to complaints and widespread evasion of postal charges. Sir Francis Freeling, Secretary of the English Post Office, stated that

> "…when I find that every conveyance in this country (England) is resorted to for the purpose of evading the duties of postage, I presume it cannot be denied that persons would do the same at other places".[2]

Thus it was that although steam packets considerably shortened the journey time and hence expedited delivery of letters between Ireland and Britain, the prohibitive expense, and profligate attitude of the Post Office towards, the running of the postal lines meant that the cost of sending letters became so high that even with the increased capacity to send and deliver letters than ever before, fewer people could afford to do so on a regular basis.

3.7 Conclusions

Even today crossing the Irish Sea can be an unpleasant and time consuming experience. In the early nineteenth century this was magnified greatly by the fact that the crossings invariably were undertaken by sailing vessels as opposed to ships powered by steam. As sailing ships were entirely dependent on the wind for their power the weather was a major factor in their ability to make the crossing. The packet ships were frequently late or sometimes did not arrive at all as poor weather conditions forced them to remain at berth. This was an intolerable situation for those who depended on communication with Britain

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[1] Robinson, 1948, *op. cit.*
[2] *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III, 68

for their livelihood, particularly those merchants who traded out of southern Ireland. The lack of reliability was an even greater cause of concern for the government for whom a stable network of communications was essential to the very action of governing. The introduction of steam ships and the reform of the packet establishments were among the first improvements in the Irish Post Office that the state instituted. That a direct and efficient communications link between Ireland and London was something the British government saw as being of paramount importance is not, perhaps, especially surprising. Yet it does highlight the value the state placed on an effective postal system.

Date	Milford	Holyhead	Liverpool
1827 January 1st	Meteor not arrived. The passage to Dunmore occupied 25 hours 36 minutes. Heavy gales and squally	Packet detained several hours by the gale. Mail from Dublin arrived too late for the whole of the letters to be forwarded	Blowing so hard a gale on the 1st, the Comet could not put to sea
January 3rd	Sovereign not arrived. The mail coach did not reach Milford until 0 h 15m PM in consequence of snow	Mail from Dublin did not arrive in course	
January 5th	Meteor not arrived; long passage to Dunmore on the day preceding, 25 hours 30 minutes. Blowing very hard with a great deal of sea. Sails spilt	Long passages	
January 9th	Sovereign not arrived; strong head wind on the day preceding 30 hours 35 minutes to Dunmore, where she waited for 2d mail	Packet to Howth driven back to Holyhead. The packet to Kingstown which persisted in keeping the sea had a passage of 27 hours 15 minutes	Packet which sailed the preceding driven back having been 16 hours at sea and Dolphin unable to proceed. Two of the large passage vessels driven back also.
January 11th	Crocodile not arrived 31 hours 10 minutes to Dunmore where she waited for 2nd mail. Vixen driven back. Vixen had great difficulty in taking coal and received damage from the heavy sea in	No sailing for either Kingstown or Holyhead	No arrival. The packet unable to proceed

	getting alongside the Tortoise		
January 13th	Vixen not arrived; long passage to Dunmore on the day proceeding		No Arrival. Packet driven back
January 21st	Sovereign late by a few minutes	The mail from Dublin did not arrive in course	
February 7th	Meteor not arrived	The mail from Dublin did not arrive in course	Long passage of the Packet from Dublin
February 17th	Meteor put back, damaged "side rod broken in the screw". She proceeded to sea with the mail the following day.		
February eighteenth	Sovereign not arrived; driven back to Dunmore ; sea breaking over Dunmore Pier on vessel's deck	No arrival from Kingstown or Howth	
February nineteenth	Sovereign not arrived	The Packets did not arrive in course; that from Kingstown had a passage of 23 hours 45 minutes and that from Howth of 24 hours and 6 minutes	No arrival at Liverpool. Gale so tremendous, the Dolphin compelled to run for Holyhead.
February 20th	Mail dispatched to Dunmore by a smack [no Packet in port]. Sovereign arrived with two mails	The mail from Dublin did not arrive in course. The packet from Howth was 18 hours 20 minutes on her passage	The Etna had a very long passage and did not arrive until after 3 PM
February 21st	No arrival. Mail sent from Dunmore by smack which did not reach Milford until the following day	The Dublin mail did not arrive in course	Long passage Packet did not arrive until 3.20 PM
February 25th	Vixen not arrived. Obliged to take shelter in Ramsey Sound, not being able to steam ahead	The Dublin mail did not arrive in course	
February 26th	Meteor not arrived – Sovereign not ready to go to sea. Reason assigned by the commander, that it blew so hard a boat could not have gone off for his engineer. Mail detained some hours	Packet detained some hours by the weather	
February 27th	Meteor driven back – Sailed again at 11AM. Vixen not arrived, having received damage	Packet detained by the weather	Packet did not reach Dublin until after 4PM

	in her hulls and sails and injured her machinery. She made the passage with one engine.		
February 28th	Meteor not arrived. Engine damaged "connecting rod link broke". She brought over the mail in course on the second day after		
March 1st	No Packet ready to take the mail. Heavy gale, W.S.W. No sailing vessel could make way. Mail sent by Sovereign at 4.30 PM		
March 4th	Crocodile driven back	No arrival from Howth. Packet from Holyhead driven back, having been 8 hours 20 minutes at sea	Packet unable to go to sea
March 5th	No arrival	Both Packets detained some hours	
March 6th	Sovereign driven back. Gale so violent, Crocodile unable to go alongside the hulk		Packet unable to go to sea
March 7th	No arrival	The Dublin mail did not arrive in course	Packet detained ten hours by stress of weather
March 8th	Crocodile driven back. Nora Creina passage vessel from Bristol, driven back into Milford by stress of weather	Packet prevented leaving Howth for several hours by violence of the gale	Packet damaged at sea. Rudder carried away

Table 3.6 Difficulties and impediments experienced by the steam packets between January 1st and March 8th, 1827 Source: *Select Committee Report on State of Communication between England and Ireland by Milford Haven: 1826-27, H.C.* 1827 (258) III

Chapter 4

Bureaucratic structures of the post

Chapter 4 Bureaucratic structures of the post

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the internal structures of the Post Office. The unwieldy nature of the Post Office establishment came in for significant criticism from parliamentary committees[1] and its inefficiencies and lack of proper management were among the principal factors in the decision to reconsolidate the two Post Offices of Britain and Ireland in 1831. The reorganisation of the Post Office bureaucracy was something which occurred as a result of the state's desire to centralise government function. The sclerotic bureaucracy of the postal service was such that the British state felt that only direct intervention would solve the problems their examination of the service presented. This centralisation of purpose was a characteristic of the changing state during the period, privileging the centre over the previously sacrosanct local. The alterations and reforms of the bureaucratic structures of the post were a centralisation of operations but not necessarily the geography of its power as we shall see.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part will outline the principal offices of the bureaucratic structure of the Post, detailing the duties and responsibilities that each such office entailed. The second will examine the issues of corruption and inefficiency in the Irish postal service, utilising the case studies of (1) the abuse of the practice of franking and (2) the Lees family.

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII

4.2 The Post Office Establishment

The 1784 Act of Parliament established the essential bureaucratic format of the Irish Post Office, a format which was to remain more or less static until the re-structuring of the 1830's. The authors of the Act borrowed from the extant bureaucratic configuration of the British Post Office for their model of organisation. The Act stated that

> ...the persons or persons from time to time to be appointed by the King's Majesty, his heirs and successors, to be made and constituted by letters patent under the great seal of Ireland by the name and stile of his Majesty's Postmaster 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 letters patent under the great seal of Ireland. [1]

There were many other offices besides those mentioned in the Act, including ones which were specific to Ireland for example the British Mail Office but it provided the basic constitution for bureaucratic organisation in the Irish Post Office.

An outline of the post office establishment as it existed in 1823.

Postmaster General
  (held jointly by two persons)

Secretary's Office:
  Secretary and five clerks

Letter Bill Office:

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[1] *23, 24 George III (1784) (CXVII),* quoted in Reynolds, M. 1983 *History of the Irish Post Office,* MacDonnell White Press, Dublin, 28

Two clerks

Receiver-General's Office:
Receiver-General and two clerks

Accountant-General's Office:
Accountant-General and three clerks

Inland Office:
A president and two vice presidents
Clerk of blind directions
Charge deliverer
An inspector of franks
Eight taxing clerks
Clerk of the money-book
Five senior sorters
Eight junior sorters
Tick clerk
A bagman
Collector of ships letters
Fourteen probationary sorters

British Mail Office:
A comptroller
A clerk
One senior sorter
Two junior sorters

Alphabet and Post-paid window:
Superintendent
Four Clerks

Bye, Dead and Missent Letter Office:
Superintendent
Four Senior Clerks
Two junior ditto.[1]

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland), 1829, (353), XII, 5-6*

4.2.1 The office of the Postmaster-General

In England, the office was jointly held by two persons. It remains unclear if the parliamentary Act which created the original office intended for there to be joint holders of the office but it was the contemporary practice in England and was transferred to the Irish office without demur. The office of Postmaster general was a remunerated position from which both holders drew equal salaries. This situation pertained until 1822 when the then senior Postmaster General, Lord Clancarty, was left

> "...in exclusive receipt of his former salary, and that, Lord Rosse (the junior
> Postmaster General) should, without emolument, continue in the discharge of his
> share of the duties of the office, and in the exercise of the patronage attached to
> it".[1]

In theory, the system of having two Postmasters General provided valuable administrative oversight in terms of checks and balances. In practice, however, the situation created many more problems than it solved. The practice of convening a meeting of the Board in order to transact the business of the post office was supposed to provide a forum where the views and wishes of the two Postmasters General could be discussed and taken into account. These Boards consisted of the senior operating figures of the Post Office but were, in reality, rarely if ever attended by either Postmaster General and were, eventually, discontinued. As the Postmasters General tended to deal with administrative issues from their respective country houses, there was considerable delay in ascertaining the decisions of either officer. Each document which required their

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[1] *Ibid*, 12

signature or perusal had to be sent to both and was frequently lost or damaged in transit. They rarely, if ever, met and often disagreed in matters of opinion and policy. Thus, as the then Secretary of the Post Office Edward Lees pointed out, he could, potentially, act in contradiction of the wishes of both Postmasters General.[1]

The office of Postmaster General was, essentially, a sinecure with the degree of activity and level of involvement sporadic and dependent on the individuals holding the offices. The positions of Postmaster General and Post Office Secretary were roughly analogous to those of the Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary of Ireland. The Postmasters General were, in reality, only the titular heads of the Post Office in Ireland. The job of the day to day running of the post fell to the Secretary of the Post Office.

4.2.2 Office of the Secretary

The office of the Secretary was a post held by two members of the Lees family throughout the period of independence of the Irish Post Office. John Lees was officially appointed to the position of Secretary in 1784, a post he held until his death in 1811. In 1801 his son, Edward Smith Lees, was appointed to jointly hold the same office as his father, an appointment he was granted at the astonishingly young age of 18. He was to run the Irish Post Office as Secretary for over 30 years until his transfer to the Edinburgh Post Office.

The duties of the Secretary were somewhat ambiguously outlined in the letters patent which created the office in the 1784 Act of Parliament. Added to this was the uncertain delineation of what powers the Secretary should possess by virtue of holding office.

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[1] *Ibid*, 14

Although for the parliamentary inspectors, Charles Johnson and Joseph Hume, the duty

of the Secretary was clear

> "It should especially rest with him, under the authority of the Postmaster General,
>
> to direct the whole machine".[1]

In practice, this meant arrogating a great deal of responsibility and executive power onto

himself, so much so that

> "The effect has been to throw the actual discharge of the business of the
>
> Department [The Post Office] in a great degree into the hands of the Secretary,
>
> not merely as a substitute of his superiors, but as the person primarily entrusted
>
> with the administration".[2]

So, although there was a layer of authority above the office of the Secretary, in the person

of the Postmasters General, it was the Secretary who actually controlled the Irish Post

Office and not simply on behalf of the Postmaster General. The Secretary did not act as a

subordinate to a higher authority but was rather an authority in his own right.

One of the aspects of the Secretary's office which jarred substantially upon comparison

with standard practice in the British Office was the extremely poor state of

communications between the Postmasters General and the Secretary. As the *Ninth Report*

of the Commissioners of Fees and Gratuities noted, the office, in the absence of the

Postmaster General was

> "...under the control of the Secretary, whose orders on the daily reports made to
>
> him of the official transactions of the office are acted upon and held as valid as
>
> those of the Postmasters General".[3]

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[1] *Ibid*, 17
[2] *Ibid*, 16
[3] Quoted in *ibid*, 16

The absenteeism of the Postmasters General, their rare appearances in Dublin and never simultaneously meant that it was not the case that the Secretary inveigled his way into the position of almost absolute significance he held in the Irish Post Office but it was more a function of necessity. However, both John and Edward Lees, and particularly Edward, benefited materially from their positions as Secretary and held other posts besides their primary one.

It was in overseeing the financial regulation of the several separate departments within the Post Office that the Secretary held the most executive power. It was also this position which allowed for the greatest possibility of embezzlement. The Secretary was obliged to account for the flow of revenue from the hundreds of deputy postmasters up and down the country and for the fiscal expenditure of the departments under his charge. Although the Accountant-General collated the expenditure and revenue flow, it was the Secretary who had control of it.

Added to this was the fact that it was the Secretary who was the primary interface between the Post Office and government. Any contact between the authorities in Dublin Castle and the Post went through the Secretary's office. It was the Secretary who first saw and dealt with requests, complaints, suggestions and direct orders. Any correspondence was always between the offices of the Secretary of the Post and the Chief Secretary of Ireland, albeit always prefacing any contact with the frequently redundant caveat of acting at the direct behest of the Postmasters General.

4.2.3 Chief Clerk

Essentially, the Chief Clerk was an assistant to the Secretary, in all branches of the Post Office, when the Secretary was present. When the Secretary was absent the Chief Clerk was the one to whom all powers and offices of the Secretary automatically devolved.

4.2.4 First Senior Clerk – Remittance Clerk

The individual holding this office had the duty of acknowledging the revenue collected by the various Deputy Postmasters throughout Ireland. He had no control over the money that was collected being, as he was, the channel through which it travelled to the Receiver-General. The Remittance Clerk kept a cash book and it was against this book that the accounts were checked by the Accountant-General once a week against the remittances recorded as being received by the Receiver-General.

The office of Senior Clerk also included the responsibility of Storekeeper which meant that he was in charge of giving out and receiving the supply of stationary used by the other offices.

4.2.5 Minute Clerk

The Minute Clerk possessed no equivalent in the English Post Office. The supposed primary duty of the Minute Clerk was the preparation of minutes which recorded the official proceedings of the Post Office. These proceedings were supposed to have taken place at meetings of the Post Office Boards but as we have seen, the convening of these Boards very rarely took place. All official communications were minuted by the Minute Clerk and then sent off to the Postmasters General as it was his duty to prepare

"...all official letters of any consequence addressed to either the Postmaster General or which come officially into the Secretary's Office, together with the particulars of all payments out of the Revenue, and the particulars of any orders issued, either by the Postmasters or by the Secretary, either of appointment or suspension, every thing in fact which is conceived necessary for the current management of the Department; at the conclusion of each day they (namely the minutes) are sent to one or other of the Postmasters General; and if his lordship approves of them he subscribes his signature; when returned by him they are transmitted to the other Postmaster General, and signed by him".[1]

4.2.6 Solicitor's Office

The Solicitor was not, *per se*, an official of the Post Office but rather was a lawyer who combined a private practice with carrying out the duties of Solicitor to the Post Office. It was the Solicitor's responsibility to prosecute any infractions of the law relating to activities of the post that is mail robberies, embezzlement, stealing money out of letters. The majority of the time the Solicitor spent when engaged by the Post Office was on these criminal proceedings, travelling up and down the country to the various assizes courts. The Solicitor was also charged with the collection of the arrears owed by the Deputy Postmasters. He also obtained information on the personal solvency of the applicants to any vacant Deputy Postmaster positions. The final branch of his duties was the preparation of mail coach contracts with the initial contract being agreed between the Postmasters General and the contractor, the Solicitor was the officer who put it into a legally binding form.

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[1] *Ibid*, 22

4.2.7 Receiver-General or Treasurer's Office

The Receiver-General was responsible for the receipt, acknowledgement and lodgement at the Bank of Ireland of all revenue collected by every department of the Post Office. He submitted weekly reports to the Board, detailing the amounts and volume of all transactions once a week. The Receiver-General was also charged with preparing and issuing the orders and warrants for the periodical and incidental expenses each department incurred. The Receiver-General was assisted by two clerks. It was frequently the case that the two deputies bore the brunt of the duties of the office and the actual Receiver-General concentrated on his private business dealings. It was common practice for the Receiver-General to use the official account to issue drafts from Post Office revenue which he transferred to his private bank account in order to more expeditiously pay the Post Office creditors.[1]

4.2.8 Accountant-General's Office

The duties of the Accountant-General were fairly straightforward and somewhat self-explanatory. The office of Accountant-General was created by the letters patent of the original Act of Parliament of 1784. The Accountant-General was responsible for collating the revenue of all the postal towns, to check the calculations and to enter the proper figures in his own book. He had no control over expenditure. He was also supposed to take a weekly account of the remittances of each Deputy Postmaster as recorded in the cash book of the Remittance Clerk. The other duties of the office included the keeping of accounts on the bye, dead and mis-sent letter office as well the revenue from the paid

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, Appendix no.4

post and the alphabet window. These duties were, for the most part, dealt with by the clerks of the office although the Accountant-General took ultimate responsibility for any accounts issued by his office.

4.2.9 Letter Bill office

This office consisted of two clerks, one of whom also held the position of junior sorter in the Inland Office. The Letter Bill office was again an original appointment created by the letters patent of the 1784 Act. The duties of the Letter Bill clerks were to be the first Post Office officials to deal with the letter bills sent in by the Deputy Postmasters. They then prepared monthly returns of the revenue arising from all postal towns in Ireland. These monthly returns were to be signed by the Secretary and then passed on to the Accountant-General. The lack of checks and balances over the contact between the Deputy Postmasters and the Letter Bill clerks provided ample scope for corruption, of which more later in this chapter.

4.2.10 The Inland Office

The Inland office consisted of fifty five officers whose job it was, essentially, to sort the mail and newspapers to be delivered all over the country. The office was not, however, responsible for all letters as there were separate offices (the Letter Carriers office, the Alphabet and post pain window) which catered for specific groups within the population e.g. mercantile groups. However, the Inland office still dealt with, on average, 6000 letters every morning and around the same amount of mail in the evening from the 433

postal towns.[1] There was considerable criticism of the structure and operation of the Inland office, with accusations being levelled at the office stating that is was massively overstaffed and that it could operate just as efficiently with nearly half the numbers of employees.[2]

4.2.11 British Mail Office

The British Mail office was a branch of the Post Office detailed to manage all correspondence that took place between Britain and Ireland. The office was not a part of the original Establishment in the Act of 1784 but rather was created by Lord Clancarty's reforms in 1807. This was mainly in response to the heavy volume of complaints, particularly from merchant groups, as the uncertain arrival times of the mail wherries from Holyhead meant that the delivery of the other mails was impeded.[3] However, the speedy dispatch of the English correspondence came to be regarded as being of paramount importance, both from a political and commercial point of view. So much so that it was recommended that the British Mail office be dismantled and amalgamated into an improved Inland office and that efforts be redoubled to improve the sorting system so that the most expedient dispatch could be achieved.[4]

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, 53
[2] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, Appendix 100
[3] Lewins, W. 1864 *Her Majesty's Mails: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the British Post Office,* Allen Lane, London
[4] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, 44

4.2.12 Alphabet and paid window office

This office was created for the collection of all letters which were supposed to be held in the post office until they were called for by the addressee's. The Alphabet office was a repository of mail but it soon became a repository of mail for very specific groups of people, in particular wealthy merchants as they were among the few who could afford to use the Alphabet office on a regular basis. The paid window was the service through which pre-paid mail was sent as in the early nineteenth century it was common practice for the postage to be paid by the addressee.

4.2.13 Bye, Dead and Mis-sent Letter office

This office was responsible for the charging of Deputy Postmasters for postage on the bye post routes. Bye (or by) posts refer to any service whereby the letters were carried on routes of lesser importance than the main routes, letters carried on subsidiary routes. They were not cross posts which were specifically established postal routes between two locations. The office was also charged with extending credit to the Deputy Postmasters for dead (undeliverable), mis-sent or re-directed letters.

4.2.14 Writing Office

Established in 1820, the purpose of this office was to maintain a check, and to limit if necessary, the heavy expenses incurred by the overuse of large volumes of printed material used by the Deputy Postmasters and the various offices of the post for the various official documents and forms. The office's introduction was hailed as a great

success as within one calendar year of its inception, printing expenses had been reduced by £1, 698 15 shillings and 7 ½ pence, a considerable sum at the time.[1] However, given the profligate use of printed material in the post office up till that point, this reduction is perhaps not all that astounding.

4.2.15 Surveyor's office

From the inauguration of the separate Irish Post Office, the office of Resident Surveyor was a sinecure, with no duties being performed in return for the substantial salary the job afforded the holder. The duties of Resident Surveyor were somewhat unclear given that the holder of the position consistently refused to engage on any activities within the Post Office and, in fact, refused to even attend the GPO. Thus, his responsibilities fell to other officers and offices, usually the office of the Secretary. The District or Riding Surveyors were a different matter entirely.

> "The efficiency and regularity of the Post Office very much depends on these officers. They can hardly travel too much through their districts, if they industriously apply themselves to their duties".[2]

The Surveyors acted as travelling inspectors or auditors for the various postal towns and routes, acting swiftly to ensure that fiscal propriety and the smooth operation of the post in the areas under their remit. They examined letter bills and opened mail bags, scrutinised the accounts of Deputy Postmasters and, in short, searched for various frauds in the post towns. There were four Riding Surveyors with two extra officers who usually, worked on secondment. Besides being inspectors, it was the job of the Surveyors to

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[1] *Ibid*, 62

[2] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, Appendix 9

ensure that the circulation of mail between postal towns was effected with speed and regularity. This was important because in a network where the major postal routes were laid out to provide a link with one central point (Dublin), communications between postal towns could and did suffer. So, it was up to the Surveyors to keep

> "...in exact order and celerity the circulation of letters between more than 400 post towns, exclusive of their connection with the capital and that the fixing and maintaining the proper routes for such circulation is the business of the District Surveyors, it will be seen that there are objects amply sufficient for their almost continual perambulations and that the connecting links of the great claim of correspondence are under their especial charge".[1]

4.3 Corruption

Having looked at the intricacies of the bureaucratic structure of the Irish Post Office we will now go on to examine one of the most significant issues which provided the impetus for the wholesale reform and re-organisation of both the bureaucracy and the network it presided over

4.3.1 The practice and abuse of franking

The practice of franking involves the superscription of letters with a signature or another distinctive mark which signifies that the letter is to be carried free of charge. It began in

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[1] *Ibid*

England in the seventeenth century, during the Cromwellian period.[1] At the time any letters which were deemed to be on the service of the Commonwealth (or the government) were allowed to go free of any postal charges. The privilege of allowing letters which were ostensibly on government service to be posted without any charges being levied continued throughout the seventeenth century. The franking privilege was extended in William's reign to include all members of parliament who were then allowed free postage of single inland letters during parliamentary sessions and for forty days before and after said sessions. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1711 in which an attempt was made to restrict the practice. However, the abuse of franking continued apace. In 1718 the amount of franks used was enormous. It was common practice for people to simply ask their local MP to sign their name on the envelope (or if they were unavailable, as they usually were, forge the MP's signature) to gain free postage. It was estimated that during this year that the unfranked mail exceeded the letters that paid postage by a factor of five. [2] As a result of this an Act was eventually passed in 1764

> "...For preventing frauds and abuses in relation to the sending and receiving of
>
> letters and packets free from the duty of postage."[3]

It remained the case that letters to and from the King went free, as well as the letters of the members of a sitting parliament, again for forty days before and after as well as during each parliamentary session. However, under the 1764 act the Member of Parliament had to personally write the whole address of the recipient along with his own name and the date of postage. The periods of free franking were well publicised. Notices

[1] Lewins, W. 1864 *op. cit.*
[2] Joyce, H. 1893 *The History of the Post Office from Its Establishment down to 1836*, Allen Lane, London
[3] Robinson, H. 1948 *The British Post Office: A History*, Greenwood Press, New Jersey, 79

were posted in the press and warning was made that no MP could have a letter sent to him free of charge except at his place of residence.[1]

In relation to the observance of the strictures of the 1764 Act, the parliamentary commissioners in their 1829 report noted that

> "In Ireland public officers are precluded from sending or receiving letters which are not on the business of their respective offices or their own private concerns; and members are restricted by the 15th section from receiving letters under cover not intended for themselves, families or persons resident in their houses; *these regulations do not appear to have been acted upon.* "(Author's emphasis)[2]

The 1764 Act attempted (rather ineffectually) to clear up the corruption and abuses inherent in the franking system. Merchants and traders only ever accepted letters on which the postage was already paid so the attempted clamp-down on franking abuses brought about a noticeable drop in the number of business letters they received which meant a decline in trade. One of the suggestions put forward as a solution to the problem was that MPs could spend an hour or two each day franking letters

> "Patriots will consider it a duty. Orators during recess instead of Harangues may exercise the pen, and Gentlemen of modest abilities may in this do their country material service".[3]

By the nineteenth century the abuse of franking had circumvented the regulations, which never more than were half-heartedly implemented, and grown so widespread that the then Postmaster General, Lord Clancarty, felt obliged to make the stamping out of franking abuses a key priority in his reforms of the Post Office which he instituted in

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[1] Reynolds, M. 1983 *op. cit.*
[2] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, appendix 162
[3] Reynolds, M. 1983 *op. cit.* 39

1807. Unlike in Britain, the situation in Ireland was such that the list of persons privileged to frank letters was large and the actual number franking letters was even larger. The abuses of the franking system were almost regarded as a national prerogative, despite the fact that the practice placed a great deal of strain on the resources of the Post Office. Privileged persons merely signed their names in the corner of the envelopes in order to receive free postage and also received far more postage under cover than a person of similar rank in Britain.

> "It further appears that the persons in the Post Office who have no privilege of
> franking by any Act of Parliament have certainly assumed the licence of sending
> and receiving letters free of postage, which they do not appear to have thought it
> necessary to confine to their own concerns; and it was stated to us generally that
> every officer in the department has considered himself entitled to the same
> privilege".[1]

One aspect of the haphazard nature of the franking system which the English inspectors noted was the widespread practice of allowing mail sent by and to charitable institutions and religious societies to be carried free of charge. But it was not only letters which were sent and received by these bodies but also (and most importantly for them given the nature of their activities) the circulation of books, papers and pamphlets free of postal charges. The postage on private letters was frequently circumvented by the secreting of letters within the covers of the aforementioned books or papers.[2] One other issue which caused considerable inconvenience to the Post Office when it came to the handling of franked mail was the size of the packages which were sent. The letters and documents

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[1] *Nineteenth report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue in Ireland and Great Britain: (Post Office Revenue - Ireland),* 1829, (353), XII, 86
[2] Joyce, H. 1893 *Op. cit.*

were often of manuscript length and were so large that the mails bags in which they were contained were too large and heavy to be carried which created further problems when it came to their transhipment and delivery.

The issue of franking continued to be a source of corruption and abuse throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century. For nearly thirty years after the Act of Union, Post Office employees regularly invoked what they regarded as their right to send and receive letters and packages free from postal charges. Regulations were eventually introduced after the departure of Edward Lees to the Edinburgh office in 1831 which gradually curbed the practice among Post Office employees. In 1832 an Act was passed in Parliament which sought to conclusively regulate the whole area of parliamentary privilege and franking. The precepts of the Act meant that MPs were no longer allowed to send more than ten nor receive more than fifteen letters per day.[1] However, as Colonel Maberly, the then Secretary of the Post Office, noted in 1836 things did not alter a great deal as a result of the Act as in Dublin

> …every species of contrivance that ingenuity can devise is resorted to for the purpose of evading postage.[2]

4.3.2 The Lees family

From the date of its independence to the year that it was re-integrated within the British postal system as a whole the Irish Post Office was under the direct control of the members of one family: The Lees family. From the closing decades of the eighteenth century to the fourth decade of the nineteenth century a Lees held the office of Secretary

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[1] Reynolds, M. 1983 *Op.cit.*
[2] Gregory, D. 1987, 'The friction of distance? Information circulation and the mails in nineteenth century England' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13(2),143

to the Post Office. Whilst it is true to say that during this fifty year period the Irish Post Office underwent great change and no inconsiderable improvement, it was also characterised, in much the same way Sir Henry Freeeling's stewardship of the contemporary British Post Office was, by widespread corruption and fraud throughout every branch of the mails and not least in its highest echelons. It was John Lees, and later his son Edward, who held the post of Secretary to the Irish Post Office throughout this time. John Lees was born in 1737 in Ayrshire in Scotland. Little is known about his early life but he first came to Ireland in the company of the Marquis of Townsend, whom he had met whilst on service in the army. John Lees was appointed to several positions in government, among them the Under-Secretary of the War Department but it was his appointment to the position of Secretary to the Post Office which holds the most interest for this research. The position, for Lees, was little more than a sinecure as he was heavily involved on other government business for a great deal of his time for example, being sent on a mission to Lord North, the Secretary of State for England, in October of 1780. Almost ten years after he was made Secretary to the Irish Post Office, John embarked on his first major undertaking relating to the postal service. He was sent to England by the then Lord Lieutenant, Lord Northington, to arrange for the separation of the Irish Post Office from the British system in 1783. The following February the move towards independence was made real. This was a noteworthy achievement and laid the foundations for future interdepartmental dealings between the Irish and British Post Offices.

Some details surrounding John Lees' somewhat interesting life are useful in illustrating why it was that his tenure as Secretary provided such fertile ground for the widespread

corruption. He had a family of eight children, the fourth son of which succeeded him as Secretary. In 1774 he built Blackrock House, a huge mansion outside the village of Blackrock on Dublin's southern coastline. Over the years he acquired several large properties at similarly fashionable addresses, notably in Parnell Square and Upper Mount Street. His wife died in 1805 and, after a period of prolonged ill-health, he himself died in 1811 in early November. His will, and the contents of his estate, raised interesting questions as to the exact nature of his term at the Post Office. In his capacity as Secretary he received an annual salary of £432 and a little over £2000 from several sinecures that he held. But his will bequeathed a very large sum of money to his beneficiaries. The exact figure is unknown but the lowest estimate puts it at £100,000 whilst several other commentators put it as high as £250,000.[1] The question remains as to how someone on such a relatively modest salary, with several houses to run and a large family to support, could accumulate such a sum?

The answers to such a question lie in the behaviour of both John and Edward in relation to the potential that the privileges of the office of Secretary offered in terms of fraud. John Lees was an apparatchik, a product of his time, and saw his multiple positions within the Post Office in a dual light: as a duty and as financial opportunity which should be taken the greatest advantage of.

Edward Smith Lees was born in March 1783. He was the fourth son of John Lees and in 1801 was made Joint Secretary of the Post Office with his father. He was only eighteen at the time and, unlike his brothers, did not attend Trinity College Dublin. The position he was appointed to was, in practical terms, the most powerful in the Post Office so his

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[1] Bayly, Beatrice Butler 1953 'John and Edward Lees' *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. XIII, no. 3 and 4, 138-147

youth made it a particularly surprising appointment. His appointment was made on the 25th of March 1801. The terms of the patent appointing him Secretary confirmed the benefit of survivorship so that, upon his father's death in 1811, he continued in his position of Secretary, albeit alone.

Edward Lees was an effective administrator and during his tenure delivery rates, times and routes were all improved upon and expanded so much so that by the time of his departure in 1831, the level of postal activity and the scope of the delivery network were unprecedented. It was during Edward's term that the mail coach network really extended which occurred in tandem with considerable improvements in the road network. The number of letter offices and the Penny Posts were also significantly increased.

However, although Edward was frequently a zealous and efficient administrator, the changes which came about in the overall efficiency of the network were coupled with widespread corruption in which Edward Lees took active part. The duties of the Secretary have already been outlined in a previous section as have the activities of the Clerks of the Roads but it is worth re-iterating them in order to illustrate the extent of Lees' embezzlement.

It was the appointment of Lord Clancarty in 1807 as Postmaster General that Lees' corruption was brought to light. The commission of inquiry into Fees and Gratuities of 1809 went into great detail on the exact nature of the offices of the postal service and what each officer's duties were. In their examination of the office of the Secretary they drew the conclusion that the Secretary was to all intents and purposes a free agent in both daily administration and policy making. The Secretary's duties were

> "To maintain the discipline of the office, and to see that the officers of each
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> department are attentive in their discharge of their several duties; to take care that

the revenue is duly collected, and faithfully accounted for; and upon his discretion depends the amount of a great portion of contingent expenditure, he being the sole judge of propriety of incurring the expense of and the reasonableness of the charge".[1]

This situation had only come about as a direct result of the absence, so prolonged as to be almost institutionalised, of the Postmasters General from overseeing the activities of the Post. As the commissioners report remarked, the possession of such responsibility by the Secretary

"…Was certainly never intended by the original constitution of the office."[2]

Originally, the Secretary was to have a superintending power above him i.e. the Postmaster General.

"To the good management of this important department, and for effectually checking and controlling its expenditure, we conceive the existence of a paramount superintending authority, daily exercising its functions, to be essentially requisite. To the want of such control may be attributed the defective state of the General Post office."[3]

It was this lack of oversight which allowed Edward to get away with explicitly fraudulent practices which, when revealed, attracted considerable censure. Lees himself was forced to admit that a signed copy of the minutes of a Board meeting at which his brother Thomas was appointed Chief Clerk and Clerk of the Munster Road, were fictitious as the meeting never actually took place. [4] The defects in the systems of communication, and the levels of mutual antipathy which existed between the two Postmasters General,

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[1] *Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Fees and Gratuities*, 1809, 25
[2] *Ibid*, 26
[3] *Ibid*, 25
[4] Bayly, B.B. 1953 *op. cit.*

allowed for this, and activities like it, to take place. Another example of Lees being forced to admit impropriety was the case of the awarding of a mail coach contract for the line of mail from Dublin to Belfast. In the letter that follows from the then Chief Secretary, William Gregory, Lees' personal acquaintance with one of the mail coach contractors comes in for some unfavourable comments.

"Sir,

I am commanded by the Lord Lieutenant to acquaint you that Mr. Disney and Mr. Jebb having undertaken to investigate a serious charge made by the Earl of Rosse against you have made a report to His Excellency which he has taken into serious consideration. The charge against you was in substance that Mr. John Anderson of Fermoy having entered into a contract with the Postmasters General for the conveyance of His Majesty's Mails between Dublin and Belfast and having immediately assigned his contract to Messrs. Anderson and Grier of Newry, the former contractors, you with a full knowledge of the contract concealed it from the Postmasters General, by which concealment Mr. Anderson was enabled to obtain more favourable terms from Government on a subsequent contract than he would have done if the fact had been disclosed. His Excellency concurs with Mr. Disney and Mr. Jebb in thinking that the evidence adduced establishes the main fact alleged against you namely that being acquainted with the arrangement made between Mr. Anderson Messrs. Anderson and Grier you concealed that knowledge from the Postmasters General and His Majesty's Government.

I am desired to transmit to you the accompanying extract from the Report of Mr. Disney and Mr. Jebb which explains with sufficient accuracy and detail the grounds on which they have drawn a conclusion unfavourable to your conduct

and in which His Excellency reluctantly but fully concurs, while His Excellency acquits you of any corrupt motive with a view to your own personal advantage in concealing a material fact from the superior officers of your department with which they ought to have been made acquainted. He considers that you have been guilty of a great breach of your official duty.

I am at the same time to add that His Excellency has taken into consideration the concluding paragraph of the report of Mr. Disney and Mr. Jebb which is annexed to this letter; and in consideration of your general zeal for the Public Service and diligence in the discharge of your Public Duty has determined not to visit the particular instance of a departure from that duty with any severe mark of his displeasure, than the censure which this letter conveys".[1]

It is worth noting, and illustrative of the power structures of the day, that although Lees' conduct was complained of and investigated, it was merely the case that he was 'censured' by the Lord Lieutenant and incurred no further punishment.

There were several other areas where Lees could be accused of profiting from graft and embezzlement. The excessive costs of stationery were criticised by the Commissioners of Inquiry into Fees and Gratuities, particularly when it became clear that no accounts were kept on quantities, consumption or cost. Lees frequently used the Post Office funds as his own personal piggy bank, spending £180 of the total annual allocation for office furniture on decorating his own house. Private property which passed through the Post Office was embezzled at an alarmingly high rate with over £80,000 worth of personal property being embezzled over a four-year period from 1806-1809.[2] Lees himself personally claimed huge amounts of money for his travelling expenses yet never felt the need to justify or

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1821, Vol. IV, 267-268
[2] Bayly, B. B. 1953 *op. cit.*

even to take note of the destinations or reasons for the journey.[1] Lees employed his brother William as a surveyor and gave several other relatives and acquaintances positions within the Post Office, for example Peter Alma, the husband of Lees' half-sister was given a pension of £70 per annum for essentially doing nothing. He allowed his voluble and bigoted brother, Sir Harcourt Lees, free rein in his inveterate letter writing, particularly for the newspaper, *The Antidote*. The clerks in the letter office were frequently employed in writing and copying Harcourt's opinions.[2]

The widespread abuses of the system of franking have already been outlined as have the frauds perpetrated by the Clerks of the Roads of which Edward was one in his capacity as Clerk of the Leinster Road. Although Edward was considerably more active in improving the postal network and paid more attention to increasing its efficiency as a bureaucracy, the Post Office in his time was riven with graft and corruption. The endemic practices of fraud and embezzlement were among the key factors in persuading the British government finally that the only way to achieve a truly efficient postal service which would operate for the benefit of the public rather than its officials was to bring it under direct metropolitan control and re-integrate the postal systems of the two islands. It was only after several parliamentary committees and numerous investigations into his conduct that Edward Lees was finally transferred to the Post Office in Edinburgh in 1831

4.4 Conclusions

Inefficiency in the operations of the modern public services is something which we today complain about vigorously yet by comparison with the early nineteenth century Irish Post

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[1] *Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Fees and Gratuities*, 1809
[2] Reynolds, M. 1983 *op.cit.*

Office, today's postal service would come away with a very clean bill of health indeed. Although the bureaucratic structure of the post was ostensibly clearly defined problems frequently cropped up as to whom exactly was responsible for discharging the duties of the offices. The obsolete practices and poor management which were a seemingly integral part of the Irish Post Office at the time had a knock-on effect throughout the postal network as a whole. In this chapter the abuse of the franking system, with its consequent loss of revenue, was a case study for the corrupt practices of the Post Office as a whole. The patronage system which prevailed throughout government service applied equally in the Post Office as can be seen from the inheritance of the office of Secretary, the most important position in the Post office, by Edward Lees from his father. Sinecures, the abuse of expenditure, the use of Post Office revenue and accounts for meeting personal costs or debts: all of these things created a situation whereby the principal job of the Post, that of delivering mail, was not being met to the satisfaction of the government. These practices and the negative implications for the general public, for trade and for the government were among for the primary reasons for the reform of the office and its amalgamation within a wider British Post Office. In order to meet that criterion the postal bureaucracy was centralised in both office and operation. For example, before 1831 the individual heads of the various departments would have communicated with local postmaster and levied fines etc. but the reforms meant that all of the correspondence of the department was brought under the remit of the Secretary's Office. The District Surveyors became an adjunct of the Secretary's Office acting under his direct control and reporting directly to him. Whereas previously the local Postmasters were granted the authority to contract for horse post and mail car lines, this privilege was

taken from them and placed under the care of the Surveyors. They sought out the lowest terms possible and submitted their reports to the Secretary and the Postmaster-general directly. No contract could be made without the express permission of the Postmaster-general. Terms could be negotiated by the local Postmasters but the final word rested with the Postmaster-general.[1] The bureaucracy of the Post was as important to the state as the network itself. One could not have one without the other.

> "Thus, it may probably appear from the preceding observations, the Secretary's Office is the mainspring of the department, both in Dublin and throughout the country; it is the sole medium of communication, on official subjects, between the Postmaster-general and his officers. Looking at the number of new offices established, new communications opened, extension of free delivery around Dublin, the general acceleration of the mails, the more quick circulation of letters by cross posts, the superior conveyances, and both the reduction of Postmaster's balances, and of the general expense of management for the period which the return to which these observations refer embraces, it is respectfully submitted that a just idea may be formed whether the time has been mis-spent".[2]

The changing geographies of the post were more than just the altering of the postal network. The centralisation processes at work in government meant that the structural geography of the Post was affected along with the network, changes which the state saw as a holistic necessity in order to achieve its aim of securing a sphere of freely circulating information under its remit.

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[1] *Returns of General Post Office (Dublin) and Post Offices in Ireland* 1836, H.C. Sessional papers (35) I
[2] *Ibid*, 473

Chapter 5

Geographies of governmentality, knowledge and the Post

Chapter 5 Geographies of governmentality, knowledge and the Post

"Oh turn their wealth to arms, and make

War for thy beloved sake

On wealth and war and fraud whence they

Drew the power which is their prey

...Let the laws of your own land

Good or ill between ye stand,

Hand to hand and foot to foot

Arbiters of the dispute"[1]

5.1 Information circulation, governmentality and geography

This chapter will examine how the concepts of governance and governmentality have particular relevance for the study of the mails. The new forms of government which were emerging at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries developed in similar but noticeably different ways in Britain and Ireland. A multiplicity of structures and institutional arrangements came into being, or were radically altered, as a result of these changes. The postal network was such a structure. This chapter will outline what is meant by the terms 'governmentality' and 'liberal governance' before

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[1] Shelley, P.S. 1994 'The Masque of Anarchy', Canto *LXIII* and Canto *LXXXII,* in *The works of P.B. Shelley*, Wordsworth poetry library, Hertfordshire, 344-346

going on to look at how these notions came to shape early nineteenth century Ireland in general and the postal service in particular.

In order to discuss these concepts it is necessary to set the context of the discussion and to pose certain questions which, though apparently vast and seemingly simplistic, are necessary in any attempt to coherently problematize the history of government and the state in any country but especially so in Ireland. How did the state come to be so powerful? What were the strategies, differences, tactics, engagements, negotiations, institutions, hierarchies and arrangements which were formulated to both activate and compose the very state itself?

These questions problematize the entire concept of the state. They force us to re-examine the issues and events and, in the end, the material things (offices, bureaucracies, flags, treaties etc) which corporealise the state. Any description will inevitably require the lynch-pin of a narrative because the thing in question, the state, did not develop in a historical vacuum. But it is in attempting to answer these questions that the most challenging and fertile analyses of the state and government will emerge and which will allow for a much more rigorous scrutiny of the geography of power and government in early nineteenth century Ireland.

In the nineteenth century there were consistent improvements in the differing communications systems, a situation which was in marked contrast with the eighteenth century. These improvements, in both organisational and technological terms, allowed for a considerable increase in the level and regularity of circulation, particularly in the circulation of information. The growth in the circulation of information (letters, newspapers, pamphlets etc) was greatly facilitated by the expanding geography of the

postal system. That system was evolving to provide a hitherto unprecedented level of service to the population of Ireland as a whole.

At the same time a significant shift in the conception and structure of the state and government began to take place. Government was changing to become far more comprehensive and sophisticated than ever before. This shift will be dealt with in detail but firstly the focus of this chapter will now turn to the concepts of governmentality and liberal governance and their relevance for this research.

5.2 The emergence of governmentality

5.2.1 The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

The notion of governmentality is a complex one and in order to examine it in greater depth we must turn to the work of Michel Foucault, whose extensive writings on the subject framed much of the current and past debate. Governmentality can perhaps be briefly encapsulated as that way in which the state has contrived to shape, control and manage the world. Governmentality is "…the methods employed as the state both represents and intervenes in the domains it seeks to govern."[1]

Foucault traces back his theories on governmentality to the shift in government which occurred in the sixteenth century. He outlines how governmentality, or the 'art' of government, emerged from bio-mimetic models of social organisation

> "The art of government as becomes apparent in the literature, is essentially
> concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy – that is to

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[1] Murdoch, J. and Neil Ward, 1997, 'Governmentality and territoriality: the statistical manufacture of Britain's 'national farm'', *Political Geography*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 308

say, the correct way of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children and servants) and of making the family fortunes prosper- how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state."[1]

The term economy is not to be understood in its modern sense of a field of mercantile or commercial activity but rather in the sixteenth century it meant a form of government. Foucault was not primarily interested in the specific territorial boundaries or histories of governmental institutions but rather in studying how government operated as an activity within the defined territorial boundaries. Obviously, he did not ignore the importance of the establishment and the control of these boundaries given that they were, and are, the *sine qua non* for the existence of the state. But it was the question of how to govern, of what activities should be undertaken by the state that Foucault addressed and it is that which concerns us most here. For Foucault the actual size or extent of the territory to be governed was not as significant as how the territory was to be governed and that in turn meant that it was the components, or things to be found in the territory which concerned and constituted the activity of governance. He cites the example of Frederick the Great comparing Holland and Russia, one being a relatively tiny space, the other being a vast territory and the yet the smaller of the two possessed far greater wealth, commercial activity and military power in spite of that size differential.[2] Thus government was about activities, similar to those of managing a household, which secure and make successful and wealthy a state. It is these process of wealth generation, of securing its borders, of

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[1] Foucault, M. 2001. 'Governmentality' in Faubion, J. D. (ed.) 2000. *Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault: 1954-1984 v. 3,* Penguin Press, London, 207
[2] *Ibid*

administering it, that the 'economy' of government, of the state is achieved. The disposition of the things to be governed is key to this process or, at least, the *understanding* of the dispositions of the things to be governed. Although it may be regarded as the primary determinant of what *can* be governed, the issue of territory is only a part of what Foucault would see as the ensemble which only when taken together can be fully understood.

Foucault separated out the act of governing from that actively symbolic thing with which it had previously been inextricably linked, namely sovereignty. The history of sovereignty, the history of there being a personage in whom all authority was vested, did not cease but continued although with considerably less impact and influence on the 'art of government'. Government from the sixteenth century onwards, according to Foucault, no longer depended upon the activity and person of the sovereign.

For Foucault what took place in the seventeenth, eighteenth and into the nineteenth century was that governmentality became something which regarded the dispositions of 'things' as its ultimate consideration. Wealth, resources, climate, irrigation, crop fertility, means of subsistence, utilities, hospitals, schools, the armed forces: All of these things were of such importance that their disposition, they way they were ordered or suitably placed became the primary occupation of government.

The state had created a postal service in Ireland in the sixteenth century, some years after its inception in Britain. However, in its initial stages on both islands the postal service consisted of Royal post horse routes which were occasionally used by powerful and wealthy citizens.[1] For the most part the postal system existed as a means for the state to

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[1] Brayshay, M. 1991 'Royal post-horse routes in England and Wales: the evolution of the network in the later-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 4, 373-389

communicate with itself. The administrative outposts and ports were the areas which were of greatest importance to the authorities in Dublin and London. Knowledge travelled through the medium of the Post but it was not the free circulation of knowledge. It was a specific and defined type of information which the mails carried at this time. The knowledges carried, and hence supported, by the Post were state knowledges insofar as they allowed government to simultaneously function at the level of the local and the national and directly assisted in contemporary processes of state formation.[1] Thus in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the postal service in Britain and Ireland was essentially an agency of the state reserved for the for the state's own use. Information circulation was restricted to the officials of the state and limited elite of wealthy individuals. Although there were no hard and fast rules dictating who could or could not use the post the expense alone would militate against its use by less ordinary, well-off members of the public. In the Early Modern period there was far more emphasis on the restriction of the post and hence the *transfer* of knowledge as opposed to its *circulation*. Governmentality, like the Post, was concerned with consolidating its position rather than by expanding its activities in any significant way. The conception of what government was might have been changing but its practice, along with the Post, would take time to mutate into the recognisable forms of state and agency, analogues of which are seen even today.

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[1] Brayshay, M, Harrison, P and Chalkley, B. 1998 'Knowledge, nationhood and governance: the speed of the Royal post in early-modern England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24, 265-288

5.2.2 The eighteenth century

It was not enough merely to pass laws directing one path or other to be taken in relation to all of the governable activities and resources. A multiplicity of tactics which included the creation of legislation was devised and deployed in order that the desired end was achieved. In the eighteenth century it became increasingly clear that what good government required was wisdom. Yet it was not wisdom as traditionally understood, that of good judgement, but rather a direct knowledge of things, the collection and collation of which allowed government to grow and evolve. The new forms of government were based upon rational principles rather than the natural or divine laws which had underpinned authority for so long. This wisdom, or knowledge of things, was to be the guiding light of government.

It is in fully implementing it that the State managed to identify population as a governable entity through the usage of political technologies such as statistics. It was in considering the territory to be governed through the lens of 'populations' rather than, as previously, through the perspective of the nation-state as a household that a significant re-alignment of the whole concept of economy (and, for that matter, society) was achieved. The bio-mimetic hierarchy of monarchy was no longer a viable model of government, in operational terms at least. The (relative) lack of sophistication in terms of bureaucratic organisation was insupportable and opened the door, necessarily, to far more complex forms of governmentality. Population possesses too massive a range of phenomena that must be considered and which are irreducible to the level of the household unit e.g. epidemics, labour forces etc.

It was in the elevation of the new perspective of population that governable 'economies' and 'societies' began to emerge. How this took place involved the cultivation of the resources, the objects and subjects of the state, the 'things and humans', in order that the means of subsistence would be amplified and that the wealth, strength and greatness of the state would be ensured. This form of governmentality, which preceded liberal governance, differed from its heir in that it sought to operate on a territory and its inhabitants in a way that was opaque to knowledge. This one-way view was an attempt by the eighteenth century state to create a 'panoptic' approach to government. The state strove to isolate, particularise and examine the conduct and actions of all those who lived, worked and died within its boundaries. The state wished to see but did not want its citizens to look back at it. The gaze of the state was intended to survey those individuals living within its borders yet at the same time its activities were not construed to be the business of those citizens whose activities it scrutinised. It was an attempt which was destined to fail as the state never achieved the complete 'panopticon' of government due to the myriad of complexities which this model of government would have entailed but also because the attempt was stultified by those groups and individuals who resisted the many forms of control and viewed them, in many cases, as both unwarranted intrusions and direct threats to their ways of life.

But what did this mean in practical, material terms? The eighteenth century state, before it could enact itself as the state, had to gain knowledge, or wisdom, of those it sought to govern. This was a desire which was shaped by the imperatives of the military-fiscal State, with all of its attendant cliques and sectionalist interests within the ruling classes, rather than to achieve the governance of the population by virtue of the apprehension of

its fundamental characteristics.[1] The creation and collection of knowledge was a process which was deliberately obscured from the gaze of the public. Governmentality in this sense sought specific knowledge of its citizens but knowledge that was also invasive and which was frequently regarded as a sinister process.

The postal service was an excellent example of the kinds of drives and imperatives which allowed the eighteenth century state to be quite so flexible. Whereas before the post was restricted in an informal manner to those individuals who were influential or possessed social or political status, the postal service of the eighteenth century was opened up to anyone with the cash to use it. The century of 'Old Corruption' meant a century of embourgeoisment in Britain and the same thing, to a lesser extent, in Ireland. The post was but one of a series of technologies and tactics by which the position of the landed gentry was retrenched and secured or, at the very least, deeply embedded. The physical landscape of Ireland altered along with the political and economic as the Enclosure Acts destroyed and fenced in previously common land. Across that landscape the local elites sent their letters to each other, doing what is utterly essential in all forms of control: staying in touch.[2]

The development of the postal network in the eighteenth century was, when compared with the nineteenth, slow. Yet it did develop as the road network grew and the mail coach network, in its restrained way, also expanded. But the state did not embark upon these improvements according to a central plan. They were, like so much else in the eighteenth century, not the direct responsibility of the state. It was left up to the Post Office officials

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[1] Brewer, J. 1989 *The sinews of power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783*, Unwin Hyman, London

[2] Braudel, F. 1988, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-eighteenth century, vol. II, The Wheels of Commerce*, Phoenix Press, London,

to maintain or discard the roads as they saw fit without reference to the oversight of central government. The eighteenth century state saw the post as a money spinner, as one of the few government departments which made money. It was not for the state to engage in the kinds of improvements which would later take place in the nineteenth century. The postal service was what made money and war was what that money was spent on. The financing of government projects was one of the main reasons for the existence of the Post Office.

However, the activities of the Post were left to the vagaries of postal officials who saw, as the state did, the need to maximise revenue as the guiding principle behind any of the actions that were undertaken in either directing or improving the postal network. State agency as private enterprise was a formula which ran throughout eighteenth century governmentality. Not for nothing was the matrix of state agencies, local elites and mercantile groups known as 'Old Corruption'.[1]

So this mix of capitalism and government produced a postal service which offered its services to anyone who could afford them. Not many could, at least not regularly in any case. But the mails offered a vital point of contact between the state and mercantile capitalism. They communicated with each other through the medium of correspondence and in doing so constructed another form of governmentality which allowed for an expansion in the spectrum of those who dominated eighteenth century Britain and Ireland. The emergence of governmentality went hand in hand with the more subtle forms of control that mercantile capitalism offered. As commercial groups grew in both power

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[1] Corrigan, P. and D. Sayer, 1985 *The great arch: English state formation as cultural revolution,* Blackwell Press, Oxford

and prominence the state came to terms with their rise by instituting a more permissive governmentality which protected its interests whilst at the same time facilitating the growth and spread of the capitalist economy. This is highlighted when one considers who the mails were considered to be *for,* who used them on a regular basis.

In the nineteenth century, the forms of governmentality which were created were intended to secure a sphere of freely circulating information. Hannah, in his study of governmentality and the historical geography of the American nation-state in the nineteenth century, makes a highly relevant point here. In discussing the dualism of programs for the mastery of America's national territory he notes that these programs "...resolved the contradiction between the need for fixity in the 'objects' of control and the need for mobility on the part of the 'subjects' of control".[1] Although he is referring to the gendered dualism of the national programs, the point is applicable in the context of the postal service. In substituting the postal network for the 'object' of control and the correspondents for the 'subjects' of control, we can see how the techniques of governmentality operated as a mutually beneficial dualism or symbiosis the flexibility of which allowed for greater responsiveness to the conditions of existence it would encounter in Ireland.

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[1] Hannah, M. 2000 *Governmentality and the mastery of territory in nineteenth century America*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 223

5.3 The nineteenth century

5.3.1 The Act of Union and after

The advent of the nineteenth century brought with it the first institution of the new colonial state, the Act of Union. The Act joined Britain and Ireland in political and legislative union and was the beginning of a lengthy series of processes which attempted to bind Ireland as tightly as possible to a metropolitan amalgam. The Act of Union of 1801 was a damaged compromise between various interested parties. It did not, of course, take into account the opinions and feelings of the rabble-rousing United Irishmen with their dissident inspiration taken from French Radicalism which itself saw its fullest expression a little over ten years previously. For the principal groups involved the Act provided one thing above all else: stability. But it was the appearance of stability rather than its actuality which eventuated from the Act's auspicious and sinister beginnings.

For Irish Anglicans the Act was a demotion in many ways as they, as a group, ceded legislative power to London but in doing so they recognised, as Irish Presbyterians and the colonial government also did, that the incorporation of Ireland was the most effective way of guaranteeing the continuation of their respective stakes of control. Moderate, what might be termed 'parliamentary' Catholics (slightly tongue-in-cheek as the vast majority of Catholics couldn't even vote much less stand for election) and the Church hierarchy were broadly in favour of the passing of the Act as it provided a basis for, as they saw it, their eventual political and civil emancipation. They felt that this was an objective which could be best achieved by less dangerous means than those of armed insurrection. The Act was a messy and difficult piece of legislation that nevertheless bore the brunt of the

British state's desire to see its 'exposed flank' safely restrained within a more definite but above all more stable Imperial ambit. Born out of fear the Act of Union was a heavy weight on the potentials and possibilities of nineteenth century Ireland and so it proved, particularly in relation to government.

Although the Act of Union could be described as *the* key date of nineteenth century Irish history it was not, as mentioned, a thoroughly worked-out master plan of colonial control. That attempted achievement could only be brought about by systematic and careful attention but also, more importantly, by change. Change was required if the nature of the colony was to be modified in such a way as to provide a lasting basis for continued control. The aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion, with its uncomfortable Leveller comparisons, continued to rumble on while the prospect of war with France loomed, expensive and bloody, on the horizon. Consequently the British state needed to maximise revenue and was, as a result, reluctant to produce or promote a manifesto of change within Britain or Ireland. The desuetude of the eighteenth century State was delayed by the interference of war and money. Two things which had previously done so much to sustain it now put off its death throes. As an aside it should be mentioned that surrounding the Act of Union was a cornucopia of bribes, fees and patronage as the Ascendancy elite sought to extract maximum recompense for the loss of Grattan's Parliament. Such activities, as we have seen, were commonplace but the scale was highly unusual as British government officials sought to smooth the passage of the Act. Value judgements aside, what this meant was that there was period of quiescence, a stasis of the state as it dealt with the military situation on the European continent.

From the point of view of government very little took place between the years 1801 and

1815. This statement is somewhat misleading but it does contain a few grains of truth.

Life continued but war remained. War was the theme of the opening years of the century

and occupied the attention of the British State. Ireland or parts of it anyway, benefited a

great deal from the Napoleonic Wars, at least in economic terms. The closing decades of

the eighteenth and the opening ones of the nineteenth century were a period of economic

progress for Ireland and, as O'Grada has noted, "...the economy continued to grow,

spurred on by the wartime demand and the Irish share of British merchandise imports and

exports managed to hold its own".[1] In the period following the Napoleonic Wars Ireland

experienced the beginnings of what could be described as an economic slump. In 1820

the boom halted completely as the wartime high of prices and profits fell sharply with

severe consequences for much of the agricultural sector as the value of exports, if not

their volume, fell.[2] As the 1810's came to a close a shift began to occur in government in

Britain and Ireland which would have long-lasting implications for the nature of the

colonial state.

5.3.2 Examining the shift in government

The 'shift' in government presents us with a difficulty not least because there are those

who would question the very nature and presence of the shift itself.[3] The broadest (or, at

least, the most prevalent) understanding is that of the statist historians and writers such as

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[1] Ó'Gráda, C. 1994. *Ireland: a new economic history, 1780-1939*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 4-5
[2] Cullen, L.M. 1981 *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* , Batsford Academic Press, London
[3] Bellamy, C. 1988. *Administering central-local relations: The Local Government Board in its fiscal and cultural context,* Manchester University Press, Manchester; Cromwell, V. 1977. *Revolution or evolution : British government in the nineteenth century*, Longman Press, London; Ogborn, M. 1992 'Local power and state regulation in nineteenth century Britain' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17, , 215-226

Beatrice Webb who embodied and promoted an officially accepted narrative in which there was a consistent movement from 'partnership' to 'agency' in terms of the relationship between central and local government. This shift ostensibly began in the nineteenth century and continued well apace into the twentieth. This transition from partnership to agency meant that central government could exert a much greater degree of control in relation to the finance of government and that local government structures were steadily marginalised by their increasing dependence on central government to fund their activities. This meant, in effect, a consistent centralisation of both power and function to the detriment of local government. A counter thesis to this model argued that local systems of power and operation were far more significant as regional and local variations in political structures meant that there was far too stringent an emphasis placed on the partnership-agency transition. Some form of transition, the argument runs, took place but it was considerably more gradual and much less influential than the previous model would have one believe.

The third model is not so much a fully worked out model as an attenuated amalgam of the two. It could be described as the 'contingent' model of government and it provides a much more flexible framework for analysing the centre-local relations of government in the nineteenth century. The siting of post offices, the location of postal routes, the creation of mail coach lines: All of these things were part and parcel of the 'game' that was the state's relationship with its official and unofficial partners and agents in its localities. As Christine Bellamy has pointed out even using language such as "agent" and "partner" gives a misleading tinge to the processes occurring at the time. Rather she argues that the model of relations between central and local government should be

viewed in terms of reciprocity and exchange, as a holistic negotiation rather than as an appropriation of power initiated by central government bureaucrats.[1]

Geographers have examined this issue before. For example Ogborn argues that the relationship between central and local government in the nineteenth century was not, as it has been presented by Foucault, Corrigan et al, a zero-sum game of power between central and local authority. Ogborn argues for a much more nuanced comprehension of centre-local relations in government whereby the greater accumulation of power at the central level does not necessarily mean less power at the local level. The attention given to this relationship has always retained a regard or a privileging of the notion that power increased dramatically and was concentrated in the centre rather than at the locality. Ogborn disputes this, arguing that this ignores the nature of relationships within which power is deployed and exhibited across time and, more importantly, space.[2]

The assertion that power shifted from one location to another as the central state grabbed it all is grossly simplistic. However, that there was significant re-organisation of government structures and the creation of new techniques of governmentality which allowed for at least the focus of the state to encompass as many spaces of activity as it could. The state *was* expanding, of that there is little doubt. Where theorists and scholars such as Corrigan[3], Foucault[4] and MacDonagh[5] differ from Ogborn and Bellamy is in the interpretation of the implications of that expansion.

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[1] Bellamy, C. 1988 *op. cit.* esp. Chapters 1 and 7
[2] Ogborn, M.1992, *op. cit.*
[3] Corrigan, P. and D. Sayer, 1985 *op. cit.*

[4] Foucault, M. 2000 *The archaeology of knowledge*, Routledge Press, London,
[5] MacDonagh, O. 2003 *Ireland: The Union and its aftermath,* University College Dublin Press, Dublin

The 1820's were a decade of change within Ireland. Changes which were deemed necessary as the State saw that the existing structures of government were not adequate for the task of securing Ireland as a stable colony and, in fact, many of them were failing. The plethora of commissions and committees which were held placed practically every sector of society under their microscopic lens. These were among new methods of 'knowing' the individuals over whom the state purported to claim dominion. The growth of 'Statistics' which eclipsed the incumbent vehicle of governmentality, namely 'political arithmetic', was purported to constitute and to reveal 'civil society'.[1] Central government began to flex the muscles granted it by the morass of multi-variant social statistics flowing from the numerous committees and commissions. What new methods of knowing did the state institute in Ireland?

5.3.3 From Law to Ordnance: New technologies of governmentality

To answer this question we return to the period after the hiatus in administrative activity in the first fifteen years of the century. The flurry of re-organisation which took place after the Council of Vienna was sponsored, so to speak, by the English political economists. But it was carried out, in the main, at odds with the finer points of intellectual and social liberty which they so proudly cherished. Yet at the same time a variety of techniques, particularly statistical techniques, were created which were themselves examples of the new technologies of governmentality which came into being around this time. Examples of these fundamental characteristics and the technological innovations used to gather and collate them are legion but by 1818 State educational surveys were being made across Britain. The Registration of Births, Deaths and

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[1] Joyce, P. 2003 *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City,* Verso, London

Marriages Act of 1836 was a massive leap forward in the recognition of governable subjects. Census-taking was instituted in 1800 and by 1841 elaborate, sophisticated census tracts were being published which contained multiple levels of data about the constituent population. [1]

These technologies of government were intimately linked with the emergence of liberalism and grew to be synonymous with what later could be termed liberal governmentality. The flowering of information circulation in both the private and public realms was deeply significant in terms of the structure and *constitution* (in a metasystemic sense) of the state, particularly in relation to the notion of political economy.

The emerging concept of statistics was one which grew to be synonymous with the forms of political economy which evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. Statistics, their collection, tabulation and analysis, were central to the new methods of knowledge which made up a great deal of the changing nature of governmentality in which the political administration sought to achieve a wholly governable society with the aid of new bureaucratic techniques.

> "Statistics are that comprehensive Part of municipal Philosophy, which states
> and defines the Situation, Strength, and Resources of a Nation, and is a Kind of
> political Abstract, by which the Statesman may be enabled to calculate Finances,
> as well as guide the Economy of his Government". [2]

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[1] *ibid*

[2] Capper, B. 1801 *A Statistical Account of the Population, Cultivation, Produce and Consumption of England and Wales,* p. ix quoted in David Eastwood 1989 'Amplifying the province of the legislature': the flow of information and the English state in the early nineteenth century' in *Historical Research* LXII, 289

The concept of statistics emerged on the European continent, principally in Germany and it, when extended to the realm of Britain, involved the mapping of the wealth, strength, resources and above all happiness of the nation. Measurement of the happiness of the nation proved unrealistic but what was key to the new practice of statistics was that unlike the old political arithmetic as pioneered by William Petty in the Down Survey, the information that was gathered and aggregated statistically was information or knowledge which dwelt in the public realm and not information which was jealously and rigorously guarded by the state. In fact, many of the statistical methods which were used by the state were developed by those who possessed status and influence *e.g.* doctors and clergymen but who were not agents of the state and who were in fact frequently its critics.[1]

As has been maintained Ireland's position as a 'semi-colonial' element within the metropolitan sphere meant that its colonial experience was in many ways divisive and contradictory in terms of the received model of classical colonial administration.[2] The government felt that it was able to intervene directly in many areas because that was, quite simply, their only choice. In, for example, the area of law and order the processes of centralisation entailed the creation, by the mid 1830s, of a single, unified police force under one command. In the eighteenth century law enforcement was still the preserve of landed gentry and the rural middle classes in their capacities of resident magistrates(or justices of the peace) and grand jurors. The system of law enforcement was sporadically administered and haphazard frequently relying on regular army detachments to capture wanted criminals. For example as this letter from the Chief Secretary Viscount Castlereagh to the Postmasters General in April of 1799 shows

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[1] Joyce, 2003, *op.cit.*
[2] Attridge, D. and M. Howes, 2000, *Semicolonial Joyce,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

Dublin Castle, 20th April, '99

To the Right Honourable Postmaster General,

My Lord,

I have laid before my Lord Lieutenant Mr. Lees' letter of the 11th inst. with one from Colonel Finlay relative to the expenses of the party of the troops employed in pursuit of the mail robbers and I am commanded by His Excellency to signify to your Lordships his approbation of your repaying these expenses amounting to 23 pounds and 8 pence,

Castlereagh.[1]

This was, however, was felt to be an unsatisfactory and expensive method of law enforcement by both the civilian and the military authorities. The series of disturbances which occurred in the opening years of the century culminated in a law being passed whereby the Lord Lieutenant was empowered to appoint a Chief Constable for each barony, to direct the justices of the peace to nominate a number of constables and the force was to be equipped by the government but at the expense of the respective counties.[2] This ultimately resulted in the unified national police force which was created in the 1830's, twenty years before a similar force was to be introduced in Britain.

The creation of national police force is just one example of the new administrative idealism which found its fullest expression in the Utilitarianism of those such as Bentham and Mill. All administration, in the period after the Council of Vienna in 1815, was to be brought under centralised control. For, as James Morris points out, "...an Ireland run from Dublin [was] an affront to the hierarchy of Empire."[3] A series of measures designed

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1799, Vol. II, 35
[2] MacDowell, R. B. 'Administration and the public services, 1800-70' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A New History of Ireland: Volume V, Ireland under the Union 1801-70,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 538-561
[3] Morris, J. 1979, *Farewell the trumpets: an imperial retreat,* Penguin Press, Harmondsworth, 151

to prove the truth of that assertion were instituted. The biggest question, as always, was one of money. Many government functions operated under the auspices of the Department of the Treasury and shared the appellation 'Board of the Revenue'. With the amalgamation of the two Exchequers in 1817 preliminary investigations got underway, the findings of which merely highlighted the need for an investigation of a much wider scope. That investigation began in 1821 with the appointment of a Statuary Commission to examine the collection and management of revenue in Ireland and Britain which produced 22 reports, one of which was on the Irish Post Office. We shall examine how this report and the report produced in the aftermath of the amalgamation of the Irish and the British post offices exemplified the shift in governance and governmentality at the time. But first a segue point of considerable relevance must be considered. The Post Office was not the only institution which was affected by the reforms of the 1820's. Other agencies and strategies were modified or created and in order to place what was happening to the Post in context we must first briefly examine some of these changes.

The creation of a national police force has already been discussed as an example of the centralisation of function under the 'shift' and the Liberal State's 'illiberality' in Ireland. But the period saw other methods being implemented. The creation of the National Boards of Education in 1831 meant that state involvement in what was hitherto seen as a sacrosanct localism was now being co-opted by the State. Under the scheme, two-third's of the running expenses, building costs, purchase of equipment and payment of salaries was to be provided out of public funds. There was, however, a *quid pro quo* in that the state demanded a veto over appointments and significant say in the syllabus and teaching. An inspectorate was established to ensure standards were set and maintained with

regulation and uniformity being a part of the scheme from the outset.[1] The Ordnance

Survey mapped the island on a hitherto unprecedented basis. The six inches to one mile

scale which they used in creating their maps was insisted upon by the then Prime

Minister Lord Wellington. The detail afforded by this scale was to make sure that the

outline of the townland boundaries (a townland being a ubiquitous yet vague ancient

territorial division) were accurate and visible on the maps. The level of detail required

that the Ordnance Survey be greatly expanded in terms of officials, to such an extent that

by 1837 it employed over 2000 workers.[2] The series of land valuations, known as

Griffith's Valuation, went hand in hand with the Ordnance Survey undertakings. The

incredibly dense detail of the Griffith Valuation came about, ostensibly, as a result of the

state's desire to know how much taxable land actually existed in Ireland. The Valuations

were so comprehensive that every piece of landholding in the country had a value placed

on it. It was, in essence, a state attempting to work out the fiscal value of the entire island.

It was across the material and metaphysical landscape of Ireland that these grids of

specification[3] were spread and they assisted in the re-imagining of what constituted

Ireland's national space. The postal service supported the creation of these new state-

knowledge matrices. In fact it may be argued that the postal network was itself a state-

knowledge matrix. We shall now go on to look at how the postal service specifically

fitted in with the wider matrix of state formation and governmentality.

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[1] MacDonagh, O. 1989 'The economy and society, 1830-1845, in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A New History of Ireland: Volume V, Ireland under the Union 1801-70,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 233
[2] Andrews, J.H. 2002, *A Paper Landscape: the Ordnance Survey in nineteenth-century Ireland,* (2nd. Ed.) Four Courts Press, Dublin
[3] Foucault, M. 2000, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Routledge Press, London, 42

5.3.4 The place of the Post Office in the New Ordering

The change in the state's conception of what the Post was and what it should do is illustrative of the political and administrative changes which were occurring throughout Ireland at the time. The postal service, in its earlier manifestation, was considered to be a Board of Revenue which in effect meant that it was held to be a subsection of the Treasury Department and not a government agency or department in its own right. This was not unusual but it did possess significance in that the Post Office was expected to be profitable. The state regarded the post as an organisation which existed primarily for the generation of profit. "The Post Office...affords one of the few instances in which the government has placed itself in the situation of the Private Trader who executes a given work for a certain payment."[1] Maximisation of profit was therefore the guiding operating principle and whilst other considerations were taken into account in relation to its organisation and activities they were held to be of a secondary nature. In his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee on Postal Communication with Ireland a Mr. Urquhart's, an officer in the Dublin General Letter Post Office, answer to the following question is indicative of this attitude

> "Do you think in general even though the Post Office should be at a trifling loss
> it ought to be the object of such an institution to give the public as much
> advantage as possible, without reference to revenue, except where any great loss
> has been incurred? I think that the question might be more properly answered by
> a higher officer than myself. If such a proposition were put before me I should
> consider it as an officer of the Post Office with regard to the revenue solely. I
> might state that such a communication would be of great public benefit but I

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[1] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII. 1

would not feel justified in recommending any measure that was not covered by
the Revenue."[1]

In the same evidentiary session the Superintendent of Mail coaches, Mr. Charles Johnson,
had a similar question put to him but his answer was even more bald and telling than his
subordinate's "When you say it is the object of the Post Office that any communication
of this kind should pay do you mean it is the object of the Post Office to cover the
expense or that it should be a source of revenue? That it should do something more than
cover the expense."[2]

These statements were summations of a position which highlights the paradoxical nature
of Liberal governmentality in Ireland, as envisaged by contemporary political economists
at any rate. That there should be minimal government spending, that structures should
pay for themselves were applicable principles here. But as they played out in reality the
levels of corruption and incompetence as a result of this drive for profits obliged the state
to intervene in contradiction to the principles of Liberal governmentality. What was
required for this to happen was an adjustment in emphasis. This switch was hinted at in
the evidence given by George Henry Freeling, Assistant Secretary to the British Post
Office, in his statements before the same committee. He was asked

> "Is it the system of the Post Office not to give the convenience to the public of a
> mail coach or mail cart, unless they expect that is shall not only pay for itself but
> be a source of revenue to the country? The Post Office has always been
> considered a Board of the Revenue, consequently one of its principles is not to
> lay out money if possible unless a return is expected; but there are always

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[1] *Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, Minutes Of Evidence
, 1832, H.C. 1832 (716) xvii, 92
[2] *ibid,* 92

exceptions to that rule, and in any material case the accommodation of an important district must be provided for even at a sacrifice."[1]

The fact that it was George Henry Freeling who made that statement is almost as surprising as the statement in itself. Freeling has obtained his position through unashamed (although not uncriticised) nepotism and was notorious for giving and accepting bribes in the course of his duties. He stated in evidence before a Board of Commissioners on Post Office Management that the reason an exorbitant fee was charged for registering a letter was so that the practice be discouraged which does not point a particularly zealous, or even competent, attitude on his part. He also admitted to the same committee that despite being in charge of the packet establishment he had never inspected, visited or even sent anyone to inspect the packet station at Holyhead, a duty which was the least his employers could expect.[2] That even such an example of 'Old Corruption's finest dregs could recognise that what was being sought was an accommodation, a compromise beyond the mere accumulation of profit on the part of the state is indicative of an important change in government thinking.

The Post occupied the dichotomous position of being, simultaneously, a public (or more accurately a state) sector institution operating in the private sector. It worked broadly according to those guidelines under which other companies and enterprises in the same sector operated. The blurring of the line which demarcated a public and a private enterprise in its terms of reference did not present any major difficulties to the ruling classes. It was broadly similar to their collective experience of government and basically how the majority of government had been organised and run up to this point. As put so

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[1] *ibid,* 103
[2] Robinson, H. 1948, *The British Post Office: A History,* Greenwood Press, New Jersey, 250-254

neatly by Corrigan and Sayer "…For much of the century [the eighteenth century] the state was, not to put too fine a point on it, a racket run by particular groups within the ruling classes largely for their own benefit."[1]

5.3.5 The Hungry state: new information flows and their political impact

However, in order to fully comprehend the alterations in information circulation in the early nineteenth century it is necessary to step back slightly from governmentality and briefly examine the political history of government. It is important to bear in mind the tension that existed between central and local government at the time. In the eighteenth century government was considerably more localised in Britain and even more so in Ireland. The emergence of the sophisticated bureaucratic machine of the 1830s possessed no analogue in eighteenth century government. In the eighteenth century all information on the activities and characteristics of the population of Britain and Ireland flowed from the localities to central government. This flow was anything but systematic and involved the transmission of data of varying quality through a panopoly of sources ranging from the Lord Lieutenant to the resident magistrates.[2] What emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, was a more efficient system of data collection with the bureaucratic activity surrounding this collection being centred on the offices of the Clerks of the Peace. Penal reform, a movement which culminated in a national prison inspectorate, grew out of the reforming zeal of local county magistrates who took it upon themselves to visit the prisons and to transmit their findings to central government.

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[1] Corrigan, P. and D. Sayer, 1985 *op. cit.*, 89
[2] Eastwood , D. 1997, *Government and community in the English provinces, 1700-1870*, MacMillan Press Basingstoke

However, it was only in the 1820s that the flow of information between the localities and central government grew to become a flood. The proliferation of royal commissions appointed from the beginning to the middle of the nineteenth century indicated the first moves by government to attempt a concerted centralisation of information. Where they differed from the committees and commissions of the eighteenth century was that they were staffed and run by professional bureaucrats and lawyers and not composed of the gentleman administrators who ran such enterprises in the past. A cool efficiency crept into the parliamentary inquiries and committees. However, this efficiency must be weighed against the fact that, frequently, commissions and committees were vehicles for their chairmen who used the time and resources spent on their subject matter to prove the righteousness of the chairman's own convictions on the matter at hand. Between 1830 and 1842 53 royal commissions sat gathering unprecedented amounts of data.[1] The 1830s saw the apogee of the state's appetite for data yet the putting in place of new efficient structures of social inquiry with their modish statistical tabulation and their reams and reams of frequently damning figures and statements had a detrimental effect on the balance of power between central and local government. The growth of both ability and appetite for data collection on the part of state meant that the relationship between central government and local structures of government was redefined. Power was reconfigured by and within the state. These new methods and techniques of investigation, these new technologies of governmentality meant that central government was granted an unprecedented level of freedom into its investigations because these investigations were no longer wholly dependent on the control of local knowledges, which were themselves

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[1] Eastwood, D. 1989 'Amplifying the province of the legislature': the flow of information and the English state in the early nineteenth century' in *Historical Research* LXII, 288

transmitted (and frequently attenuated to suit the needs and motives of the local elites) by local government. To put it simply, central government no longer needed local government to appraise it of the nature of conditions 'on the ground' so to speak.[1] Local government itself became a subject for inquiry and reform rather than an equal partner in the process of official inquiry. As the level of information flow grew, the agencies collecting it began to flex their muscles and to exercise a deliberate influence on the formulation of government policy. This situation is a fundamental characteristic of the liberal state. Liberal governance enacted itself by gaining the most acute and accurate knowledge of those over whom it sought to govern.

5.3.6 A collation of ideas: The 1832 Parliamentary Committee Report

As we have seen a parliamentary committee sat in the years 1831-1832 and published a report on postal communication with Ireland in 1832. The report was systematic yet selective in its examination of the nature of the postal service in the aftermath of its amalgamation into the British Office. Unlike the report of three years previously, this report did not focus on the fiscal aspect of the Post Office but rather it concentrated on the managerial and bureaucratic techniques which it employed. One should note that the title of the report in 1832 included the phrase postal communication 'with Ireland' rather than postal communication 'within Ireland' when one considers this observation "...with communication time often a week the Irish Executive had to be given a great deal of discretion...[with] channels so circuitous and so much of the activity vicarious, the

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[1] Eastwood, 1997, *op.cit.*

British impact was bound to be muffled or blunted to a degree".[1] MacDonagh here is, of course, referring to the period at the end of the eighteenth century when there actually was an 'Irish Executive'. Nevertheless the point is well made. The British government did not want to simply provide a public service of the highest quality. The state wished to minimise journey time so as to able to communicate as quickly and effectively as possible with every area within its domain. The state saw it as a "...peculiarly English object that the most remote parts of Ireland should be connected as intimately as possible with herself...[this would mean that]...the identity of feeling and interest will be soonest attained."[2]

To return to the 1832 report the fact that it recommended a substantial overhaul of the Irish Post Office should not, perhaps, come as too great a surprise. "Select committees and Royal Commissions were not, in the 1830's, intended to provide dispassionate enquiries but rather were seen as making the case for a preconceived change".[3] The state and the Post Office had previously regarded "...the collection of the greatest amount of revenue at the least possible expense (as) their sole duty...(there was to be) no exertion for public accommodation (which) does not carry with it the certainty of profit for the Revenue".[4] But stability, that old hobby-horse and closet companion of the Act of Union, was not the only thing being sought. The principle that one must first destroy in order to create came into play. The state recognised that the system was moribund, highly

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[1] MacDonagh, O. 1989 'Introduction: Ireland under the Union, 1801-70' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A New History of Ireland: Volume V, Ireland under the Union 1801-70,* Clarendon Press , Oxford, *xlvii*
[2] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland,* 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 31
[3] Daunton, M. J. 1985 *Royal Mail: the Post Office since 1840,* Athlone Press, London
[4] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland,* 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 30

inefficient and corrupt and that it was unsustainable in its current form. Change was both necessary and inevitable before any stability could be guaranteed.

The change was that "...even in a financial point of view it would not be prudent to confine the operations of the Post Office to this one object."[1] Clarification of this statement mean that now "Facility of communication is of so much importance to both countries that and Expenditure which may be necessary for affording it to the fullest extent should rather be considered as an outlay of Public Money for National Purposes than for the better management of a particular department or the accommodation of a particular district."[2]

Now the postal service took on an importance which had seemingly been ignored heretofore. It was no longer seen solely as a revenue-generating agency in which the metropolitan administration would have much say. Somewhat loftily, the Duke of Richmond made a, heavy handed, point, in his capacity as Postmaster-General when he said "The Department [The Post Office] in all of its operations is more closely connected with the interests, accommodation and personal feelings of every class of His Majesty's subjects than any other branch of state."[3] Somewhat grandiloquent but he had a point. With the exception of law enforcement or tax collection agencies there were no other government departments with which ordinary people would come in regular contact. But Richmond was not satisfied with this. He enlarged on his original statement adding that

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[1] *ibid*

[2] *ibid,* 3-4

[3] *Parliamentary Accounts and Papers relating to the post office,* 1834, House of Commons Parliamentary papers, C., xlix, 507

"...no circumstances can justify the practice of giving any priority of delivery with regard to letters or newspapers. The great principle of the Post Office is general and equal accommodation, affording convenience as far as it can possibly be carried to all, but a preference to none."[1]

As egalitarian and noble as these statements are their aspirations are somewhat attenuated when one takes into account the subsequent statements which were intended to qualify and clarify the previous ones for the benefit of the incoming Secretary to the Irish Post Office, Augustus Godby. "You will naturally understand that this regulation is not intended to apply to the letters of the Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary or to government dispatches which are to be delivered as soon as possible after the arrival of the mails.[2]

Thus the admirable democratisation of the Post was therefore an alteration in its operating principle in relation to the public but for the government it was different. The state retained a particular and possessive attitude towards its activities. This meant that as far as the state was concerned the principle of 'general and equal accommodation' did not apply to its agencies because the state, self-evidently, did not equate with the public. Preference and privilege were to be preserved as the 'natural' functions of government insofar as they related to the operations of this particular executive agency. This process of privileging governmental traffic is a good example of the persistence of older forms of governmentality within the flawed husk of Liberal governmentality. 'Police' forms of governmentality also adopted a possessive attitude towards information and its carriage

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[1] *ibid,* 541
[2] *ibid,* 541

and regarded the data it gathered as a state secret and regularly oversaw the censorship of the mail of private individuals. Yet such a possessive attitude, somewhat watered down and not as conspiratorial as that which prevailed under 'police' governmentality, is supposedly contradictory as 'Liberal' governmentality depended upon communication being secured so as to permit and actively encourage free exchange and free circulation of information, a cornerstone of the 'Liberal' state.

So how did the state view the potential of the mails once the unbridled capitalism of its previous incarnation had been securely fettered? The closing remarks of the 1832 parliamentary committee give an indication as to what the state's conception of the Post had changed to. Some qualification was given (and has been quoted previously) but the concluding paragraph of the report speaks with a Utopian fervour enthusing that "…every new communication which shall be opened up with England will open a new district for the employment of Capital and the exercise of Industry".[1] Such activities would carry with them their own benefits, both direct and indirect as "…by every improvement of a line of Communication the expense of maintaining it efficiently will diminish and the use of it and thereby the Revenue will increase".[2] Here there are the strong overtones of the laissez-faire economists with the attendant disdain for government intervention. The hope that, put on its proper course, the Post Office, like the market would become self-regulating is obvious. But the state had plans for the Post. It was to be the state's new siege engine in attacking the ramparts of the rural wastelands of Ireland. It would create "a new market for the English manufacturer, a new supply of food for the artisan and a

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[1] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, 31
[2] *ibid*

new source of Revenue for the State".[1] The opinions of those in the bureaucratic field and the merchants and traders who regularly used the Post tally in this report where it stated "...every improvement of Lines of Communication already existing will tend to induce the Capitalists to settle in the more remote parts of Ireland, and thus spread industry and happiness in these hitherto neglected districts".[2] The sentiments expressed in the report might be deemed to insinuate that the state was proposing to use the Post Office as one means to civilise the savage natives. This would have remained an insinuation were it not for the fact that the report bluntly states "...civilisation and employment of the people will extend".[3] The report has the somewhat predictable aspirational (to match the rest of its conclusions) crescendo which stated that the bringing together of Britain and Ireland in term of closer communications is something on "...which will depend the prosperity and permanence of the Union of two countries".[4]

5.3.7 Governmentality and "The Light of Liberty"

The notion of individual liberty, however flawed as a concept and which is still raised today as a standard in the battle for political dominance, was heavily influential in Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The activities of European powers with systems such as the *Cabinet Noir* and secret police forces were held up as examples of the kind of tyrannical despotism prevalent on the European continent which no free-born Briton (read Englishman) would or should tolerate. Jeremy Bentham summed this up when he said

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[1] *ibid*
[2] *ibid*
[3] *ibid*
[4] *ibid*

"Publicity is the fittest law for securing the public confidence and causing it constantly to advance towards the end of its institution…without publicity, no good is permanent; under the auspices of publicity, no evil can continue…secrecy is an instrument of conspiracy; it ought not therefore, to be the system of a regular government".[1]

Thus a system of governmentality where the activities and actions of every individual within the domain of government was particularised and examined minutely was one which was intolerable to those who saw government as being of a different character and purpose in nineteenth century Britain. Liberal governance ceded the practice of governmentality to a previously anathema element, that of an unknowable subject of rule. The exigencies of contemporary political philosophy in Britain demanded that the state not inquire too closely into the private domain of the subjects it purported to govern. This was in part a reaction to the horrors of 'continental despotism' where spying on citizens was part of a government's remit. To the ruling classes in Britain this was intolerable. Individual liberty was paramount and all attempts to introduce a system of control by censorship and secret police should be fought tooth and nail. Thus, an uneven dialectic came into play whereby the state, supposedly, refused to gather certain information about its citizens. Unlike its predecessor, the liberal state, as Patrick Joyce has pointed out, "…depended upon cultivating a certain sort of self, one that was reflexive and self-watching".[2]

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[1] Bentham, J. 1843 'Of Publicity' in J. Bowring (ed.) *The works of Jeremy Bentham, vol. I,* Tait Press, Edinburgh, 314-315
[2] Joyce, P. 2003 *op.cit.,* 4

It was not simply the case that liberal governance cultivated a self-regulating subject of rule but that the subject of rule in question also regulated, or at the very least scrutinised, the liberal state. The very basis of this form of governmentality was shored up by its dependence on those individuals who could *perform* the very freedom it granted by constantly questioning the *limits* of this freedom.[1] It was this scrutiny, this monitoring of not only civil society but the nexus which granted the liberal state its power, the symbiotic nexus of state/society, which was crucial to the flexibility of liberal governmentality. The ability of the self to be viewed, surveilled and to survey was the guarantee of liberty and freedom and also, simultaneously, the greatest threat to it. Liberalism possessed its own contingent logic which located rule, its power over the people and things of the territory, in the rational conduct of the governed. As we have seen the fundamental prerequisite for governance is knowledge: before a body of subjects, a population can be governed they must be known and identified. The liberal community of subjects, having been identified, depended was depended upon, in Joyce's phrase, the "light of publicity which would guarantee freedom".[2] This is an echo of Bentham's earlier words. The publicity of knowledge, the publication of knowledge, underpinned all elements of liberal governance. There was, of course, a hypocrisy to the outpourings of support for individual liberty on the part of senior members of the government and various elements of the ruling classes. That the state regularly intercepted and opened the mail of a considerable number of individuals (as came to light in the Mazzini case) showed that the state was very far from being above spying on its

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[1] Rose, N. 1999, *Powers of freedom : reframing political thought,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
[2] Joyce, *op. cit.,* 8

citizens and, in fact, regularly did so, citing national security as the overriding concern in each case.

This is the case for Britain certainly but what impact did these notions have for Ireland?

5.3.8 'Liberal' Ireland? Steps to a new form of state

One of the things which seemingly defined Liberal governmentality as it played out in Britain was the absence of authoritarian intervention. This was in contradiction to earlier, 'police' forms of governmentality which might typically involve sinister organisations such as secret police forces or the "Black Chamber" (although these elements of previous incarnations of 'cruder' forms of governmentality existed within the body of Liberal rule as we shall later see). The new forms of governmentality depended on the existence of a discourse of scrutiny between the Liberal subject and the ruling state "...the state's power...is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power"[1]. Power was (is) insidious and flexible, pervasive yet dependent. But it was of the nature of an implicit, unspoken accord between the state and the subject which the subject had little, but some, say in establishing and yet played a vital role in maintaining a political 'gaze' which granted the state its licence and legitimacy. It did not ask for this, it was established, assumed and taken. But it was 'liberal' in the multifarious meanings of the word. It was permissive in terms of liberty (liberty here bearing the bourgeois conception of freedom, that of the freedom to work, to make money, to engage in trade) and the rights of (some) individuals and not least the establishment *of* individuals *as* individuals, at least in the eyes of the authorities. This was Britain's new "Mortall God", to use Thomas Hobbes'

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[1] Foucault, M. 1982 'The Subject and Power' in *Critical Inquiry* 8, 777

phrase, created through dialogue, enthroned on a new seat with a changed set of courtiers but recognisable nonetheless.

The theories of utilitarianism with their focus on increased efficiency particularly in relation to government, both local and central, were advocated by thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham. He saw in the idea "…it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong"[1] the fundamental principle for organising society. The law and legislation could be used to create and reform 'society', the mass of people who lived within the boundaries of the state, into 'Society', a collection of individuals the identification of whose characteristics and activities would allow them to be clearly categorised by the state and grouped according to definitions legitimised by the state, whilst retaining the absolute necessity of the self-regulating market. At the time the term society was not used to indicate the multitude or the masses. The term 'society' had a specific meaning and was used to refer, much like the term 'The Quality' was in the eighteenth century, to those individuals who were literate, propertied and articulate.[2] The transformation of society to Society was an implicit goal of Liberal governmentality which would require a far greater knowledge of the masses before any such vernacular could become an absolute. It was Bentham, the poster boy propagandist for this new Utilitarianism but perhaps not as significant a theorist of it as for example J.S. Mill, who vociferously promoted the turn in government, the 'shift' which has been spoken of. We have looked at the burning desire on the part of the state for data in the 1820's and 1830's with the colossal amount of information being collected by parliamentary committees and Royal Commissions. The level of social inquiry was unprecedented and the sheer density

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[1] quoted in Corrigan, P. and D. Sayer, 1985 *op. cit.,* 109
[2] MacDonagh, O. 2002 *op. cit.*

of the number of inquiries happening over such a short space of time has probably not been matched before or since. The state was hungry. The society of eighteenth century Britain and Ireland needed to be turned into the Society of the nineteenth century. The fundamental social classifications such as age, gender and occupation were routinized in administrative procedures, enshrined in law, embedded in institutions and then symbolized in rituals of state.[1] This was part of the centralising process. The question of power is, almost, moot when one considers that the potential for organising a society depends on the level of knowledge of that society. Micro-levels of disputation, conflict and negotiation, though important, should not detract from the underlying conclusion that the state was making itself and making the rest of society along with it. In order to process the data, new agencies had to be created. In order to accurately plan for the decisions which may be taken as a result of that data new ministries were created. In order to carry out those decisions with sufficient legitimacy new legislation had to be drafted. And, finally, in order to ensure that the letter of the law was being carried out throughout the state new inspectorates had to be created. Thus one had a flexible, self-replicating machine made of human parts. 'Mortall God' indeed.

Yet it should be pointed out that the process of state formation, simplified here, did not necessarily take place in that linear fashion. The culmination of the process was not always the appointment of someone to inspect a premises or an institution. In fact, the 'someone' in question might not even be a central government employee. Persons of status and influence, for example doctors of clergymen, could and did inspect and assess whatever institution or activity was moribund or in dire straits. They could initiate the process which would end up adding more and more layers to the body of the state. Prison

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[1] Corrigan, P and D. Sayer, 1985, *op. cit.*

inspectorates are a good example of this as penal reform in early nineteenth century England was really initiated by zealous county magistrates who visited prisons and sent their own reports to central government of their own volition. The key thing to bear in mind here is the appetite of the state for these new forms of social data and their willingness to act upon them (although not necessarily to take the radical step of solving the problems they uncovered).

Without wanting to sound flippant or facetious but that was Britain and Britain was (and is) not Ireland. Ireland was, to contemporary Britons, a strange and yet not-so-distant land. The government recognised that the methods of governmentality which had been applied in Britain would have to be modified before they could be imposed on Ireland,. The Liberal state did develop in Ireland albeit in a different fashion to its trajectory in Britain. Government, as mentioned, underwent a sort of hiatus during the opening years of the century, mainly preoccupied with the burning issue of Catholic Emancipation and, on a more localised scale, the issues of law and order.

As the Napoleonic Wars ended the state began to focus its attention on how best to govern Ireland. It is perhaps misleading to describe this process in such a nakedly normative fashion as the context of contemporary Ireland belies the construction of a grand state-centric narrative somewhat. The appointment of Sir Robert Peel as Chief Secretary of Ireland in 1812, an appointment which would last for six years, had a lasting impact on the nature of government in Ireland. Peel himself was a rigid character, in both temperament and outlook, but was of the opinion that "an honest despotic government would be by far the best government for Ireland".[1] This highlights a point we will return to but in terms of administration Peel's tenure in office saw the 'shift' beginning to take

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[1] Quoted in MacDonagh, O. 2002 *op. cit.*, 19

place. The committees and commission which began to be staffed by professionals saw a corresponding turn in administrative terms as the bureaucracies began to be staffed by public servants who did not see their positions as sinecures or were not fee-plunderers. The dirge of 'Old Corruption' was being heard in the corridors of power as the new forms of governmentality took hold.

To return to the "honest despotism" required for the government of Ireland, this off-hand remark contextualises the governmentality of the nineteenth century. Ireland was treated differently from Britain. The state did act far more prescriptively and, as Patrick Carroll-Burke has noted,[1] older, 'police' forms of governmentality entwined themselves in the structures of Liberal governmentality which were deployed. The colonial authorities were far more authoritarian than they would ever have been able to get away with in Britain. Several possible explanations exist for this. One is that the inherent instability of Ireland as a colony, as exemplified by the sporadic outbursts of agrarian and politically motivated violence in various parts of the island, required that a whip hand rather than a velvet glove was the correct method of ruling. Another explanation is that the groups contesting for power within Ireland were far less embedded, far less wedded to the power structures that were in place (the Anglican Church excepted) to consistently oppose the introduction of creation of new ones. A similar but slightly more qualified explanation is that the dominant groups within Irish society were simply too dependent on the muskets of the Army and the militias (and, subsequently, the truncheons of the constabulary) to prevent any of the experiments the colonial government saw fit to impose. The stated position of the landed gentry, the Protestant Ascendancy, was paradoxical in many ways. The

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[1] Carroll-Burke, P. 2002 'Medical Police and the History of Public Health' in *Medical History,* No. 26:4, 461-494

maintenance of their standing required a degree of subservience on their part towards London yet there was considerable aggression proffered towards the, comparatively tiny, olive branches being offered by the government in London to the newly emerging Catholic bourgeoisie. They could not see the government's logic of creation, the creation of the bulwark of a Catholic middle class to stave off the depredations of another, more serious Leveller-esque revolt like 1798. The state's policy culminated in the emergence of Catholic leaders, much to a certain relieved satisfaction, such as Daniel O'Connell. The government saw the absolute denial of all forms of rights - political, social or economic – to Catholics as something which could, potentially, backfire as a policy. Instead of producing a leader committed to parliamentary democracy, as it was understood in the early nineteenth century, they could end up with Catholic Ireland's answer to Oliver Cromwell with the distinctly unpalatable prospect of Fenian Roundheads putting all loyal Ireland to the sword. This is, of course, a melodramatic and unlikely comparison but fear was what created the Act of Union, fear was what maintained it but the state recognised that fear alone was never going to be enough. Added to this is the fact that for many within Britain's ruling classes rule through fear was antithetical to their conception of the governed's relationship with the governing.

5.4 Conclusion

There is a tendency to create a *post hoc propter hoc* analysis of any given situation in retrospect when one is attempting to explain it. It is a trap which historians and historical geographers must be especially wary of when attempting to construct narratives of the

past. Despite this it is the case that the prevalence of the state is really only revealed in retrospect. That Britain and Ireland constituted one kingdom with the same legislative body is an undisputed fact.[1] What is being outlined here is how one of its agencies was used in the attempt to make that kingdom (or the connection at least) work. What should be clear from a reading of the sources quoted is that although the particularism of the state and its communications aside, the state was attempting to secure a field in which information could be freely exchanged and in which it circulated freely.

The 1832 report and the other documents quoted here have the feel of a somewhat unrealistic wistfulness about them. But to their authors these aspirations, plainly stated, were not unrealistic at all. For them the Famine had not happened yet. Ireland still possessed an untapped potential. The other side to these aspirations of course is the implicit desire to produce a 'Liberal State', as it had been outlined earlier in the chapter, in Ireland. Within the expanding yet still bounded confines of this very Irish governmentality, many sophisticated technical solutions were defeated or modified by conditions of existence. The state saw the postal routes and the network which they comprised as a surface of emergence which required detailed analysis. The individual differences of the routes, the population size they catered for, the commercial significance of the individual postal towns or area, its military importance, the amount of revenue a town or line would generate annually and the processes of negotiation which could over-ride coldly logical, material concerns all allowed the postal network to be designated and analysed.[2]

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[1] MacDonagh, O. 2002, *op. cit.*
[2] Foucault, M. 2000, *op. cit,* 40

By going into such voluminous detail in its investigations the state was, consciously or unconsciously, finding a way of limiting the domain of communication, of defining what it was that was being talked about, of ascribing to the network the status of object in order that it may be described as a manifest thing. The state's action was itself a dualistic form of control in terms of the depth of knowledge such a definition or delineation offered yet at the same time the state was exerting a far more obtrusive and direct form of control in terms of what that definition was to be or how far the boundaries of that delineation could stretch. Liberal governmentality demanded an ideological *volte face*. The Liberal state, as it was constituted in Britain, was never implemented in Ireland. Yet within the context of early nineteenth century Ireland the colonial state went as far as it could in implementing the philosophy and practice of liberal governmentality. The trajectory of what the postal service was supposed to be and for whom changed, and was changed, over time. In the early nineteenth century the post was supposed to assist the state in creating a realm of freely flowing information where the circulation of words and ideas was unrestricted. That lack of restriction was frequently compromised in both Britain and Ireland by matters of security but the desire and the intent to create that realm was there.

'Police' forms of governmentality aside, the state was trying to prepare the ground for a new and stable colony, a colony which would be metropolitan in character and which would intimately mimic the organisation of government and the economy and, not to mention, Society which pertained in Britain. That the experience of implementing new techniques of governmentality in Ireland would eventually leach back into the mid to late Victorian state in Britain so much so that it would begin to resemble the state as it was being reconstituted in Ireland in the 1830's was not something which occurred to the

ruling classes at the time. The state was to become Shelley's "Arbiters of the dispute" and to dominate rather than facilitate life within both Britain and Ireland for a long time to come.

Chapter 6

Negotiation, contestation and correspondence: The post and the reconfiguring of social structures

Chapter 6 Negotiation, contestation and correspondence: The post and the reconfiguring of social structures

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall look at the issues surrounding the impact of the postal service on social structures and their ordering within early nineteenth century Irish society. The political and economic changes which were occurring at this time were mirrored by deep changes in the structure of Irish society. The beginning of the century saw the initial stages of the emergence of an Irish Catholic bourgeoisie which grew in power and influence throughout the century, assisted by the political campaigns of Daniel O'Connell. The acme of their influence within the colonial century was probably reached by the 1860's but in the opening decades of the nineteenth century they were only beginning to make their voices heard. In terms of the post, what was happening at the time was that the changes which were being instituted in the postal network were recognised by individuals within local ruling elites as being of considerable significance for them, particularly so as the reach of the post extended beyond the shores of Ireland and into the globalised world of the British Empire.

The spread of the postal network increased the potential for the widening and strengthening of the links between those living in rural areas and the colonial and metropolitan centres of Dublin and London respectively. This fact became apparent to many within the local ruling elites and, as a result, access to the postal network was keenly sought-after. The individuals in question were those for whom letter-writing was

an accustomed activity. They were literate, educated and Anglophone, not to mention Anglo-centric. They were the 'Society' of their day, those who mattered and those for whom influence and control were a part of their daily lives. The expansion of the postal network was a discernable opportunity for them to bolster their positions within the confines of their social arenas and to confirm their status within the communities in which they lived. They lobbied and argued for greater access to the network and saw in the control of the new forms of capital which speedy and effective communications granted a way of accumulating those new forms of capital and hence power.

The local ruling elites were not the only ones to recognise the potential of the post for gaining power and influence within Irish society. At a national level, Daniel O'Connell saw the introduction of a Penny Post system as something which would greatly benefit the members of the Catholic bourgeoisie. He believed that his support for such a measure would boost his status and status of the class which he himself felt was his strongest ally. That this measure was something which would affect a social class at a national level is in contrast with the attempt to reconfirm (and reconstitute) social formations at the local level. Finally, although this is the most difficult arena to scrutinize in any detail through the dearth of available evidence, we shall look at the 'voiceless' within the machine, the subaltern. The term 'subaltern' is used in the Gramscian sense of classes which have been subordinated and excluded from any significant role in the power relations of a particular time and place.[1] Spivak, in a seminal article on the concept of subaltern studies,[2] argues for a considerably more nuanced understanding of the concept of studying the voiceless.

[1] Gramsci, A. 1971 *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (eds.) Hoare, Q. and G. N. Smith, Lawrence and Wishart Press, London
[2] Spivak, G. C. 1994 "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. (eds.) Williams, P. and L. Chrisman, Columbia University Press, New York, 66-111

She believed that in order to effectively engage with a the idea of the subaltern, the position of those studying it (that is, Western academics and intellectuals) meant that, firstly, postcolonial studies ran the risk of speaking on the behalf of those without a voice without letting them speak for themselves. Secondly, studying the subaltern from 'the outside' could lead to logocentric assumptions of cultural uniformity and such assumptions would blur what were important differences within the subaltern groups themselves. [1]

The term subaltern is used in this research quite tentatively. While a great deal of work has been done on the concept of the subaltern within contemporary postcolonial studies this thesis wishes to elucidate certain aspects of the postal service which do not appear in the official documentation and records kept by the state. Rather, the term is used to denote is those groups which existed in Irish society but which are notable by their absence from the official testimony. This research attempts to 'let the subaltern speak' by drawing attention to their existence as correspondents and their corresponding absence within the official documentary record. To do so we shall examine the diary of a hedge school teacher, Humphrey O'Sullivan, for insights into the presence and absence of access and usage of the postal network at the lowest levels of early nineteenth century Irish society.

Thus, this chapter will be broken into three parts. The first, and the most extensive part, will deal with how the postal network facilitated and altered social relations at the level of the local. Specifically, this section looks at how the transmitting of memorials to government and bureaucracy were how local ruling elites gave voice to their desires, demands, hopes and fears. In this and subsequent sections we shall look at some of the

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[1] *Ibid*

central concepts of Bourdieu's thought and how pertinent they are in understanding the issues surrounding the control, deployment and use of the post in early nineteenth century Ireland. The second part will draw back the focus of the chapter to a national level to consider the post and the consolidation of the Catholic bourgeoisie through the political machinations of Daniel O'Connell and the final section will deal with the oblique yet significant access which was afforded the subaltern groups within Irish society.

6.2 Petioning, memorialisation and the re-configuring of the local: The post and rural ruling elites

6.2.1 The process of petitioning

We shall first briefly examine the nature of petitioning during the period in question. The post performed many functions but in political terms the carriage of petitions was one of the most important. The process of lobbying was one which allowed a degree of access to structures of political power which those living in rural areas would have very little direct contact. This process of petitioning involved the drafting, approving and the transmitting of a letter to government officials and persons of influence. Members of parliament were frequently petitioned by their constituents. What is of interest here is those petitions which were sent to government officials and colonial bureaucrats. The nature of petitioning is such that there are basically two main types, in form at least, and the topics covered by each range across the political, cultural and economic spectrum. In the nineteenth century, a certain type of petition was used to deal with public grievances and would consist of a generally agreed text amongst those who sought to effect a general

change in law. A petition of this type would have many signatures appended to it to highlight the depth of feeling and strength of unity amongst the petitioners. This type of petition survives to this day. It saw its apogee of use and influence in the early nineteenth century in Britain with the deployment of campaigns such as the Corn Laws, Universal Suffrage, the Poor Laws, factory legislation and the Chartist movement. This form of petition was a unifying political statement as much as an effective tool for change.

There was, however, another type of petition which did not always consist of thousands of signatures and was aimed at specific grievances but was, at the same time, aimed at more specific power structures and the individuals within those power structures. This type of petitioning was a medium for the constant process of negotiation that went on between local elites and central government. Petitions of this sort were part and parcel of the discourse which went on between central government and localized power structures. It could be said that there was a Foucauldian discourse[1] of the Post in that statements were made about the postal network within these petitions and that there were certain unspoken rules or ways of talking about the network that included some things and ruled out other. For example, there were frequent references to the economic benefits of the creation of a postal town but there was no direct criticism of the Post Office or the state for not introducing one previous to the petition. The local knowledges regarding the state of communications within their area which the ruling elites would prioritize in the discourse granted them a degree of authority which the state lacked. Yet from the perspective of the state there existed practices within the Post Office for dealing with the specifics of the network. Added to this was the fact that as the century wore on discursive formation took place. The older discourse of the Post was one where the local groups

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[1] Foucault, M. 1989 *The order of things : an archaeology of the human sciences*, Routledge Press, London

would attempt to activate a postal node on the basis of their superior knowledge of the conditions of existence within the relevant town or village and the state would then react. However, in the early years of the nineteenth century the discourse shifted in the favour of the state as it sought out new levels of data and information on the territory it sought to govern. The postal discourse changed as the state dispensed with the input of the local groups in shaping and altering the postal network. However, the concept of a postal discourse does fall down in one area in terms of Foucault's conception. The Post lacks a 'subject' to personify the discourse which other discourses possessed, for example, the madman, the criminal etc.[1] Despite this the petitions were rooted in particular institutional practices which were at the heart of the greater discourse of power and knowledge in early nineteenth century Ireland.

These petitions were essentially letters sent through the post to various officials and bureaucrats in Dublin Castle and other government offices, in this case the Post Office. They did not have a standardised format *per se* but they did share a number of commonalities which set them apart from ordinary correspondence. Those sending the petitions did so as individuals but they also drafted and sent them in on the behalf of others. The petitioners sometimes asked for financial redress, for example the payment of a pension to the relatives of those who died whilst on duty for the Post Office, but they frequently had a broader remit as well. Requests, suggestions and even demands were made of the Lord Lieutenant's office, the office of the Chief Secretary and the Postmasters General within these petitions. The character of each petition was such that

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[1] Foucault, M. 1979 *Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison*, Penguin, Harmondsworth; Foucault, M. 1989 *The birth of the clinic : an archaeology of medical perception*, Routledge Press, London;

they were delicately worded, inflexion and emphasis were central to revealing the urgency and importance of the requests within the letters.

In this context, of petitioning for access to postal routes and the postal network, the work of Pierre Bourdieu possesses a particular relevance in terms of analysing the transmission and contents of the petitions. Bourdieu postulated that different groups within society compete and jostle for differing forms of capital and hence power. Broadly speaking there are four main types of capital: cultural, social, economic and symbolic. Yet he also discusses one other type of capital which should be briefly mentioned here although it is not worked out to the same detail of the other four, principally because Bourdieu never adequately defined it. Statist capital is a form of capital which is created by the centralising activities of the state as it deploys various agencies to collect data and knowledge about its subject populations and sovereign territories. The process of accumulating those data and that knowledge is the act of accumulating statist capital. Statist capital is then used in the derivation of legitimacy which the state strives to be the font of. The difficulty in discussing statist capital is it is a conception of capital which is interpreted from Bourdieu's work rather than an integral part of it. He does discuss some of the state practices in his published material[1] but as the focus of this chapter is on the relationship between social formation and the postal network, it is not one of the forms of capital which will be concentrated on. For Bourdieu, economic capital was essentially defined as the sum of material exchanges – money, goods, services etc. It was the unit of exchange in any economy. Bourdieu saw that any of the other forms of capital could be derived from economic capital through various treatments of transformation. Bourdieu defined social capital as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are

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[1] Bourdieu, P. 2001, *Practical Reason: On a theory of action*, Polity Press, Cambridge, Chapter 3

linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of

mutual acquantinance and recognition."[1] Therefore social capital is determined by the

apparent width and breadth of one's network of relationships in social space with other

agents. Cultural capital represents the non-economic elements of the social matrix and it

"acts as a social relation with a system of exchange." [2] It can consist of things ranging

from verbal dexterity to aesthetic awareness to literary articulacy. Symbolic capital is a

form of power which disguises itself as a demand for recognition, for the services of

others and for deference.[3] Although cultural, social and symbolic capital are all rooted in

economic capital they were not, according to Bourdieu, reducible to it.

> "If they had been aware of this continuity, those who... have realized the
>
> decisive role of redistribution in establishing political authority and in the
>
> functioning of the tribal economy (in which the accumulation – redistribution
>
> circuit fulfils a similar function that of the State and public finances) would no
>
> doubt also have observed the central operation of this process, namely the
>
> conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital, which produces relations
>
> of dependence that have an economic basis but are disguised under a veil of
>
> moral relations."[4]

The postal network was a form of capital which could be termed *social capital*. The

petitions were sent by members of the local elites in order to gain access to the postal

network. The processes of lobbying and petitioning can be most usefully understood in

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[1] Bourdieu, P. 1986 'The Forms of Capital' In John Richardson, Ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Greenwood Press, New York, 248

[2] Harker, R., C. Mahar and C. Wilkes 1990, *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu,* MacMillan Press, Basingstoke, 1

[3] Bourdieu, P. 1986 *op. cit.*

[4] Bourdieu. P. 1997 *The Logic of Practice,* Polity Press, Oxford, 123

terms of negotiation *through* social space, *over* social capital, by virtue of *deploying* the symbolic, cultural and economic capital that they possessed. The channels of negotiation which the letters, and the postal system itself, opened up serve as a window onto the extent and circumstances of centre-local relations of government and power, particularly as those relations assisted in the creation and solidifying of those groups who contested for power within early nineteenth century Ireland. From merchant capitalists to the landed gentry, from Daniel O'Connell to village schoolmasters, the use of petitions to lobby for access to the postal network was a weapon in the battle for power. Central to this process was the individual spokesman who was designated to speak for the group and who gave voice to that group by virtue of his position.

6.2.2 Local elites and access to the network

A consistent theme in this research project has been that of relations between the colonial centre (Dublin) and the localities. What has been largely left unexplored to this point was the process of communication between the localities and the centre and how that process both affected and shaped the various social groups within early nineteenth century Irish society. A fundamental aspect of the discourse between local rural elites (as well as other groups) and the colonial authorities was correspondence or, more specifically, the petition. In terms of the Post Office these petitions were sent by individuals and groups within early nineteenth century Ireland who had a grievance regarding postal operations. They displayed an awareness of how detrimental the lack of access to the postal network was and thus how important that access was. The petitioners would target specific figures in the colonial hierarchy who, they felt, would be able to effect a change in the

unsatisfactory state of affairs regarding postal delivery in their area. That unsatisfactory state of affairs would usually, but not always, consist of a lack of access, or restricted access, to the postal network.

Right Hon. The Postmasters General   Dublin   Castle

26th January 1816

My Lords

I send you by command of the Lord Lieutenant the enclosed memorial from Social Magistrates and Gentlemen of the town and vicinity of Bally Longford in the County of Kerry praying that a Post Office may be established there and I am to signify this Excellency's desire that you will take the same into consideration and report your opinions what may be proper to be done therein.

I have

R. Peel[1]

In this memorial (petition) the Magistrates and gentlemen of Ballylongford were accessing one power structure, the Lord Lieutenant, in order to gain access to another, the postal network. It was in drafting the petitions the individuals and groups involved saw themselves as part of a dialogue between themselves and the central localities. The symbiosis of this dialogue was facilitated by the Post as it was the postal network which carried out the dialogue. The Post was both a network and a field, as Bourdieu would put it, as the agents with it simultaneously jostled for access to and domination over that field

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1816, Vol. IV, 21

and that network. The concept of the 'field' or 'social field' is a central one in Bourdieu's thought. He uses the terms frequently (and occasionally interchangeably) when discussing his notions of the differing forms of capital and the generation and maintenance of social groups and classes. The term 'field' denotes the backdrops and the areas against and in which different groups and individuals contest and manoeuvre themselves in order to gain access to and control over the differing forms of 'capital'. The cultural field, economic field and the bureaucratic fields are the fields which are most relevant for the nineteenth century postal service as it was within these fields that the groups' capital was deployed in order to gain access to and control of the postal network. The reply to the petition from the Chief Secretary Robert Peel is as follows.

Colonel Crosbie M.P.   Dublin   Castle   3rd
January 1816

    Sir

        Having by the Lord Lieutenants commend submitted to the Post Masters General the memorial of several magistrates and Gentlemen of the Town and vicinity of Bally Longford in the County of Kerry praying that Post Office may be established there; I am directed by his Excellency to transmit to you a copy of a letter from Edward S. Lees esq. Secretary to their lordships dated 1st instant by which it appears that their Lordships will take this application with several others of a similar nature into consideration when the New Post Office now building shall be completed.

        I have

R. Peel[1]

These letters refer to a single petition from the local ruling elites of Ballylongford in Co. Kerry but the colonial authorities received dozens of such petitions every month. The letters were more than simple requests or demands of groups who wished to accumulate economic capital. Individuals and groups which lacked a purely commercial motivation made representations and memorials which were sent to the Postmasters General, the office of the Chief Secretary, the office of the Lord Lieutenant, sitting committees of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and the Lords of the Treasury. In short anyone who had any bearing or influence on the distribution, establishment and most importantly, the financing of the postal network. It is this type of jostling for access to, and control over, the differing forms of capital that the existence of a (in this case the bureaucratic field) field is maintained. These memorials were, in the absence of direct face to face meetings, the sole legitimate means of accessing those structures of power with which those living in rural areas would have little regular contact. In composing the petitions the local elites were engaging the state in a dialogue and it was through this dialogue that the needs, desires and voices of those groups were expressed which, in many ways, was how the existence of those groups manifested. One point which should be mentioned is that these petitions regarding the mails were taken seriously by the colonial authorities.

However, one must ask why Dublin Castle was not swamped by a deluge of petitions if they were all taken seriously, if they were all taken at face value? Several factors militated against this outcome however. One factor was that literary levels were not high

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[1] *ibid*

in Ireland at the time and the memorials showed an awareness and acknowledgement of the necessary linguistic etiquette, not to mention the requisite tact and diplomacy, demanded by bureaucratic officials if they were not to be rejected out of hand. A second factor was the cost involved in sending bulky petitions by mail. Postal costs were a step function of distance at the time so there was no flat rate for sending a letter. Also, weight was a variable in determining postal costs which definitely restricted the number of frivolous petitions. So on the one hand time, care and money were required to send a petition. But on the other an awareness of that fact is shown by Charles Grant in a letter to Andrew Chicester.

A. Chicester esq. M.P.   Dublin Castle, 4th November, 1818

   My dear Sir,

     I have to offer many apologies for not having sooner acknowledged your letter respecting the Post Office at Moville. But although I was prevented by various business from an immediate reply, I can assure you I paid instant attention the subject of your communication – you have before this time heard from Mr. Lees, who told me he had written to you satisfactorily upon it. The whole matter is finally under the consideration of the Postmasters General in order to be recommended to the favourable attention of Government. I hope therefore it will not be long before the gentleman of Moville will be gratified by a compliance with the prays of their Memorial. As soon as I receive the final judgment of the Postmasters General I shall submit the subject to the Lord Lieutenant.

   I have etc.

Cha. Grant.[1]

The postal network in Ireland was organised principally to provide a direct communications link between rural districts and towns and Dublin. In conflating their welfare with that of the Crown, these groups and individuals saw the establishment of a more direct link with the centre of administration and military decision making as providing a more tangible form of political and economic security. This security would then translate into the strengthening of their positions of power and dominance within their local communities.

6.2.3 The character of the petitions and the petitioners

Right Hon. The Postmasters General   Dublin   Castle   17th February 1812

     My Lords,

        I send your Lordships by command of the Lord Lieutenant the memorial of the Gentlemen, Clergy, Freeholders and Traders residing in and near the town of Scariff in the County of Clare representing the great inconvenience they suffer from the Post being conveyed to that town only three days in each week and praying that a daily post to Scariff may be established.

        And His Grace desires your Lordships will take the said Memorial into consideration and report what may be proper to be done thereupon.

        I have etc.

        W. Gregory[1]

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1818, Vol. IV, 89

The letter above is a typical example of the type of petition which was sent in by the local groups. Such a request as outlined was far from unusual. It was requests such as these which comprised a great deal of the correspondence which took place between the Postmasters General and Dublin Castle. In each commentary by whoever was dealing with the issues raised by the memorials, a description was frequently given of the memorialists. These descriptions spoke of an awareness of the class which the memorialists belonged to. If the government official approved of the measures suggested, their recommendation was augmented by describing the petitioners as, for example, 'being of good and sound character' which, in turn, implied a tacit acknowledgement of the individual's position as a member of their respective local elites. Here is a clear example of what Bourdieu was referring to when he said

> "The position of a given agent within the social space can thus be defined by the positions occupied in the different fields, that is, in the distribution of the powers that are active within each of them. These are, principally, economic capital (in its different kinds), cultural capital and social capital as well as symbolic forms of capital called prestige, reputation, renown etc., which is in the form of which different in the contestation for control over symbolic capital that legitimacy was attained and thus further provided for the manifestation of organised movements with spokespersons which would become 'classes'".[2]

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1812, Vol. III, 4
[2] Bourdieu, P. 1985 'The social space and the genesis of groups', in *Theory and Society,* 14 (6), 724

The contest for symbolic capital was a key one in early nineteenth century Ireland as it manifested itself in the emergence of organised groups within Irish society which possessed spokespersons and which would become identifiable as classes in the Bourdieuien sense.

> "We beg to transmit for the information of your Excellency, a Memorial from the Noblemen, gentlemen and traders interested in the prosperity of the counties of Meath, Cavan and Fermanagh... [who see]...the great advantage and security which these counties would derive from the establishment of mail coaches on the North West road leading from Dublin to Enniskillen".[1]

These 'Noblemen, gentlemen and traders' were quite obviously members of the local ruling elites of Meath, Cavan and Fermanagh. It is in pointing out the advantage that the counties might accrue from the establishment of mail coaches in their respective counties that they are in fact highlighting how beneficial such a measure would be to themselves. These memorials, requests, demands, suggestions and representations were nearly always made by individuals on behalf of 'gentlemen', 'freeholders', 'clergy', 'magistrates', 'noblemen' and principal inhabitants of a particular town or area. It is this mobilisation which Bourdieu emphasised as being the essence of the formation of a social class. Classical Marxist analysis placed an individual or group in direct location to the relations of economic production. For Bourdieu, this blurred what were clearly obvious differences in the social field which were manifest in both physical forms and immaterial action. These differences could not, in any meaningful way, be explained away by reference to the economic base of society. According to Bourdieu, a 'real' or 'actual' class is a group

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1803, Vol. II, 134

mobilised for struggle. This is the critical point at which Bourdieu diverges from Marx's 'incorrect' formulation of a theoretical class as a real class without contingent consideration of a class to its material definition. This, for Bourdieu, elided the struggles and hierarchies which took place in the fields within which the various classes struggled for power and control.

However the gentlemen and traders of Meath and Cavan were not alone in seeing the establishment of a postal link as a prerequisite in sustaining not only their communities but their position within these communities. In 1813 Viscount Dillon sent a petition to the Lord Lieutenant. In it he requested the establishment of a daily post to Loughlin, County Roscommon.

> Right Honourable the Postmasters General   Dublin   Castle   21st September 1813
>
> > My Lords,
>
> > I enclose a memorial presented to the Lord Lieutenant from Lord Viscount Dillon representing that the Post Office which was established at Loughlin in the County of Roscommon has been discontinued; and praying that benefit of a daily Post may be afforded to the town and neighbourhood at Loughlin and that His Lordship will undertake into indemnify the Post Office Department against loss or deficiency that may arise between the Disbursements and the Revenue of such Establishment.
>
> > And his Excellency desires that your Lordships will take Lord Dillon's application into consideration and report your opinion thereupon.
>
> > I am etc

Robert Peel[1]

At first glance this is a fairly standard request which these memorials typically contained. The Postmasters General and the Lord Lieutenant received dozens of such requests each month. But there is a notable difference between this and other petitions. The significant, and unusual, part of the petition is where it reads "and that his Lordship (Lord Dillon) will undertake to indemnify the Post Office Department against any loss or deficiency that may arise between the Disbursements and Revenue of such Establishment."

Clearly, Lord Dillon regarded the existence of a post office at Loughlin, of a link to the outside world as being so necessary to the area's prosperity and security that he was prepared to fund it as a private individual. However, it would be somewhat disingenuous to assume that Lord Dillon was acting as a facilitator, as a 'Good Samaritan' in this instance. That he was prepared to reach into his own pocket speaks volumes about the importance of the existence of a communications link to rural communities and those who prized such a connection recognised the potential of it for securing their status and influence with their communities. Lord Dillon, in common with other memroialists before him, became a spokesperson for a particular group when he submitted this petition, in this case the local gentry.

Right Hon. The Lord Bantry   Dublin   Castle   21st

October 1818

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1813, Vol. III, 274

My Lord,

        The memorial signed by your Lordship and several gentlemen and inhabitants of the town of Dingle praying that a daily post may be established to that town having been by the Lord Lieutenants command referred to His Majesty's Post Masters General for their consideration and report. I am directed by His Excellency to acquaint you that their Lordships have stated on reply that however desirous they might be to attend to the prayer of the memorial their duty will not permit them to recommend the measure sought for in as much as there would be a deficiency in Revenue over and above the expense that would attend it of £40 per annum in which they are of the opinion would not be repaid by the extension of the Post to Dingle.

        C. Grant[1]

In this instance a request, even one authorised and supported by a peer of the realm, was being turned down. This was a frequent occurrence, so much so that the requests which were contained within the petitions were refused more often than not. The policy of not placing into operation any postal structure which did not, or would not produce a profit was the deciding factor here. It was not, however, wholly unusual to append the name of a local dignitary with official standing, usually a Member of Parliament, to add weight to whatever proposal was being put forward.

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1818, Vol. IV, 88

6.2.4 Intra-agency dialogue and negotiation

There was also a certain amount of intra-agency dialogue within the petitioning process. This dialogue is an example of the contestation for capital which occurred within the bureaucratic field. This contestation is exemplified by the two letters which follow.

Right Hon. Postmasters General   Dublin   Castle   nineteenth

October 1811

My Lords,

The Lord Lieutenant has considered your representation of the 12th Instant on the memorial of William Paul and Thomas Evans clerks in the Office of the Superintendent of Mail coaches praying that they may be permitted to participate in the profits arising from their length of service, with reference to the gradation of salary on which the several other officers of your department were regulated by the Establishment settled in December 1807.

And it appearing to His Grace that Mail Coach Office was a new Establishment at that time, and that until the advantages expected from it could be ascertained, the officers in it have been prevented from enjoying the advantages they would have been entitled to had the office previously existed and utility of the Office being now fully ascertained, the Mail Coach system considerably extended the office in point of duty risen to one of magnitude and importance and the Duties performed to your satisfaction. And your Lordships feeling strongly the justice of the claims of the Memorialists, have recommended

that the Clerks of the Mail Coach Department may hereafter be placed on the same footing in point of Emoluments arising from their periods of service as those in the Accountant and Receiver Generals' Office.

I am commanded by His Grace to signify his approbation of the Clerks in the Office of Superintendent of Mail Coaches being placed on the footing in respect to the Gradation of Salary that you have recommended.

I have etc

W. W. Pole[1]

Here two agents (Paul and Evans) are deploying the cultural and symbolic capital within the bureaucratic field granted them by the State's earlier decrees in relation to the Mail Coach Office in order to appropriate and increase their share of economic capital. This would in and of itself boost their cultural capital by the corresponding elevation in status and office that such a pay rise would grant. The legitimacy is bestowed by the State itself operating as the dominant agency within the bureaucratic field. However, within that field the agencies themselves were internally structured (being, as they were, hierarchical bureaucracies) and these agencies contained their own interrelated but separate sub-fields in which individual agents contested for control of the forms of capital. Intra-agency negotiation was occurring which itself emerges as a form of conflict between agents within the bureaucratic field.

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1811, Vol. II, 21

6.2.5 Economic capital, the changing state and the petitions

The Postmasters General   Dublin   Castle   22nd
December 1823

    My Lord,

        The Lord Lieutenant has had under his consideration a variety of memorials complaining of a change which has recently taken place in the mode of conveying the Waterford Mail, the effect of which is stated to be to retard the arrival of the letters in Waterford and to diminish the safety of the property usually and necessarily conveyed in them.

        The Lord Lieutenant has also had under his consideration the reports made to him by your Lordships on this subject, the result of His Excellency's consideration of these several documents is a conviction that the trade of Waterford does suffer some material inconvenience from the manner in which the letters from Dublin are now conveyed.

        That considering the importance and the extent of the trade of that city it is a point well deserving of consideration whether it should have a direct mail coach from Dublin. On the other hand His Excellency feels the importance of reducing as far as possible, the expense of conveying the letters which from peculiar circumstances in this country been so very large a proportion to the Revenue actually collected. He deems such a reduction however compatible, if not with a direct communication from Dublin to Waterford, at least with such a mode of conveyance so should bring the letters to Waterford at an earlier hour in the morning than is possible under the present temporary arrangement.

        Considering however the peculiar situation in which the Post Office of Ireland is at the present moment placed from the doubts which exist as to the

future arrangement of the Office itself, and considering that it may be perfectly practicable on a review of the other subsisting contracts for carriage of letters hereafter to make a more general and satisfactory arrangement for the conveyance of the mails to other places as well as to Waterford His Excellency deems it inexpedient now to make any fixed or permanent arrangement with respect to this particular contract; Understanding also that the Coach by which the letters were formerly conveyed still continues to travel between Dublin and Waterford, His Excellency has commanded me to desire that your Lordship would make immediate arrangements with the proprietor of that coach for the conveyance of the letters of Waterford as heretofore, taking especial care however that the arrangement be purely temporary; and be liable to be changed or put an end to at any time, on three months notice being given on the part of the Postmasters General.

I have the honour etc

Henry Gouldbourn[1]

This is a commentary note rather than a petition itself but it does comment on the petitions being sent in. Two interesting aspects arise out of the letter. Firstly, the concern for the economic well being of the city of Waterford. The covenant entered into, of course, is that although the general economic well being of an area or town requires attention, too much *specific* economic capital should not be expended. This ties in with the changing imperatives of the State as it was becoming the 'Arbiter of the Dispute' in terms of the activities and processes which played out in the 'real' space of the localities. The second aspect is the acknowledgement that the whole of the bureaucratic field was,

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1823, Vol. IV, 327

in the 1820's, in a state of flux. This obviously affected the postal service as the boundaries of the bureaucratic field were shifting and were at the same time being deliberately shifted. In this context the senior colonial officials were reluctant to commit any substantial element of either their economic or, more importantly, their symbolic capital to support and legitimise any venture which was not short term and hence ultimately of little lasting value (at least to those merchants who traded to and out of Waterford). Yet the attempt, half hearted it has to be said, to provide a stop-gap solution to the problem of delays in delivery to Waterford is an example of the dominant agents within a field attempting to secure their position by offering an attenuated 'transformation rate' of cultural capital into economic capital. The merchants were seeking to secure their positions with their respective field by increasing their access to the mails. The Lord Lieutenant and his officials were facilitating that desire but in an alternative form. To accede to the request in its original form would possibly undermine their position within the bureaucratic field as the field was shifting, so much so that the position of the agents within it were uncertain (as the state recognised itself) and they, as agents within the field, were thus reluctant to commit any form of their capital under such unstable and uncertain circumstances.

6.2.6 The spokesman as group: The correspondents and the petitions

These memorials provide examples of the contestation for resources (capital) and hence power which were occurring at a time when communication by letter was becoming increasingly prevalent. Communication at a distance was the most frequent and effective means in initiating a dialogue with the state.

Those who were the appointed spokespersons for their groups and who drafted and sent in these memorials *became* their groups and *made* those groups by the surrogate relationship they enjoyed with the groups which they represented. They were delegated to be the only one who gives voice to that group and thus appear as the source of power which he or she (practically always he in these cases) exerts on those who are its real source of power. There is a transformative aspect to this relationship in which, in much the same way that economic capital can be transformed or 'exchanged' to become cultural or symbolic capital, the spokesperson relies on the group as a source of legitimacy. Yet, as symbolic or cultural capital cannot be reduced to economic capital alone, this dependency is only really given potency by the spokesperson deploying their cultural or symbolic capital to bestow legitimacy upon its source.

"The capacity to make entities exist in the explicit state, to publish, to make public (i.e. render objectified, visible, and even official) what had not previously attained objective and collective existence and had therefore remained in the state of individual or serial existence – people's malaise, anxiety, disquiet, expectations – represents a formidable social power, the power to make groups by making the common sense, the explicit consensus, of the whole group."[1]

There is alchemy to this, a social magic in which nominating an individual to become the voice of a group and by virtue of that voice proclaiming that group and its interests and concerns, is how the existence of a group is posited in the first place. In the letters

[1] Bourdieu, P. 1985, *op. cit.*, 729

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mentioned above, individuals speak on behalf of the groups in order that these groups retain, or even gain, a stake in the contestation for power and control over the differing forms of capital. Access to and control of the mechanisms of the postal service would help to provide this. "In the struggle to impose the legitimate view of the social world… agents yield a power proportionate to their social capital i.e. the recognition they receive from the group."[1]

6.2.7 British groups and the Irish mails

Yet it was not solely the province and concern of Irish commercial groups which regarded the Irish mails as vital in the furthering of their interests.

Right Hon. The Post Masters General   Dublin Castle 1808

My Lords,

The Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury in England having transmitted a Memorial of the Right Honourable C. F. Greville dated the 16th of December enclosing on behalf of the South Wales association for the improvement of the Southern Communications by Mails and by Packets from Milford to Waterford certain plans for that purpose I in close herewith by command of the Lord Lieutenant the said Memorial and Plans and his Grace requests your Lordship will consider the same and report your opinion thereupon.

I have etc

Chas Saxton[2]

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[1] *ibid,* 731
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book 1808, Vol. III , 58

The South Wales Association was not the only group who felt it necessary to make their voices heard. On the 20th of September 1820, a 'numerous public meeting' was held in Glasgow organised by 'the Merchants of Glasgow trading to Ireland and others in Glasgow connected with that part of the Empire.' The petitioners felt that 'the present communication betwixt these important parts of the Empire is extremely important to the purpose of a safe, regular and speedy intercourse.'[1] These groups demonstrated a manifest interest in the activities of the Post Office in Ireland and saw the correspondence it carried as being of great material value to them. The emphatic conflation by the Glasgow merchants of their interests with the interests of 'these important parts of Empire'[2] was calculated to simultaneously elicit sympathy on the part of the government for their problems and highlight the importance of postal communications within the burgeoning British Empire. Awareness of the commercial opportunities presented by improved communications is indicative of the greater emphasis placed on the creation of international economic linkages. Other postal services operating in different parts of the Empire, such as Australia, India, New Zealand and Africa did not experience the same level of re-organisation and development until much later in the century.[3] Examples of this can be seen in the fact that stamps were issued for all of India as late as 1854[4] and the first official post office in Australia was not built until 1841.[5]

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[1] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, Appendix No.10

[2] *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on postal communication with Ireland*, 1831-32, H.C. 1832 (716) XVII, Appendix No.10

[3] Daunton, M. 1985 *Royal Mail: the Post Office since 1840*, Athlone Press, London,

[4] http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Stamps-and-postal-history-of-India, Retrieved May 9th, 2004

[5] http://www.auspost.com.au/BCP/0,1080,CH2070%257EMO19,00.html, Retrieved May 9th, 2004

6.3 Emancipatory letters: Daniel O'Connell, political mobilisation and the post

6.3.1 Background

Thus far we have looked at how those who used their symbolic, cultural and economic capital to further their interests by gaining access to the post. However, most of the groups we have examined have been ruling elites from a particular socio-economic (bourgeois or gentry) or ethno-religious (Protestant or Presbyterian) background. The reason for this is that most of the surviving records relate in the main to those groups and that there is very little material extant which throws light on other social groups and their involvement with the postal network. However, this is not to say that the aforementioned groups were the only people interested in utilising the postal network or in availing of the opportunities its expansion would provide them, either directly or indirectly. To do this we shall look at two aspects of the social and political milieu of early nineteenth century Ireland and how they interacted with the postal network and those who controlled it.

The focus of the chapter must turn from one of highlighting the local and how the post affected and shaped the processes of social formation to the emergence at a national level of a new, increasingly significant class: the Catholic middle class. Catholics in early nineteenth century Ireland were becoming more and more politicised, particularly so as the campaign for Catholic emancipation built up momentum. Along with the emergence

of a new, confident Catholic bourgeoisie, this meant that the political consciousness of

Irish Catholics was expanding and the potential for their role in parliamentary politics

became increasingly apparent. Perhaps the most concrete example of utilising the post to

create and thus further class interests is provided by Daniel O'Connell's espousal of the

campaign to introduce a Universal Penny Post.

6.3.2 The Penny Post

"Hail joyous day! The Postage Bill

Brings blessings great and many:

And best of all, say what we will,

It only costs a penny.

From John o'Groats to England's End,

From Norfolk to Kilkenny,

A letter now may reach a friend

And only costs a penny".[1]

The system of postage which was in place in the early nineteenth century relied on the

high cost of postage and incorporated a system whereby payment was made on delivery.

The idea of introducing a system of single uniform rate of postage was essentially the

brainchild of one man, Rowland Hill. In 1837, Hill published a pamphlet entitled 'Post

Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability'. In it he argued that Post Office

revenue had not increased since 1812.[2] Hill pointed out that the trade and prosperity had

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[1] Robinson, H. 1948 *The British Post Office: A History,* Greenwood Press, New Jersey, 302
[2] *ibid*

increased in Britain, as well as the population but that postal revenue had remained static.

Hill blamed this stasis on the unreasonably high postal charges then incurred on all letters

and parcels. He argued that the existing Penny Posts in operation in various parts of

Britain and Ireland were profitable and that even with collection and distribution costs

included, the levels of post which would be engendered by the introduction of a Uniform

Penny Post would make the scheme profitable. Reformers saw cheap postage as a method

of strengthening the resources of the community. Hill was the most prominent advocate

of the introduction of the radical measure of a Universal Penny Post which had several

staunch opponents who argued that such a measure would be economically unsustainable.

They felt that the number of letters which needed to be written, and hence sent and

delivered, in order to make the scheme profitable was so great as to swamp the islands

under a tide of expensive and unnecessary correspondence.[1] The Penny Post was

established, after a concerted campaign, in 1840.

6.3.3 The benefits and the intended implications

The principal argument underlying the introduction of the Penny Post was an economic

one. However, the reformers did have other benefits in mind which would accrue in less

tangible terms. Harriet Martineu, in a letter to her friend Elizabeth Barrett Browning,

wrote enthusiastically that the measure would be a of great value to the poor "…who can

at last write to one another as if they were all M.P.'s".[2] Paying one penny to send a letter

weighing not more than half an ounce anywhere in Ireland would mean that the sense of

isolation imposed on towns and villages would cease, families would be able to organise

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[1] *ibid*
[2] *ibid*, 302

their activities more effectively and news of distant relatives would be easier to come by. In particular these benefits were supposed to accrue to the working classes, allowing them access to a system of communication which had previously been the preserve of the middle and upper classes. The "unrestricted circulation of letters"[1] which Rowland Hill sought was aimed at re-enforcing the existing resources of the communities which had heretofore been isolated from the mainstream of information circulation by the iniquitous economic constraints of the existing postal rates. One of the interesting points to arise from the Penny Post campaign was the, for the time, unusual alliance of social reform and business. Bankers and merchants were highly active in promoting the campaign and in lobbying government officials to give it their backing. In 1838, three parliamentary select committee sessions were held on the subject of the Penny Post under the chairmanship of Robert Wallace, the Scottish M.P. who was an outspoken advocate of postal reform in general and the introduction of a national Penny Post in particular. The major bone of contention between the Post Office and the reformers was that Post Office revenue would fall dramatically if the Penny Post was introduced. But the committee found that the high postal rates caused widespread avoidance of their payment which caused a huge loss of revenue and was a strong argument against rates which tempted evasion.[2] The Post Office was fighting a losing battle though and the Penny Post passed into law on the seventeenth of August 1840. The initial benefits of the Penny Post did not bring about the social revolution which some of the more utopian reformers envisaged. Yet what it did was allow the concept and practice of correspondence seep further and further into the social strata of Britain and Ireland. It did have an almost immediate

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[1] Hill, R. and G. B. 1880, *The Life of Sir Rowland Hill and the History of the Penny Postage,* Freeman Press, London, 290
[2] Robinson, H. 1948 *op. cit.*

political impact as political organizations, such as the Anti-Corn Law League, were now able to engage in the kind of mass correspondence which would have previously beyond their economic capabilities. As Richard Cobden, the great social reformer of the early nineteenth century, wrote in a letter to Hill thanking him for his efforts stating that the reform had been "…a terrible engine for upsetting monopoly and corruption: witness our League operations, the spawn of your penny postage".[1]

6.3.4 O'Connell and the Penny Post

As Daniel O'Connell said on the 29th April, 1839: "I have strong reason to hope that the reduction of postage to one penny per letter will be adopted by the ministry and in that case it will give them the first accession of popularity. *It will be a most beneficial measure to the poorer classes* (author's emphasis)."[2]

In a subsequent letter O'Connell went on to describe his approbation of the Penny Post proposal on the 3rd May 1839 when he said "I have every reason to believe that we shall carry the universal Penny Postage. It would be the most popular measure ever adopted. I said a few words on the subject yesterday at Lord Melbourne's, which were very favourably received and pointedly noticed by him".[3]

A description of this meeting is given in O'Connell's letters and a report from the Globe newspaper has a deputation from the city of London uniform penny postage committee attending a meeting with Lord Melbourne at which O'Connell passionately declaimed,

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[1] Vincent, D. 1985 'Communications, community and the state' in Emsley, C and James Walvin (Eds.) *Artisans, Peasants and Proletarians 1760-1860,* Croom Helm Press, London, 179
[2] O'Connell, M. R. (ed.) 1979 *The correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, Blackwater Press, Dublin, Vol. VII, 235
[3] *ibid*, Vol. VII, 237

also on the 3rd of May 1839, "...on behalf of the poor Irish in Britain who were cut off by the existing post office rates from 'home, kindred and friends'".[1]

The intentions of the reformers, among whom O'Connell would number himself, was to facilitate greater access to the post for the 'poorer classes' and thus, as a consequence, increase the amount of correspondence engaged in by, for example, urban wage earners, rural smallholders or artisans as a whole. The actual outcome of the Penny Post reforms did not achieve the said goal. Postal flows only doubled in the year after the passing of the Act creating a universal Penny Post, 1840. There was little evidence that the move was of benefit to the 'poorer' classes but there was considerable evidence that commercial and middle class groups were enjoying substantial benefit from the measure.[2]

O'Connell's desire to see the 'poor Irish' in Britain re-attached to 'home, kindred and friends' was not quite as humanitarian as it first appears. In fact, the measure for extending postal communication beyond the realms of the ruling classes to benefit working class groups did exactly the opposite. And when one considers some of his further comments on the subject some light is shed on how O'Connell regarded the post in a more authentic manner.

In May 1839 he wrote "...They concede the 'penny postage' that is, an universal postage of one penny only. This is a most popular movement...we are in the greatest spirits. The country will be with us to a man - that is all that is desirable to have".[3]

[1] Report contained in the Globe newspaper, 3rd May 1839 cited in Maurice R. O'Connell (ed.) *The correspondence of Daniel O'Connell*, Blackwater Press, Dublin,1979 Vol. VII, 236
[2] Vincent, D. 1985 *op. cit.*, 176
[3] O'Connell, M. R.1979 *op. cit.* Vol. VII, 249

Even more tellingly, O'Connell points out that

> "...If the Ministry...carry the penny postage, they will certainly survive this
> session and, in that case, we shall be able to raise a rational reform system and
> agitation for the next session. The Chartists will be hors de combat by that time
> and then we will easily unite a large portion of the middle classes in favour of
> further reform and in the effect to push on the Ministry. This is our great hope".[1]

What is clear in this instance is that O'Connell's stirring words of comfort for the 'poor Irish' and the 'poorer classes' were, in point of fact, a political smokescreen. Ostensibly, O'Connell viewed the Post as a means of alleviating the suffering of economic migrants by granting them access to a system of communication which would thus allow them contact with the communities they left behind in Ireland. In reality, his views were nothing of the sort. He saw the reform of the postal service, particularly the reduction in postal charges, as a wildly popular measure particularly among middle class groups. What is occurring here is what Bourdieu terms 'misrecognition'. Misrecognition is a similar concept to Marxist 'false consciousness' and it is what happens when the economic and political interests inherent in a set of practices are 'denied'. This process is closely linked to the deployment of O'Connell's symbolic capital, attained as a result of his position among the Catholic Irish.

The very ambiguity of O'Connell's desire to see the Penny Post introduced meant that the logic of interest which can be applied to all social practices is misrepresented and it

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[1] *ibid*, Vol. VII, 237

becomes a logic of *disinterest*. O'Connell's actual interest in the Penny Post is masked by his concern for his fellow countrymen, in particular the poor. His espousal of the measure and its subsequent adoption allowed him to undermine other political organisations such as the Chartists whose activities might have weakened his position of influence amongst the Irish people. It was his victory in pushing for this reform which re-confirmed his popularity among the newly emerging Catholic bourgeoisie. O'Connell was able to benefit by his transformation of self-interest into disinterest and thus accumulate symbolic capital. Thus, the Post was primarily a political weapon and a functional tool the reforms of which would be of great advantage to this new Catholic bourgeoisie, the constituency over which O'Connell claimed dominion. Any benefits to working class individuals or organisations did not materialise until much later in the nineteenth century with the rise of trade unions and the rapid increase in literacy levels.[1]

6.4 Return to sender: letter writing and the subaltern

6.4.1 Introduction

What becomes clear from even a cursory reading of the sources used thus far is that, as far as the mails were concerned, there were only a limited number of constituencies for whom the Post was an integral part of communication amongst individuals and between communities. Businessmen, the formally educated classes and government all operated within the norms of postal communication and had done so for a considerable period of time. That is, perhaps, not so surprising when one considers the levels of illiteracy and

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[1] Vincent, D. 1985 *op. cit.*

the widespread oral Irish culture which prevailed at the time. Also, correspondence was something which was *theoretically* confined to those socially and economically powerful groups in terms of necessity and also in terms of communication. Mercantile groups required the post to trade. The state needed it in order to communicate with itself so that the business of government could be carried out. But there was another function the Post carried out which had a more social aspect. Correspondence was the way in which the gentry and bourgeoisie *spoke* to members of their own social class, from a distance at any rate. Letter writing was a method of communication as well as a means and it performed the task of long distance conversation admirably. However, the less well-off, the artisans, the urban proletariat and the labouring poor, all of these groups are characterised by a silent voice, in textual terms at least. These are the subaltern groups which are notable for their lack of presence within the records of the Post Office. That absence is one which should be recognised as significant.

6.4.2 Rural Ireland and cultural diffusion

Relatively poor educational facilities meant that there were high rates of illiteracy amongst both men and women in Ireland in the early nineteenth century.[1] The labouring classes did not figure largely as correspondents due, for the most part, to the fact that they could neither read nor write and their first language was Irish not English. It was only later in the century as literacy rates rose that the possibility of writing and sending letters increased. The transformation of Ireland from a primarily oral culture to a written one was brought about by various educational systems (usually with a sectarian bias) but

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[1] Kennedy, L. *et al* 1999 *Mapping the great Irish famine: a survey of the famine decades*, Four Courts Press, Dublin,

possessing one commonality: all lessons were taught through English.[1] English then became the primary medium for the reading and writing of texts in nineteenth century Ireland. From the 1830's onwards the decline of the Irish language was rapid. However, in the opening decades of the century, Irish was still the first language of most of the population.

Due to the oral nature of Irish culture there are very few contemporary texts which provide primary source material for gaining insight into indigenous culture at the time: 'Most of the writing in Irish was in the manuscripts written in the countryside...the circle which the written word in Irish reached in this form was quite limited".[2]

6.4.3 The diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan

So, how the post was viewed by the labouring classes is not really the question to be asked. Rather, was the Post used at all? One of the very few contemporary textual sources written in Irish which survive today is the diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan. The diary was kept between 1827 and 1835 and was written by a hedge-school master. In it he writes despairingly of the process of cultural diffusion which prevented the development of a literate Gaelic culture: "Some of the townspeople are organising a circulating library for a limited number of members. It has been established for a year. Alas! Who will establish

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[1] Cullen, L.M. 1981 *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* , Batsford Academic Press, London

[2] *ibid*, 131

an Irish language library? No such person is available. The English language of the Saxons is everyday getting the upper hand of our own native language!"[1]

This statement is indicative of the trends in the Irish language noted earlier. But what about the postal service? Was it the case that it was simply being ignored as being of no relevance to the urban poor and rural peasantry? O'Sullivan cites examples of the post being used in order to gain a voice within the structures of state communication which were almost wholly dominated by Anglophones when he wrote on the 8th of January 1828: "The people of Callan are about to send a petition to the British parliament, asking for Catholic Emancipation without any ties, without any restrictions with regard to religion, and without surrendering any powers we already have."[2]

Again, on May 11th of that year

> ...The people of the Commonage got a letter from Alexander Dawson member of
> parliament for County Louth and another from Lord Duncannon informing them
> that the bill that was against them in parliament to impose a rent on their cabins
> and gardens or else to cast them out in the world to beg, steal or murder, has been

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[1] H. O'Sullivan, *The diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan*, (Ed.) Tomás de Bhaldraithe Mercier Press, Dublin,1979, 21.
The text in the original Irish was published in A. O'Suilleabhain, Cín Lae Amhlaoibh (Dublin, 1970), 25 and is as follows"(January 5th 1828)... "(5ú Eanair)...Bhá cuid de mhuintir an bhaile ag cur leabharlann rothánach chuimsithe in eagar. Tá sí ar bun le bliain. Íocann gach nduine den chomhthionól coróin sa mbliain. Faraor! Cia chuir-feas leabharlann Ghaeilge ar bun? Níl sé le fáil. Tá an Béarla Sasanach ag breith barr gach lá ar ár dteangain dílis bhunúsach féin."
[2] *Ibid*, 42. The original text is as follows "(8u Eanair)...Atáid muintir Challain chum achainí do chur chum Feise na Breataine ag iarraidh saoirse Chaitliceach gan fuíoll ar bith gan conradh i dtaobh creidimh ná ag tabhairt suas aon chumhachta noch atá again cheana."

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thrown out. Our parish priest, Father Seamas Hennerby, Dr. Ceitinn, myself and

others were of good assistance in this affair![1]

These writings show that there was not a complete dearth of contact with the mails

among the labouring classes at the time. It was, of course, limited to the literate and,

specifically, to the literate Anglophone but it does represent correspondence activity. An

interesting commentary on the perceived improvements and shortcomings of the mail

delivery system, the mail coach, is provided by O'Sullivan when he said on May 1st 1829

... The mail goes from Dublin to Cork in twenty-one hours, although it is only

fifty years ago since the coach from Kilkenny to Dublin used to take two days,

although Kilkenny is half-way between Dublin and Cork. At that rate the coach,

called 'The Flyer', would take four days to [do] one day's work. 'The slow flyer'

would be a more appropriate name. But the blame couldn't be put on 'The Flyer',

but on the English Parliament, that left Ireland without proper travelling facilities

– nothing but muddy roads and rough paths, fords without bridges, hills and

rough glens.[2]

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[1] *Ibid*, 49. "(Bealtaine 11u)...Fuair muintir an Choiminis litir ó Alastrain Dosán seanóir Chontae Lú agus litir eile ó Thiarna Dhún Canáin gur caitheadh amach an bille bhí ina gcoinne sa *bParliament* chum a mbotháin agus a ngarraithe do chur faoi chíos nó iad a chartadh amach faoin saol le déirc nó le foghail no dúnmharú, ach míle milliún buíochas le Dia, buadh ar na diabhail agus ba mhaith é cabhair ár sagairt paróiste, an tAthair Séamas Heineabaire, agus an Ollún Céitinn agus mo chabhair féin, le daoine eile."
[2] Ibid, 72. The original text is as follows "(Bealtaine 1ú).... Imíonn an mála ó Bhaile Átha Cliath go Corcaigh in uair agus fiche, cia nach bhfuil thar chaoga bliain ó bhíodh cóiste ag imeacht ó Chill Choinnigh leathshlí ó Baile Átha Cliath go Corcaigh. Dhá bhrí sin ghabhadh an cóiste úd- *Eiteall* do ghlaoidís air – ceithre lá chum obair aon lae. '*Eiteall mall*' ba cheart do ghlaoch air. Ach ní ar *Eiteall* bhí an locht, ach ar an Seanad Sasanach, noch d'fhág Éire gan cóir imeachta ach bóithre pluide nó ráil gharbha, áthanna gan droicheadaibh, suas maolchnoc agus síos garbh-ghleannta..."

6.4.4 The postal network and the creation of demotic geographies

Simply because the post is mentioned in the diary of an early nineteenth century teacher does not ascribe to it the status of a system of mass intercommunication. What O'Sullivan's diary entries point to, however, is the existence of a level of oblique access to the mails. The considerable expense of sending a letter and the necessity of literacy skills were obstacles in directly engaging with the mails: "For many nineteenth century writers, the inscription of a letter was laborious and its transmission expensive, facts adding to the gravity of communication."[1]

Yet it was frequently the case that the privacy of individuation implied by letter writing (being, of its nature, an interpersonal dialogue) was fractured by the existence and intervention in the days before mass literacy of a body of individuals who composed letters on the behalf of others. Reading and writing were skills which were shared out among the community for the benefit of all.[2] Assistance from those who could read and write, schoolmasters, priests, neighbours etc, was sought and a level of circuitous access to the postal network was granted. O'Sullivan hints at this when describing the success of a bill being thrown out of parliament which would have increased rents in the area. He said "…Our parish priest, Father Seamas Hennerby, Dr. Ceitinn, myself and others were of good assistance in this affair!"[3]

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[1] Fitzpatrick, D. 1994 *Oceans of consolation,* Cork Univeristy Press, Cork, 23
[2] Vincent, D. *The rise of mass literacy: reading and writing in Modern Europe,* Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000
[3] O'Sullivan, H. *op.cit.* 49

This concept of resources being utilised by the community as a whole meant that those with command of the requisite literary skills occupied intermediary roles of considerable power and influence.[1] Their status was underpinned by their control of a potent form of cultural capital (literacy) which, in turn, allowed for control (indeed manipulation) of disparate strains of informational capital. Thus, their positions in social space altered in their favour as a result of the acquisition of the transferable skills of reading and writing. The native Irish culture of the early nineteenth century was an oral one in which direct conversation was the primary means of communication. As a result the lack of access to the postal systems was something which was taken for granted. The writing and reading of letters was not a regular feature of their social activities. Letters were, however, sent within and by those living in these communities. Those who wrote and received letters were cultural gatekeepers, almost. The letters they sent and received would be on other's behalf and they, the Anglophone literate, were the only ones able to decode them. This placed them in a position of power but it also, unquestionably, meant that those communities would have felt an increased sense of 'connectedness' to the outside world. The contents of the letters, particularly those letters from emigrant family members, would have been widely discussed. Those contents, indeed the very receipt of the letters themselves, would have meant that the working class communities which could neither read nor wrote were granted proxy access to a much wider geography of people and places than was available to them through their daily experiences.

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[1] Vincent, D. 2000, *op.cit.*

6.5 Conclusions

The metropolitan government, the Lord Lieutenant, the Chief Secretary's Office, the ruling local elites, merchants and traders in both Britain and Ireland, Business Federations, Chambers of Commerce, banks and assorted individuals from towns and villages across Ireland. All of them shared a common interest in the operation and location of the Irish mails. They also all lobbied for the deployment and targeting of postal resources, resources which they felt would benefit them, both individually and collectively. It was this contest for resources or a particular type of social capital which we will call informational capital that Bourdieu saw as being key to outlining a flexible taxonomy of social groups which would transcend the rigid outlines imposed on the Marxist categories of class by making note of, indeed predicating themselves an observable social differentiation.

> "The construction of a theory of the social space presupposes a series of breaks with Marxist theory. It presupposes a break with the tendency to emphasize substances – here, real groups whose number, limits, members, etc. one claims to be able to define – at the expense of relations with the intellectualist illusion which leads one to consider the theoretical class, constructed by the social scientist, as a real class, an effectively mobilized group; a break with economics, which leads one to reduce the social field, a multi-dimensional space, to the economic field alone, to the relations of economic production, which are thus established as the co-ordinates of social position; and a break, finally, with objectivism, which goes hand in hand with intellectualism, and which leads one to overlook the symbolic struggles that take place in different fields, and where

what is at stake is the very representation of the social world, and in particular the

hierarchy within each of the fields and between the different fields"[1]

Yet what is it that each group was actually doing in lobbying for increased access to the

mails?

At the local level the merchants and traders were treated separately from the 'gentlemen',

'clergy', 'principal inhabitants' etc because it was felt that, whilst the latter groups

depended in some way upon control of economic capital, the former groups were explicit

in seeking access to the post in order to reconfirm their domination of economic capital

within their respective fields. The other groups were engaged on a more complex and

sophisticated process. In the memorials the individuals referred to were usually those

who were seen as composing 'Society' – literate, articulate, educated and, as such, were

those who already possessed significant amounts of economic and cultural capital. The

groups, mediated by their spokespersons, were deploying their capital within the political

and economic as well as the bureaucratic fields within which Irish society was organised.

The 'noblemen, gentlemen and clergy' saw the establishment of a postal link as a way of

reinforcing the social structures that existed within their communities and as a method of

legitimising and securing official – explicit and public – acknowledgment for their

symbolic capital. What was being mobilized was a complex matrix of capital so that an

outcome could be achieved by several groups which nonetheless had different motives

for achieving that outcome. How this was achieved was through the mystery of ministry

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[1] Bourdieu, P. 1991, *Language and symbolic power: the economy of linguistic exchanges*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 228

as a transformative process took place whereby the process which granted the spokesperson the power to act as the proxy of the group which created him but also act through a transformative exchange of capital, to create the very group that created him.

But within this process the geography of such events must be considered. The petitioning of bureaucratic and governmental structures for increased access to the post was something which the local rural elites saw as providing them with great benefits. Their activities, however, were conducted at a local level and were therefore geographically discrete. That the process of groups forming to lobby the government and the Post Office took place all over Ireland throughout the early nineteenth century meant that the process of attempting to control this means of distributing information (the postal network) took place on a *national* scale but always at the *local* level. The drives and imperatives for the changes were coming from bottom-up as opposed to top-down for this is where the strength and power of Irish society had traditionally accreted.

The contrast with O'Connell's view of the potential of a cheap system of postage for middle class Catholics is stark as he saw it as something which should be negotiated and lobbied for but would applied at a national level. The group which would benefit a great deal from this nationally applied scheme would be the Catholic bourgeoisie. But these benefits could only accrue from a top-down impetus, so to speak. O'Connell saw relatively cheap postage as a new way for the Catholic middle classes to speak to itself, to communicate with members of the same class more efficiently and easily. This class contestation took place at a national level as opposed to those whose battles over resources and capital were more effectively fought at the level of the local.

These voices were either expressions of the traditionally powerful (the gentry, the aristocracy etc.) or those who were becoming increasingly powerful as the century wore on (the Catholic bourgeoisie, the professional classes etc). In a limited way this chapter has attempted to elucidate the voice of the voiceless in these discourses of power and social relations, the voice of the rural peasantry, the subaltern. It is a very difficult thing to do as in the postal records which exist today the presence of the working class was not something which was regarded with a great deal of importance. It was not considered essential to the process of government or even Society for their voices to be heard or listened to. It was only at the end of century and particularly with the popularisation of proletarian memoranda such as postcards and Valentine's cards that the working classes really engaged with the concept of correspondence in a big way. Yet this does not deny the obliquity of access which rural communities in particular were granted by those who lived among them and could read and write in English. They were communal gatekeepers who facilitated the access, through the medium of correspondence, of these communities to diverse national and, in the case of emigrant letters, global geographies. The information and descriptions contained within these letters would open up new vistas for these communities and could enrich the lives and experiences of those living within them.

Chapter 7

'A form of freedom': resistance and the mails

Chapter 7 'A form of freedom': resistance and the mails

7.1 Introduction

"Take away justice, then, and what are governments but great confederacies of robbers? After all, what are confederacies of robbers unless they are small-scale governments? The gang itself consists of men, it is directed by the authority of the chief, it is bound together by a pact of mutual support, and the loot is divided in accordance with an agreed law. If, as a result of the recruitment of desperadoes, this evil grows to such an extent that it takes control of a territory, establishes bases, occupies cities and subjugates peoples, then it assumes the name of a government, the more openly because this is now plainly applicable: not because the robbers have renounced their rapacity, but because they are no longer at risk of punishment. The reply that a captured pirate made to Alexander the Great was apposite and legitimate. For when the ruler asked the man how he could justify making the sea a dangerous place, he answered, with defiant outspokenness, 'In exactly the way that you justify doing the same to the whole world. But because I do it with a single paltry ship, I am called a robber; while you do it with a large navy, and are called an emperor.'"[1]

In this chapter the concepts of crime and resistance are paramount. The link between the two notions is problematic but undeniably there and careful exegesis of what crime consisted of in early nineteenth century Ireland is a valuable index of the social and economic, not mention political, trauma which were defining characteristics of Ireland at the time. Thus the nature of crime, what constituted a crime, who was the offender, what

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[1] Augustine of Hippo, 1963. *De civitate Dei,* abridged and translated by J.W.C. Wand, Oxford University Press, Oxford, Book IV, Chapter iv, 178

was the motive, what was the reaction, who were its victims and what forms of punishment were exacted are all relevant questions within this context. The postal network was a frequent target for highwaymen and thieves and violence was a common tool of those who attacked the mail coach network, in particular. The nature of the attacks varied but their motivations were of less concern to the state than the fact of their occurrence. In examining the issue of mail coach attacks and highwaymen, this chapter will deal with a variety of related issues which set the context of the attacks and their potential significance before going on to analyse the attacks in detail.

7.1.2 The background to the analysis

The backdrop for this time period is a land famed for its agrarian outrages, political unrest, the poverty of its rural population, rampant sectarianism and the harsh, yet on the whole ineffective, judicial system. The exigencies of Ireland were such that the vast majority of its population lived in rural areas, Dublin being the only urban area of any considerable size. The consistent increases in population and the concomitant subdivision of landholdings meant that biodiversity was unknown, the potato was the principal dietary staple and the vast majority of rural landholders were living in conditions so appalling that the Duke of Wellington was prompted to comment that "there never was a country in which poverty existed to the extent it did in Ireland".[1] Coupled with the fact that Ireland was alternately governed by a Protestant ruling elite or the British colonial state, the Catholic masses saw their situation as a singularly unjust one. The Rising of 1798 with its discomfiting echoes of the Digger revolt (even though the gentry were

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[1] quoted in Rude, G. 1978 *Protest and Punishment: The story of the social and political protestors transported to Australia, 1788-1868*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

among its leaders) had a profound effect on the mindset of the authorities in Dublin

Castle. Yet in the period after the Act of Union it was not the United Irishmen which

were the problem. As Donnelly and Clarke point out "Every decade between 1760 and

1840 was punctuated by at least one major outbreak of rural discontent... the Oakboys of

1763, the Houghers of 1778-9, ...the Rightboys of 1785-8... The Ribbonmen of 1818-

20... the Rockites of 1821-4".[1] Thus the explosion of discontent in the 1700's

culminating in the Rising continued to rumble on well into the nineteenth century. The

nature of protest, agitation, resistance and crime took many forms. George Rudé in his

study of criminals and protesters transported to Australia lists thirteen categories of

protest 'crime' "robbery alarms; forcible possession; arson; riot and destruction of

buildings or machinery; attacks on houses or land; cattle maiming; threatening letters;

unlawful, armed assembly; assaults on and obstruction of police; assaults on revenue

officers, unlawful oaths; combinations to raise wages; high treason (limited to 1848)".[2]

In this chapter we shall attempt to situate the attacks on the delivery lines and the Post

Office employees which occurred in a fairly consistent manner in the two decades which

followed the Act of Union. The question of what constitutes resistance will be posed and

if social crime is a form of resistance then are all attacks on an agency of the state a

means of opposing the deployment and subsequent activities of that agency? The issue of

perception is one which permeates all such judgements of course and such actions as will

be discussed cannot be easily separated out into 'good' and 'bad' acts. Such a

simplification, while possibly self-evident and certainly candid, frequently blurs what the

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[1] Clark, S.and James S. Donnelly 1983 'Introduction' in *Irish peasants : violence and political unrest 1780-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 25
[2] Rude, G. 1978 *op. cit.* 32

act itself points to in terms of social implications and economic constraints. If theft and agitation are the measure of bad government, then their forcible elimination means that government, as Foucault would concur, is merely a synonym for control. That control was what was lacking in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Also in this chapter we shall look at the concept of the 'bandit', the noble robber who robs from the rich and gives to the poor. The social historian Eric Hobsbawm is synonymous with the model of social banditry and he developed his theories in several works such as Primitive Rebels, Captain Swing and Bandits.[1] As we shall see Hobsbawm examined the history of protest and crime from the perspective of those who took part and who formed bands of men (and, occasionally, women) to rob from mail coaches, banks, trains etc. and who attained a degree of status and respect which sometimes coalesced to become legend and myth. The classic example of this is the most famous bandit of them all, Robin Hood. Yet the bandits who preyed on the wealthy were of peasant stock themselves in order to operate most effectively they required the support, active or tacit, of the peasant population in which they found themselves. A feature of social banditry is that it is most active when the state is weak or its institutions poorly developed.

Finally, one other individual should be mentioned whose work, although on a different period of time, is highly influential on this area of the research. Peter Linebaugh's brilliant evocation and analysis of crime and punishment in eighteenth century London is

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[1] Hobsbawm, E.J. 1971, *Primitive rebels: studies in archaic forms of social movement in the nineteenth and 20th centuries*, Manchester University Press, Manchester; Hobsbawm, E.J. and George Rudé. 1973, *Captain Swing,* Penguin, Harmondsworth; Hobsbawm, E.J, 1985 *Bandits,* Penguin, Harmondsworth

an important text for any student of the history of crime and criminals.[1] In his book, *The London Hanged*, Linebaugh makes a powerful case for the revisiting of the depressing history of capital punishment in eighteenth century London. He superbly synthesises the power and willingness of those individuals who 'suffered at the tree' to achieve the freedom which the ruling classes very much attempted to prevent them from ever having. Escape from the confinement of 'necessary' changes in the economic order was their achievement. Thieves, whores, killers, cutpurses, sniggsmen, reevers, highwaymen, drunks and traitors were all 'launched into eternity' at the gallows tree. However, Linebaugh takes up E.P. Thompson's challenge to future historians. Thompson said that

> "we need more studies of the social attitudes of criminals, of soldiers and sailors, of tavern life; and we should look at the evidence, not with a moralising eye ("Christ's poor" were not always pretty), but with an eye for Brechtian values – the fatalism, the irony in the face of Establishment homilies, the tenacity of self-preservation. And we must also remember the "underground" of the ballad-singer and the fair-ground which handed on traditions to the nineteenth century (to the music-hall, or Dickens' circus folk, or Hardy's pedlars and showmen); for in these ways the "inarticulate" conserved certain values – a spontaneity and capacity for enjoyment and mutual loyalties – despite the inhibiting pressures of magistrates, mill owners, and Methodists".[2]

Linebaugh responded to this difficult challenge by producing his own work on the social history of eighteenth century London which emulated Thompson's desire to see those silent values and attitudes studied. He showed how those who refused to accept their place within the economic order of things maintained and retained a capacity for

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[1] Linebaugh, P. 2003, *The London hanged : crime and civil society in the eighteenth century*, Verso, London
[2] Thompson, E.P. 1991, *The making of the English working class*, Penguin Press, London, 59

individualism and, paradoxically, collective consciousness which is, ultimately the apotheosis of freedom. Although it is on a different time and a different place its conclusions and methods, not to mention the quality of the writing, were things which inspired aspects of this research.

7.2 An outline of the moral economy of crime

The nature of crime and criminality is tied up in many knots, those of legality, morality, class, economics and social distinction to name but a few. Yet it is frequently not a simple matter to declare something right or wrong, certainly not as simple as the statute books would have us believe. The moral economy of contemporary crime is the outcome of two centuries of the reconciliation of the subject with, and the normalisation of, the state. Yet in early nineteenth century Ireland the situation was very different. Attitudes towards what we would today categorise as criminal activity were far more permissive in terms of both the 'crime' and the 'criminal'. In any time and in any place there is a written down legal code, the laws of the land which exists alongside another code. Popular attitudes towards crime and the law constitute an unwritten code and frequently diverge from the stone tablets of the law of the land. This divergence is commonplace but in early nineteenth century Ireland it was highly pronounced. A combination of factors coalesced to create a healthy disrespect for the actions and institutions of government, particularly in relation to law enforcement. A rapist or a child murderer might be reviled and shunned but a smuggler or a poteen seller would enjoy a degree of protection and acceptance of his activities which the former transgressors never would. Highwaymen,

pirates and outlaws would be elevated to the status of folk rebel, a sort of smudged hero to the working classes whose activities would be celebrated and discussed in homes and public houses throughout Ireland. They were simultaneously a narrative or entertainment and yet at the same time evidence that life was not in vain. There were those who struck out at the landlords, the agents, the revenue men and the polis. The combination of heroic myth and political consciousness found expression in these individuals. Yet they were regarded and prosecuted by the law as criminals.

As E.P. Thompson points out there was considerable divergence in between the unwritten moral code of the people and legal code in the latter half of eighteenth century England. "One may even see these years as the ones in which the class war is fought out in terms of Tyburn, the hulks and Bridewells on the one hand; and crime, riot and mob action on the other".[1] In place of Tyburn, the hulks and Bridewells one could effectively replace them with, approaching the problem from another direction, the boreens, crossroads and assize courts of early nineteenth century Ireland. These places were where the social and economic tensions manifested themselves in class and sectarian conflict. It was there where resolution was sought by all sides yet, as they all were to discover, little resolution was gained. The prolix nature of the legal code has always been an attempt to allow only those who wrote it to fully understand it. The complex of statutes and codes were added to every year in an attempt to ameliorate the lack of order with plenty of law. The state's reaction to any fresh, or even stale, attempt to challenge its legitimacy, by design or by extension, was to increase the choking gossamer of an already punitive legal code and to increase the number of offences which were punishable by death. These felonies could by

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[1] Thompson, E.P. 1991 *op. cit.*, 60

no means be categorised as 'offences against the person'. In fact the majority of criminal acts which had their severity of punishment augmented were economic crimes.[1] The fulcrum of this entire chapter is the dislocation, in both theoretical and practical terms, of what the state and the colonial government saw as a crime and what was popularly perceived as criminal. The two could and did match but they equally frequently did not.

7.3 'The unruly Irish': Social unrest in the early nineteenth century

The Ireland of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a bleak and unprepossessing place for large numbers of the population. Subsistence agriculture and frequent political and social unrest were combined with severe poverty. To use a Marxist term the rural populace was alienated from the dominant economic, religious and political systems of the time. The Rising of 1798 was followed by more gloom as food shortages greeted the new century in 1800 – 1801. William Cobbett's description, in a letter to his servant, of what he found in the Irish countryside is apposite here

> "I went into several [hovels]... They all consisted of mud walls, with a covering
>
> of rafters and straw. None them of so good as the place where you keep your
>
> little horse. I took a particular account of the first place I went into. It was
>
> twenty-one feet long and nine feet wide. The floor, the bare ground. No fireplace,
>
> no chimney, the fire (made of potato-haulm) made on one side against the wall,
>
> and the smoke going out of a hole in the roof. No table, no chair; I sat to write
>
> upon a block of wood. Some stones for seats. No goods but a pot, and a shallow

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[1] P. Corrigan and D. Sayer, 1985, *The great arch: English state formation as cultural revolution,* Blackwell Press, Oxford,

tub, for the pig and the family both to eat out of. There was one window, nine

inches by fire, and the glass broken half out".[1]

Although some here questioned the validity of such observations stating that outsiders

frequently magnified their reactions for dramatic impact, there is little doubt that the lash

of poverty and inequality was felt keenly on the backs of the rural peasantry.

The problem, the central one at least, was land. Who held it, who worked it and, of

course, *cui bono*? In the early decades of the nineteenth century Ireland's population was

expanding at an alarming rate. This put pressure on the subdivision of landholdings,

which in turn meant that the cultivation of the potato became the only viable means of

feeding a large family from a small plot of land. The 'middleman system', whereby

agents and farmers let out lands to small holders on behalf of the landlord, divested the

supposed owners of the land of their responsibility to the tenants and dumped it into the

frequently unscrupulous and callous hands of the land agents. The lack of 'tenant right'

or the proviso that failure to meet with rental payments could and did result in immediate

eviction meant that there was considerable bitterness festering among the Irish labouring

classes, a bitterness which bore consistent fruit in the form of sporadic outbreaks of

violence.

Life, for the rural peasantry, the smallholders and cottiers, was tough. Perhaps not as

bleak as nationalist historiography would have us believe but there is little setting aside

the fact that regular food shortages occurred, their diet varied very little and depended

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[1] quoted in O'Grada, C. 1989 'poverty, population and agriculture' in W. E. Vaughan(ed.) *A new history of Ireland. 5,: Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70,* Clarendon Pres, Oxford, 110

almost exclusively on the potato, hygiene conditions were, for the most part, poor and the lack of enforceable rights to the land they occupied and worked all combined to produce a fertile soil for dissent.

7.4 The conception of a different morality: social banditry

In order to problematize more coherently the material being dealt with and the themes contained within we shall now briefly examine the concept of the 'noble robber' or the social bandit. It was the economic and social historian, Eric Hobsbawm, who bequeathed us his conceptual model of the social bandit, a figure distinguished from the common-or-garden criminal by several characteristics, not least among which is the absence of predation upon the peasant communities in which the bandit operated. Before going onto outline the content of Hobsbawm's model of social banditry, certain caveats should be mentioned. Several people have criticised the model for its generalisations, its assumptions about the use of terms such as 'peasant class' and 'peasant consciousness',[1] and for the fact that when applied to specific situations involving banditry and protest for example of the Kelly Outbreak of the late nineteenth century in Australia, the model breaks down quite significantly.[2] Also, in the absence of a detailed explication or application of the concept of the social bandit in Irish history, there have been those who doubt the collectivity or social coherence of the various factors of the rural working

[1] O'Malley, P. 1979, 'Social Bandits, Modern Capitalism and the Traditional Peasantry: A Critique of Hobsbawm,' *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 6, 4: 489-499
[2] McQuilton, J. 1979 *The Kelly Outbreak 1878-1880: The Geographical Dimensions of Social Banditry,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne

classes that the model assumes.[1] Despite these valid criticisms the model does contain valuable insights which can help explain the nature and function of crime as resistance in the early nineteenth century in Ireland.

So what is social banditry? Hobsbawm paints a thumbnail sketch "It consists of relatively small groups of men living in the margins of peasant society, and whose activities are considered criminal by the prevailing official power structure and value system, but not (or not without strong qualification) by the peasantry. It is this special relation between peasant and bandit that makes banditry 'social'".[2] For Hobsbawm social banditry is an almost universal phenomenon with the activities of social bandits stretching from China to Peru to the Ukraine to Indonesia. Hobsbawm, in a curious dichotomy which at times evades as much as it enlightens, draws a kind of psychological boundary between the 'figure' of the bandit and the material conditions which prompt and nourish social banditry. The man (occasionally but rarely a woman) who is the social bandit is one who refuses to accept, as stated, his or her place in the economic and social order and who fights back by attaching the manifestations of those processes and institutions which embody and impose that order. The 'hero' of the people, the Robin Hood characterisation, is given a great deal of space within which to breathe in Hobsbawm's characterisation. The social bandit would never prey on the poor, would rob the lord's harvest but never steal from the peasants harvest in his territory. This reification, the development of a cult image will be returned to but suffice it to say that Hobsbawm's

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[1] Lee, J. 1980 'Patterns of rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland: a prelimanry survey' in Cullen, L.M. and F. Furet (eds.) *Irlande et France XVII-XX siecle: pour une histoire rurale compare: Acts du Premier Colluque Franco-Irlandais d'Histoire economoique et sociale,* Dublin
[2] Howsbawm, E, J. 1974 'Social Banditry' in H.W. Landsberger (ed.) *Rural Protest: Peasant movements and Social Change,* MacMillan Press, London, 143

model is suffused with the iconography of resistance from the populist rendering of frequently non-existent deeds or even individuals.

Turning now to the conditions necessary for social banditry to flourish, we find fruitful ground for analysing the postal attacks. Hobsbawm thought that social bandits emerge at times of widespread social discontent and that such activity frequently co-existed alongside more ambitious movements of peasant insurrection. The conditions in which such movements flourished were times of pauperisation and economic rises in pre-industrial societies where agriculture was the dominant mode of production. Another necessary condition for the existence of social banditry was the existence of a 'weak' or bureaucratically unsophisticated state. Hobsbawm believed that at the times of social unrest, when insurrectionary organisations began to develop, that the bandits and bandit groups operating were subsumed or merged with the larger movements and that the activities and organisation (hierarchical or otherwise) of the bandit groups was frequently emulated by the primitive peasant insurrections or guerrillas. The tactics and methods developed by bandits were thus co-opted into the service of these wider peasant movements. Hobsbawm gives literally dozens of examples but to name a few there was the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation) of the early 20th century, the *bandeleros* of Andalusia of mid-nineteenth century Spain, Pancho Villa in Mexico, and the *cangaceiros* of North Eastern Brazil, who operated between 1890 and 1940.[1]

Regarding the mythopoeic element of Hobsbawm's model, it is worth nothing that there is a space within the model, a mental space, for the bandit to occupy in the collective

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[1] Howsbawm, E. J. 1974, *op. cit.*

consciousness of the peasant populations in which social bandits lived and operated. Hobsbawm claims that the public image of the bandit is one which is not only sketched in by those who discuss and take note of the bandit's activities and progress (i.e. the public) but imposed upon the bandit themselves. The action of banditry is freedom, according to Hobsbawm, and in a peasant society few people can be free. The peasant's economic servitude (even though Hobsbawm plays this aspect down by stating the peasant is virtually self-sufficient) coupled with their immobility, the tying to the land means that, quite simply, the peasant is a figure in chains. Marriage, inheritance and subsistence: All of these things constrain in such a way as to diminish the peasant's freedom. Thus the bandit occupies a place in the mental drama of peasant society and that place is one reserved for protest. One key thing to mention here is that although the 'honour' and prestige accorded to bandits as fighters against injustice and champions of the poor may have meant the bandit would not, out of shared morality, prey on the peasant population there was an additionally pragmatic element in that absence of predation. The bandit lived within peasant society and in order to guarantee his continued freedom (and frequently existence) he depended on the refusal of the peasantry to turn him into the police.

The type of social protest which banditry represented was, therefore, neither very organised nor highly conscious. There was little in the way of ambition to the activities of the social bandit. He might enjoy a widespread support for his activities (as long as the right targets were hit) but beyond that little was achieved other than the bandit enriching himself and in doing so place himself into the role of avenger and social champion. A

role which, it must be said, usually had little to do with the reality of the bandit's character or actions but it was the creation of legend or myth which concerns us in this instance. To briefly recapitulate, Hobsbawm's thesis of the social bandit had several prerequisites. Overall, for social banditry to emerge it must be a time of flux, of widespread social discontent. It must begin in a social environment which was occupied by a 'traditional peasantry'. Finally that environment itself must consist of agricultural mode of production in a pre-industrialist or pre-capitalist plane. It is in the transition from 'traditional peasant' society to modern economy that we find the emergence of social banditry according to Hobsbawm. That this actually contradicts his earlier conditions of existing within a pre-capitalist economy *only* is not something which gives Hobsbawm much pause for thought. Despite this, his theorisation of the context of crime and resistance has lent us several useful tools for analysing the material at hand.

7.5 A tradition of violence? Outrage, terrorism and resistance in Irish history

"I do hereby solemnly and sincerely swear that I will not make known any secret now given me, or hereafter may be given, to anyone in the world, except a sworn person belonging to the society called Whiteboys, otherwise Sive Oulthos' children. Furthermore, I swear that I will be ready at an hour's warning, if possible, by being properly summoned by any of the officers, serjeants, and corporals belonging to my company. Furthermore, I swear that I will not wrong any of the company I belong to, to the value of one shilling nor suffer it to be done by any others, without acquainting thereof. Furthermore, I swear that I will

not make known, in any shape whatsoever, to any person that does not belong to us, the name or names of any of our fraternity but particularly the names of our respective officers. Lastly I swear that I will not drink of any liquor whatsoever while on duty, without the consent of any one or other of the officers, serjeants or corporals; and that we will be loyal to one another as in our power lies".[1]

Thus read an oath which was found in the possession of a number of Whiteboys arrested at Tallow in April 1762. The internal discipline that the oath aspires to was somewhat aspirational in its form but the armed insurgents of the Whiteboy rebellion of 1761-1765 while not perhaps an efficient military machine were very definitely organised and marched and drilled in open defiance of the colonial authorities. This particular outbreak of unrest had a great deal to do, as nearly all of the subsequent rebellions also did, with the landholding structure. In the case of the Whiteboys, the resistance that was being proffered was opposed to the radical restructuring of the rural (and hence national) economy by the enclosing of common lands. The mid-eighteenth century Whiteboys threw down fences which enclosed previously communal lands and attacked farmers who exacted tithes. The unrest was at its strongest in Tipperary although it spread throughout the country, mostly in the south and west. The oath-taking of those who composed the ranks of the Buachaillí Bána (Whiteboys) is the first recorded instance of such, arcane activity and organisation in terms of agrarian unrest in Irish history. It was not, however, the last. The Whiteboys were the precursors of all those agrarian secret societies which followed them (and which were frequently lumped together under the heading of 'Whiteboyism' irrespective of location or specific motivation) in that they utilised oaths

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[1] Donnelly, J. S. jr. 1978, 'The Whiteboy movement, 1761-5' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxi, no. 81, 20-54

when accepting new recruits as a binding tool, something which was invested with great practical and symbolic importance. Although the Whiteboys did not follow the Hobsbawm model of social banditry in that they were active at a time of agricultural prosperity, it was the implications of that prosperity for the labourers and cottiers which the Whiteboys listed amongst their grievances. The shift towards a pastoral economy fuelled by export demand meant that all land grew in value and the resultant evictions of cottiers and labourers to create new grazing lands produced a despair which turned to an instinctual social violence that ended in the forcible release of prisoners from gaols, enclosure fences being torn down and cattle being maimed.

The Whiteboys were the first, in short. They were followed by many others. Joseph Lee, in an influential essay on the nature of social unrest in Ireland criticises the, as he sees it, dogmatic nationalist historiography which placed all agrarian unrest in a straightforward and misleading binary of the downtrodden masses rising up to oppose the imprecations of an alien religion and an alien government.[1] Lee highlights the intra and inter class nature of many of the conflicts which arose, stating that the majority of the struggles occurred not between farmers and landlords but between labourers and cottiers on the one side and farmers on the other. In another article he states his belief that, for example, the Ribbonmen did not attack any individuals to rob them but rather to take what was useful and necessary i.e. their arms. In fact, Lee goes on to suggest that the continental model of the banditti did not apply in Ireland in spite of the fact that highway robbery was prevalent in Ireland in the early nineteenth century. He quotes the statement of the Lord Lieutenant in 1816 which said that "...it is worthy of remark that, in spite of the many

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[1] Lee, J. 1980 'Patterns of rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland: a prelimanry survey' in Cullen, L.M. and F. Furet (eds.) *Irlande et France XVII-XX siecle: pour une histoire rurale compare: Acts du Premier Colluque Franco-Irlandais d'Histoire economoique et sociale,* Dublin

successful attacks which were made upon houses, with the view of depriving the proprietors of their arms, it rarely occurred that any other species of property were molested by assailants".[1] He also cites a police report from 1845 in Roscommon of the 14th of June which stated that

> "...between 12 and 2 in the morning, about twelve men attacked Regan's house, and having forcibly entered, demanded arms and not finding any swore him as to whether he had arms. Three of them assaulted him and were about taking a sum of money when Regan's wife cried out 'they had robbed him'. One of them supposed to be the leader of the party called the men to swear them as to who had taken the money, when it was instantly restored. They killed Regan's dog and departed".[2]

For Lee, Ribbonism was a synonym for all agrarian unrest similar in its usage to Whiteboyism. But this was not unrest of an insurrectionary nature. It did not seek to operate so as to smash the state or replace the landlord and middleman system with a Gaelic, communal paradise. Ribbonism sought to rid the extant system of its grosser excesses and in acting as they did to achieve a kind of law of good conduct amongst al the actors who took part in the agrarian drama of nineteenth century Ireland. Lee denies the linearity of conflict which is drawn from the Whiteboys to the Land League which nationalist orthodoxy promotes. He argues that class conflict and the widely different aims of each movement or society meant that the unrest took place in temporal isolation and should be examined at the individual level and not as a form of historical progression.

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[1] Lee, J. 1973 'The Ribbonmen' in T.D. Williams (ed.) *Secret Societies in Ireland*, Gill and MacMillan Press, Dublin, 31
[2] *ibid*, 32

There are those who criticise Lee's conclusions such as Beames, Fitzpatrick and Donnelly.[1] They attack his argument on several grounds, commenting that the class conflict model of analysis is too prominent. Donnelly, for example, contends that although important Lee's thesis blurs what is a fundamental characteristic of the agrarian upheavals: that in times of prosperity the rebellions were dominated by the landless poor who wished to frustrate the inflationary activities of those who wanted to acquire land for grazing. On the other hand times of economic depression saw the expansion of the social spectrum in the composition of the rebellious groups. Donnelly points out that in all of these rebellions the poor and the landless played a part but that their pre-eminence depended on the buoyancy (or lack of it) in the Irish agricultural economy.

Yet having said all of this it was still the case that Ireland in the eighty year period from 1760-1840 was a violent and disturbed place. While claiming a coherence of aggression and violence is one thing it is another to claim coherence of ideology. That is not the intention here. What should be borne in mind always is that as one reads the reports of the attacks on the postal lines, there is and was a tradition of armed resistance and violence against those whom the rural proletariat and others saw as repressive or deliberately unjust. While in the majority of cases which follow, a Bakuninist analysis would allow for the attacks to be legitimised as attacks on the concept as well as the material of property, that is not the suggestion being posed. What is being proposed here is that from the point of view of those in charge, the ruling elites, is that stealing from the

[1] Beames, M.R. 1975 'Peasant movements in Ireland, 1785-95' in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, ii, no.4, 502-506; Beames, M.R. 1978 'Rural conflict in pre-Famine Ireland: peasant assassinations in Tipperary, 1837-1847', in *Past and Present*, no. 81, 75-91; Fitzpatrick, D. 1982 'Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland' in P.J. Drudy (ed.) *Irish Studies 2: Ireland: land, politics and people*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 37-75; Donnelly, J.S. jr. 1985, 'The social composition of agrarian rebellions in early nineteenth century Ireland: the case of the Carders and the Caravats, 1813-16' in Patrick J. Corish (ed.) *Radicals, rebels and establishments : papers read before the Irish Conference of Historians, Maynooth 16-19 June 1983*, Appletree Press, Belfast, 151-169

mail lines *was* resistance. Interrupting the lines of communication is a classic guerrilla tactic used to this day and whatever the motivation behind the attacks the state viewed them as directly interfering with their own activities.

7.6 'Going on the Accompt': Mail coach robbery and the mails

I keep my horse, I keep my whore,

I take no rents, yet am not poor;

I traverse all the land about,

And yet was born to never a foot;

With partridge plump, with woodcock fine,

I do at midnight often dine;

My hostess' daughter has her place;

The maids sit up and watch their turns;

If I stay long the tapsters mourns;

The cockmaid has no mind to sin,

Though tempted by the chamberlain:

But when I knock, O how they bustle!

The ostler yawns, the geldings justle;

If maid but sleep, O how they curse her!

And all of this comes of, Deliver your purse, sir![1]

This picaresque verse is the blanket, general definition of the life theatre and the social impress of the highway robber, or as it is portrayed in bandit lore. One who does not find

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[1] Stage song from *The Widow* by Thomas Middleton in A.H. Bullen 1885 (ed.) *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, Middlesex Press, London, Vol. III, I, 22-37

a place, through inability or through a distaste for the dull humdrum of repetitive labour of the peasant economy as it played out in the tillage fields or the pasture meadows. The town too provided little to their liking in terms of more formal, legal employment and the force of a rumbling stomach or a threadbare pocket would be overriding. So they would go upon the 'Accompt', to borrow a phrase from the Ordinary of Newgate. Peter Linebaugh explains that to go upon the Accompt had two meanings in eighteenth century England.[1] With the emergence of advanced capitalist flows which facilitated increases in commerce and the volume of trade, cash flow difficulties were encountered which obviated the use of silver and gold as forms of currency and pressed into service new forms of credit – monies of the 'Account'. At the same time when payment was in arrears social relations of the eighteenth century manifested themselves in shortages of gold and silver. When this happened the labouring classes resorted to other methods of obtaining payment and when they turned to highway robbery this was termed, not without some considerable irony, 'The Accompt'.[2]

The situations of England in the 1730's and Ireland in the early nineteenth century are not wholly analogous in either social dynamics or the etymology of criminal argot. Yet it remains the case that those who lived by the musket and the cudgel, who hid behind hedgerows and walls in wait on lonely roads as a matter of occupation also did so as a matter of necessity. Highway robbery may have been easier to perform than working the land but it was a dangerous activity for the performers. The difficulty in any discussion of crime of this period is that activities such as highway robbery, attacks on private property or on the person tend to meld into the white noise created by the generality of agrarian

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[1] Linebaugh, P. 2003, *op.cit.*
[2] *ibid*

disturbance. These disturbances mask the activities of the ordinary thief to some extent in that it is frequently difficult to separate common or garden theft from any actions with an undertone of social protest or with a primitive political import.

That is, one supposes, the axis on which this chapter turns. However, it is not to belittle the potential of the accounts and descriptions of the attacks on the mail lines to provide a fuller picture of life in early nineteenth century Ireland. Rather, it is a caveat that the groups and individuals involved in the action of theft were, for the most part thieves who simply wanted to steal something. A closer analysis of that action can provide some valuable insights into what constituted resistance in that it could be suggested that resistance is not necessarily a conscious act on the part of those resisting. That is the real fulcrum of this chapter, that the acts and motives of those who stole from post boys, who attacked mail coaches and who stole mail bags are not the primary determinant of the character of resistance. To the state and the Post Office all attacks were a form of resistance, an impediment to their own activities. That Ribbonmen, Whiteboys, Terry Alts or simple criminals were the ones who stole or attacked the mails was not the problem. The fact of the attack rather than its motive concerned the government the most. To 'go upon the Accompt' was to pit oneself against the forces of law and order and in this case, the Post Office. The attacks may not have possessed a political character but their implications did.

To His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant,

May it please your Excellency,

The Belfast mail coach having been attacked in the morning of the fifteenth of January near Drogheda by a gang of armed robbers and John Toole the driver having in a very spirited manner whipped forward his horses for the purpose of saving the mail and thereby drawn upon himself the vengeance of the robbers they fired at and wounded him very seriously in several parts of the body.

And on the night of the eighteenth of January the Limerick Mail Coach having been attacked at Cherryhill in the County of Kildare by a banditti of armed men who concealed themselves behind a hedge and fired at the coach as it passed but upon some of the making their appearance, the Mail Guards Thomas Conroy and James Conroy fired at and beat them off and the coachman James O'Brien having exerted himself by whipping forward his horses the mail was saved by their joint exertions.

And on the same night the Cork mail coach having been attacked by a number of armed men near Clonmell who fired several shots which were returned in a very spirited manner by William Moore the guard who used every exertion to save the mail until he was disabled by several wounds.[1]

These are fairly typical accounts of several mail coach attacks. Typical in the sense that each report was faintly bombastic in its way as it either rather pompously accentuated the positives or wrung its hand and demanded action over the negatives. On the third of September of the same year another report contained the following description

"...on the morning of the 24th of July the Longford mail coach having been attacked by a banditti of armed men who fired at the coach as it passed but the mail guards Joshue Tate and John Young in a very spirited manner returned fire and the coachman Lawrence Nowlan having rapidly driven forward the mail was

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1803, Vol. II, 93

saved by their joint exertions. And on the night of the 9th of August the Limerick mail coach was attacked by a large number of armed men at Cherryhill in the county of Kildare who fired at the coach behind a hedge but upon some of them making their appearance the mail guards Robert Mathews and Thomas Anthony having returned fire and the coachman Robert Thomas having resolutely driven forward the mail was saved tho' not before on the guards Thomas Anthony had his arm broke by a musquet(*sic*) shot and received several wounds in other parts of his body."[1]

Thus the heroes of the Post Office were rewarded for their devotion to duty with musket balls and the terror of imminent mortality. Such violence was far from uncommon in these attacks and although valorous actions are noted they were the unusual part of the reports. Mail coaches in the early nineteenth century in Ireland travelled with two mail guards, of whom at least one would be armed. It was the practice in Britain at the time to travel with only one mail guard on a mail coach but as can be seen from the levels of violence used the presence of two armed guards was not an extravagance.

These accounts above, stirring though they are, did not portray all of the nature of the mail coach robberies. More often than not, the outcome was not that "the mail was saved by their joint exertions". "On the 16th of November 1806 His Majesty's Mail was attacked and robbed between the two towns of Mullingar and Ballimore and that, under the authority of the then Postmasters General, a reward of £100 was offered for the apprehension and conviction of the Parties concerned in the robbery".[2] Happily in this

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1803, Vol. II, 149
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1808, Vol. III, 190

particular instance although the mails were stolen one of the miscreants involved was captured

> "...two days subsequent to the robbery a man named Bryan McMahon was apprehended in Athlone on whom was found a considerable portion of the property but before his committal to prison could be effected he contrived to make his escape but after a period of eighteen months again taken into custody in the Town of Drogheda was immediately committed to the gaol of Mullingar was there tried at the late Assizes of County Westmeath convicted upon the clearest testimony and has since suffered the sentence of the Law".[1]

The number of parties concerned at the prevalence of highway robbery grew with every passing day. The 'principal inhabitants', the new 'Quality' of nineteenth century Ireland could not but help stick their oar in over the activities of the bandits.

Dublin Castle, 16th April 1814

The Postmasters General,

My Lords,

I have received and laid before the Lord Lieutenant your Secretary's letter of the 11th instant enclosing the report of Mr. Ferguson Superintendant of mail coaches on the attack of the Mail Coach near Cashel on the night of the 31st of March. I now enclose by His Excellency's direction for your Lordship's information, a copy of a letter on the same subject from Weldon Jordan esq. Deputy Mayor of Cashel dated the 9th instant and His Excellency hopes that by the exertions of the Magistrates and by the rewards that are offered for discovering and apprehending the persons concerned in the attack on the coach and wounding one of the escorts, they may be brought to Justice.

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1808, Vol. III, 191

I am,

W. Gregory.[1]

Note the capital 'J' on 'Justice'. The levels of violence used by the thieves in the attacks were high. An ambush on isolated roads or stretches of the mail line that ran through woods or valleys were the favoured spots, natural killing grounds. There was little impunity shown on the part of the robbers in attacking their fellow countrymen. Wives of mail guards or drivers were made widows by the attacks and the Post Office paid them a part of the salary of the employee killed on duty as a pension, as evinced by this excerpt

> "...in consequence of the attack on the mail coach from Dublin to Galway on the morning of the 3rd at Cappa Hill in which you recommend that the widow of the mail coach guard who was shot on that occasion and who is left with five children in great distress should be paid twenty pounds at present and twenty pounds annually".[2]

In the same attack the coachman received several head wounds for which in turn received "a sum not exceeding ten pounds".[3] A similar situation occurred when one Alexander Mackay, a mail guard on the Dublin to Derry coach was shot in the head in an attack on the coach on the 8th of April 1823. He died soon after of his wounds but the Postmasters General awarded his widow a pension of £20 annually and, unusually, £3 to each of his children until they could otherwise be provided for.[4] Such munificence was part of Post Office policy, a policy which we shall return to later in this chapter.

There seemed little coherence to the distribution of the attacks. They occurred in a widely dispersed pattern, both close to towns and cities and in isolated rural areas. The attacks

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1814, Vol. III, page?
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1812, Vol. III, 44
[3] *ibid*
[4] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1822, Vol. IV, 303

themselves could obviously only take place according to the geography of the expanding postal network. Seemingly, all mail lines in practically every county were vulnerable to attack. In 1814 the Derry coach was attacked at Green Hills in county Meath, its contents stolen and one of its drivers badly wounded. On the 12th of April 1823 the Enniskillen mail coach was successfully raided near Enniskillen without loss of life although, all guards and drivers were wounded. On the 7th of January 1828 the mail coach was attacked between Mullingar and Ballymahon and was relieved of three bags of letters bound for Dublin. The south-west and the Midlands were particularly active in terms of highway robbery in the early years of the century. South Tipperary and North Waterford in particular were areas of considerable bandit activity. That this area was also a hotbed of agrarian agitation is not, perhaps, a coincidence although it would be erroneous to draw a causative link between the two. It merely seems to be the case that in the atmosphere of violence that prevailed in the Waterford, Tipperary, Cork region, violence begat violence. Little of political character can be inferred from the attacks described in the reports that came from this area but it is, again perhaps, telling that one item which was particularly prized was the guns that the mail guards habitually carried, especially as they usually carried a ready supply of ammunition.

However, one did not have to be a Rockite, a Ribbonman or a Terry Alt to desire a firearm. Highwaymen, as the evidence shows, found a use for them aside from their use as tools in the meting out of primitive justice by the Secret Societies. The prevalence of attacks in the region is outlined in the following report

"...the repeated robberies of the mails in the neighbourhood of the town of

Clonmel have attracted the Lord Lieutenant's particular notice and I am desired

by His Excellency to request that a report be made to me for His Excellency's

information of the modes of conveyance of the mails between Clonmell and Waterford, Clonmell and Cappoquin, Clonmell and Cahir and Clonmell and Cashel and the expense attending the same and that as the necessity of giving additional security to the conveyance has become indispensable you will represent in what manner it will be most expedient to have these mails carried as to prevent the frequency of robbery now so justly complained of".[1]

This letter from Andrew Marsden to the Postmasters General simply shows how much of a problem highway robbery was for the Post Office. Providing extra security increased expenses but it was clearly a necessity in this case.

In fact in 1818 the Post Office found itself unable to deliver mail between Ballinasloe in Galway to Westport, County Mayo due to the inherent instability of the area. It was

"...impossible to procure a renewal of the contract for conveying His Majesty's Mails upon the very important line of Post leading from Ballinasloe to Westport". In the absence of a mail coach contractor brave or foolhardy enough to take up the contract the Post Office was "...reluctantly compelled to resort to the mode of horse conveyance which in part of that district of country is at present rendered insecure particularly at this late season of year."[2]

This is what the highwaymen had achieved. They had frightened mail coach contractors off tendering for certain areas. The "late season of the year" referred to above was a boon to the highwayman. Dark, cold nights which were frequently wet assisted him on the execution of robberies as visibility dropped drastically and sounds were masked.

To return to the theme of violence the furious nature of the attacks was implicit and taken for granted. If one is gong to rob a mail coach which is guarded by armed men then the

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1805, Vol. II, 180
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1818, Vol. IV, 90

simplest and most direct, not to mention effective, method to achieve that goal was violence. However, not all of the robberies of the mails were on mail coach lines. Post boys were used to cover short distances where the ground was too rough or it would be uneconomic to employ a mail coach to deliver the mail. The post boys were just that – boys. Young adolescents even children who were not armed. They were frequently and easily waylaid by men with empty pockets and big sticks. But again the levels of violence used in the attacks were high, disproportionately high to the threat they posed to the robbers. On the 1st of March, 1822 an unnamed post boy was carrying the mail between the towns of Rathkeale and Shanagolden when he was waylaid by a gang of men armed with cudgels. He was stripped and beaten to death and the mails he was carrying were taken. The gang was described as "insurgents"[1] and the boy's mother was paid £6 per annum as a compensatory pension. It was small comfort for the mother who wrote a heart-rending letter to the Postmasters General describing the boy's death. The murderers were never apprehended.

In this instance we part company quite vociferously with Hobsbawm's model of the social bandit. To attack a mail coach was one thing. The guards and the coachmen were all adults and at least two of them would usually be heavily armed. They knew the risks and should one of them be killed in a firefight then there was an acceptable risk on both sides to allow for a sufficient social defence of the robbery to be maintained. As stated, armed coachmen were one thing. Unarmed children were entirely another. That kind of action would garner little support or sympathy in the local communities in which it was committed and the people involved would be running a very high risk if they expected a

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1822, Vol. IV, 238

nearby villager to support them, even if they were on the run from the militia and the polis.

Another example throws a different light on the mail coach attacks and that took place in April 1822 between Cork and Tralee. In a letter from one C.D. Oliver, proprietor of mail coaches, an attack is described. It took place on the 17th of April and it was unusual in its execution. Unusual because robbery was not the primary motive, in fact the attackers did not even rob the coach. The coach and horses were attacked by a "Party of Insurgents"[1] but rather than simply stealing the mail and the guns of the guards the attackers burnt the coach to its axles and slung the mail bags on its burning embers without opening them (the seals of the mailbags were intact when the scene was inspected). They then proceeded to maim the horses so badly that they later had to be put down. The fact that the mail coaches frequently carried cash as part of their load, a fact that highwaymen and thieves up and down the country were well aware of, makes it odd that even a cursory examination of the contents of the mailbags was not attempted. Further light is shed on the dim and fierce affair (the coachman and mail guards were, needless to say, killed) by a fact which emerged in later correspondence. In order to claim compensation for the loss, Mr. Oliver had to find someone in the surrounding neighbourhood to bear witness to what happened before the Post Office would reimburse him. For 48 hours afterwards Mr. Oliver could not find a single inhabitant of a nearby town or village who would help him, a fact which would seem to indicate that the attack was not committed by criminals but by members of one of the myriad of agrarian secret societies, possibly the Rockites who were particularly active in the southwest at that time. That this was an isolated incident is not the whole truth but as the authorities invariably described any gang of armed men as

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1822, Vol. IV, 236

'banditti' or 'insurgents' it is quite difficult to ascribe an overtly political motive to the attacks. Yet at the same time it seems clear that they were not simply 'criminal'.

One aspect of the mail coach attacks and the post boy robberies which has been alluded to is the Post Office policy of compensating the victims of the attacks or their relatives. This policy was stringently adhered to. The Post Office hierarchy and Dublin Castle were active in paying the Post Office employees the recompense they felt they were entitled to in the aftermath of the attacks. "William Harborne the Mail Guard immediately fired his pistol at, and killed him" in an attack on the Cork mail line at Mallow in 1803 and in doing so "preserved the mail and being of the opinion that such conduct on the part of the mail guard deserves to be rewarded…we beg leave to recommend that a reward of thirty guineas be paid to said William Harborne" the Postmasters General said in a letter to the Lord Lieutenant.

> "We beg leave to submit the meritorious conduct of the men to the consideration of You Excellency and to suggest whether or not it may be expedient in justice to them as well as an encouragement to other guards and drivers to act in the like praiseworthy manner to bestow such reward as Your Excellency may seem fir and if Your Excellency has no objection thereto we would beg leave to recommend that the sum of thirty guineas be paid to each of the five persons before mentioned".[1]

After an attack on the mail coach at Cashell by a "Banditti" the then Chief Secretary, William Pole, stated

> "…having laid before the Lord Lieutenant your Secretary's letter of the 6th inst. representing the very spirited and proper conduct of the Guards and Coachmen of

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1805, Vol. II, 387

the Cashell Mail Coach on the night of the 29th when they were attacked…and signifying your request to be informed whether the usual reward granted upon such occasions viz. thirty guineas to the Guards and twenty to the Coachmen should be extended to those upon the Cashell coach. I am commanded by His Grace to signify His approbation of the guards and coachmen of the Cashell Coach being rewarded for their good conduct on this occasion as has been usual on occurrences of a similar nature".[1]

Another example comes from an attack on the mail coach at Derry in 1812 when the Postmasters General wrote to the Lord Lieutenant stating

"…we directed our Secretary to acquaint Your Grace through Mr. Secretary Peel on the 30th ultimo with the particulars of an attack made upon the Derry Mail Coach on the morning of the 28th ultimo and adverting in general terms to the good conduct of the Guards and the Coachmen who defended the Mail that morning. We have now the honour to communicate for Your Grace's further information that we caused the most particular enquiries to be instituted into the conduct of the Guards and Coachmen on the occasion. And it appears to have been distinguished by the greatest Coolness and gallantry and though they were forced to at last yield to superior numbers their charge was not surrendered while resistance could be opposed to a well armed gang rendered desperate by the Death of one and the wounding of one or two of their associates nor until every part of their ammunition had been expended and one of the guards disabled from several desperate wounds in his body and the coachmen and the remaining guard much injured".[2]

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1811, Vol. III, 217
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1812, Vol. III, 244

While praiseworthy to the Postmasters General and the authorities in Dublin Castle, their actions could hardly be described as purely philanthropic. These were troubled times and economic hardship was common. The possibility of earning a large reward for bravery or meritorious conduct (even at risk of injury or possible death) was intended as an encouragement. The authorities conceived of rewards as "a stimulus to other mail guards to an active and spirited discharge of their duty".[1] Praiseworthy but not entirely lacking in self-interest.

How did these attacks affect those who used the post? The merchants and traders for whom the post was a daily necessity viewed the attacks with an understandable degree of trepidation. In November 1802 a memorial reached the Lord Lieutenant from

> "...the Merchants Trades and Inhabitants of the city of Waterford whose names are signed hereto [stating] that the mails between Dublin and Waterford contain almost at all times property to be of considerable value that for almost thirty miles of the road between Royal Oak and Waterford they are conveyed on horseback usually by a boy ill mounted and unarmed, a mode of conveyance attended with delay and insecurity".

The memorial continued by "praying that a carriage may be appointed for the conveyance of the mails between Waterford and Carlow or Leighlin Bridge as may be judged most expedient".[2] A similar situation was described in December 1806 by the Chief Secretary in a letter to the Postmasters General.

> "It having been represented to the Lord Lieutenant that the Great Western Mail containing the bags of thirty post towns of much consequence and so large as sometimes to require two horses to carry it is accompanied by a small boy which

[1] *Royal Mail Archives*, POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1805, Vol. II, 112
[2] *Royal Mail Archives*, POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1802, Vol. II, 116

unsafe mode of conveyance is a temptation to Robbers that it has been robb'd

three times within one fortnight and that it is necessary a carriage should be

provided which would carry a guard as well as a driver".[1]

These lapses in security were fairly common and they gave much cause for concern to the

merchants and traders, the business federations, Chambers of Commerce and the banking

concerns who used the mails lines to send bank orders, documents as well as cash in the

mailbags which were so regularly stolen. They did not see it, however, as a matter which

could be effectively dealt with by them.

<div align="right">Dublin Castle 28th Nov. 1812</div>

Right Honourable the Postmasters General

<div align="center">My Lords,</div>

I send you herewith by command of the Lord Lieutenant a memorial from the

bankers, merchants and traders of Newry requesting that in consequence of the

frequent robberies of late on the Northern Road, measures may be taken for the

security of the mail coaches on that road and His Grace requests your Lordships

will consider said memorial and report your opinion thereupon,

<div align="center">I have the honour &c.</div>

<div align="center">W. Gregory[2]</div>

In the same year the "Bankers of Dublin" sent a more complete and detailed petition to

the Lord Lieutenant regarding the widespread robbery on the mail coach lines "...in

consequence of the late Robberies of His Majesty's Mail coaches, an unusual degree of

alarm prevails". This "unusual degree of alarm" was not all that unusual but in this

instance the bankers had a specific gripe. They complained of the absence of security and

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1806, Vol. II, 232
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1812, Vol. III, 24

"...safety for the remittances to and from the Metropolis".[1] These remittances were, of course, the drafts and cash sent to and from Dublin by provincial banks, upon the smooth movement of which depended the banking system. But the bankers did not ask for the customary but ambiguous 'something to be done'. They viewed the situation as being so serious and the matters concerned of such importance that they requested "more effectual protection thereof" culminating in the demand that "a military escort be appointed to each mail coach". The tone of the memorial is far more aggressive than the usual softly-softly, plaintive diplomatic whinging one normally encounters in communications between government and private groups at this time. The bankers, and others like them, were worried.

7.7 What to do? Structural failings and Government responses

The problem of mail robbery was not the only one faced by the government in the early nineteenth century. We have already seen how the countryside was alive with secret societies, both agrarian and religious, and this was coupled with a more general lawlessness at a local level which possessed little organisation but persisted past the point of comfort. In the years after the Napoleonic Wars Ireland was too disturbed to respond to the kind of civil administration being instituted in Britain yet at the same time it was not sufficiently in upheaval to allow for the introduction of martial law. The system of 'country gentlemen' providing the type of leadership (read dominance) and setting the kind of example which created the kind of quiescence in the rural communities which

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1812, Vol. III, 243

allowed for the flourishing of 'stable' local government in Britain did not exist in Ireland. The gentry existed and were real enough but they did not possess the necessary authority to safely impose the order generated by the natural deference of the peasants for their 'betters'. This partnership model of government was itself breaking down in Britain or rather was being re-modulated to allow for increased centralisation of government function and control. However, in Ireland the system was not being re-modulated but was under severe attack and had, in many instances, ceased to function. The landlords and the gentry were supposed provide those 'arbiters of the dispute', the magistrates, the justices of the peace and the Grand Jurors who would foster good government and be the associates Dublin Castle needed to keep peace on the ground.

In the onslaught of agrarian outrage, the ubiquity of secret societies and the lauding of the highwayman, a climate of iconoclasm was fostered among the subject population which eventually forced the introduction of an entirely new form of law enforcement centred around 'police' governmentality. The atmosphere of tension and fear which existed among the officials in the Castle certainly pervaded among the county magistrates. In 1816 the Chief Secretary, Robert Peel, wrote

> "...it is quite impossible for anyone to witness the remorselessness with which crimes are committed here, the almost total annihilation of the agency of conscience as a preventative of crime, and the universal contempt in which the obligation of any but an illegal oath is held by the mass of people".[1]

In the opinion of some, the problem lay with the central authorities' inability to effectively appoint stronger magistrates

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[1] Broeker, G. 1970 *Rural disorder and police reform in Ireland, 1812-1836,* Routledge and K. Paul, London, 25

"...we must not flatter ourselves that such work can be speedily accomplished. Putting down the turbulent and encouraging the well affected are the first indispensable steps towards a durable system, which perhaps can only be established beneficially and effectually by an improvement in the habits of country gentlemen, a work in itself beyond all legislative reach and attainable only by an increase of their intercourse with other persons and parts of the United Kingdom".[1]

This letter from Speaker of the House Abbot to Robert Peel indicates an awareness of the problems at hand but demonstrates an unwillingness to divest the colonial government of a policy of locally based law enforcement techniques which had served the ruling classes and the state so well in Britain.

The realities of the situation were such that the traditional methods of law enforcement, with the Protestant gentry acting as magistrates and justices of the peace and the rural middle classes acting as Grand Jurors and assisted in their duties by a poorly organised network of parish constables, were not effective. There was another agency of law enforcement, the baronial constables, created by Acts of Parliament in 1787 and 1792. They were appointed by the Grand Jury but were underpaid, under-trained and so wholly ineffective as to be considered worthless as a method of maintaining law and order.[2] Robert Peel was pushing a new proposal – the Peace Preservation Force. The Act instituting the force allowed the Lord Lieutenant to proclaim an area in a state of disturbance and to then appoint a stipendiary magistrate along with a body of special constables to assist in the restoration of order. The plan was vigorously opposed by

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[1] *ibid*, 23
[2] Connolly, S.J. 1989, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30' in W. E. Vaughan(ed.) *A new history of Ireland. 5,; Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 74-106

elements within the government in Britain as it smacked too uncomfortably of the centralised forms of law enforcement which characterised the British ruling classes' personal bête noir, continental despotism. The burden of paying for the activities of the Peace Preservation Force fell upon the district to which it was sent and was therefore unpopular with local magistrates who frequently opposed its introduction. The Peace Preservation Force, when it was approved and written into the statute books, was not particularly successful. While it was a new departure in the enforcement of law and the 'natural order' of the rural class structure, in most instances of its deployment it was necessary to supplement its activities with the militia and the army.[1]

The Post Office too had to rely on the army in the protection of the mail lines. "The mail has been again robbed near Boyle" Andrew Marsden wrote to the Postmasters General in July 1805 and he had received representations that asked "…for the consideration of His Excellency whether from the frequent robberies that have of late been committed between Elphin and Sligo it may not be expedient to direct a military escort to protect the mails on that line from future depredations".[2] Such requests became increasingly common and acted as a prod to the Post Office only insofar as they passed the request on up the line to the military authorities. The reply to this particular request is indicative of how thinly stretched the military in Ireland were at the time.

> "In consequence of your Lordship's Representation a communication has been
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> had with the commander of Forces and it appears that from the arrangements that
>
> have necessarily been made of the cavalry for the defence of the country it will
>
> be impossible at present to furnish detachments to escort the mail on the line
>
> desired and His Excellency apprehends that if the yeomanry were put on

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[1] Broeker, 1970, *op. cit.*

[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1805, Vol. II, 179

permanent duty for this service not only a considerable expense would be incurred thereby but that as often as circumstances might make it requisite to withdraw them from that duty it would be probable that the mail would again be attacked. His Excellency is therefore of the opinion that it will be most advisable to provide for the security of the mail on the line to Sligo by conveying it in a cart with a guard which would be attended with less expense then Escorts of Cavalry or Yeomanry and I am commanded by His Excellency to recommend it to your Lordships to take necessary measures for establishing a cart with a guard for the conveyance of the Mail on the line to Sligo accordingly".[1]

Quite who or what the Lord Lieutenant and his Chief Secretary thought was protecting the Sligo mail before this is somewhat uncertain. Three mail guards had been killed guarding this line in the previous year.[2]

The expense of engaging the military as a method of protection for the mails thus obviated its use as policy even when there were cavalry or troops available. Yet protection was not the only way the military could assist the Post Office. They were used to hunt down and capture highwaymen and mail robbers in the absence of a constabulary to do the job. Examples of the army as a police force are numerous. On the 20th of April 1799 a Colonel Finlay wrote to the Postmasters General to demand repayment of the expenses incurred by a "Party of Troops" employed in pursuit of mail robbers. The expenses amounted to £23 and 8 pence.[3] On the 20th of September 1801, Charles Abbot wrote to the Postmasters General regarding the capture and conviction of a group of

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[1] *ibid*, 179
[2] *ibid*, 175
[3] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1799, Vol. II, 35

highwaymen who had robbed the mail coach near Cappoquin the previous March. Their

capture was apparently the result of the zeal of five cavalry officers based at Cashmore. It

was recommended that it would be "…expedient for you to order a reward of ten guineas

each to those men not only with a view to remunerate them for their trouble and expense

in scouring the country on this service but because it may operate as a stimulus to others

to exert themselves in rendering such services".[1] It would seem that officers and

gentlemen were not on a par with the lower orders when it came to defending the mails.

The provision of security in the fight against highwaymen and bandits was something

which clearly occupied a great deal of the time and resources of the Post Office. Yet at

the same time the old battle inherited from that engine of capitalist accumulation, the

eighteenth century, in which all life was conceived of in terms of profit and loss, ensured

that the mails were never fully secured. 'Who should pay?' was a consistent refrain when

it came to protecting the mail lines. The Post Office, as we have noted, was reluctant to

outlay any more money than was absolutely necessary when it came to the employment

of mail guards. Paring down the numbers employed in this duty was a running theme of

the Post Office establishment. In a letter from Charles Saxton to the Postmasters General

the guards for "…several lines of road" were described as being withdrawn in November

1810 only to be reinstated on the 5th of April of the following year.[2] In a communication

from Chief Secretary Gregory in 1823 the Postmasters General were informed that "the

third guard on the Belfast, Derry and Enniskillen Mail Coaches was intended as a

temporary arrangement and that direction should be given for discontinuing the escort of

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1801, Vol. II, 91
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1812, Vol. III, 323

Dragoons". [1] In 1825 the Lord Lieutenant wished to discontinue "a patrol from a detachment at Cashel to meet the Cork Mail". He did not "consider that there can be any object in continuing this patrol...(as it was)...so manifestly inconvenient to the troops employed".[2] The colonial authorities disliked such extra-mural activity and the magistrates regarded it as a deviation from their more proper duties as the Chief Magistrate of Police for County Tipperary, a Mr. Wilson, pointed out in a letter to the Postmasters General when requesting that a police escort of the mail coach from Littleton to Cashel be discontinued.[3] The absence of proper security on many of the mail coach lines prompted the Post Office to search for any and all means of protecting the mails, providing, that is, that it did not cost too much. They even entertained the suggestions of a Mr. Corry who claimed to have a mysterious and unspecified "machine for the protection of mail coaches and Plan for the destruction of midnight bandittis".[4] The machine and the Plan did not eventuate in any great leap forward in mail security as Mr. Corry never actually replied to further queries, which was not all that surprising as he claimed he needed finance in order to properly develop his idea which the Post Office would, naturally, provide up front.

7.8 Conclusions

The model of social banditry does not, on the face of it, possess a great deal of relevance for the highwaymen of early nineteenth century Ireland. The model itself proposes a man

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[1] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1822, Vol. IV, 366
[2] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1825, Vol. IV, 377
[3] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1822, Vol. IV, 342
[4] *Royal Mail Archives,* POST 15, Ireland Letter Book, 1824, Vol. IV, 245

of moral integrity (according to the mores of the moral economy of the peasantry) who did not prey on the poor, who attacked the wealthy and righted the injustices meted out on the populace by local law enforcement. That the highwaymen attacked the wealthy and the state through its agency the Post Office is undisputed. To what extent he was a hero who righted the wrongs visited upon the peasantry of rural Ireland is a matter for conjecture. However, there existed a considerable body of outlaw lore in the early nineteenth century which celebrated the achievements and exploits of figures such as the highwayman, James Freney, in much the same way the exploits of Jack Shepard or Dick Turpin were lauded in England a century earlier.[1] Banditry and harassment of the gentry and the agencies of the state certainly took place and this is, in itself, enough to denominate it small-scale resistance. Bandits and highwaymen may not have emulated the internal command structures, the coherence and the conspiratorial organisation of groups such as the Whiteboys or the Ribbonmen but even though these organisations possessed a political or economic agenda, it should be recalled that banditry itself arose out of reaction to the major land confiscations of Elizabeth I, James I, Oliver Cromwell and William III. The fact that highwaymen and bandits attacked the mail coaches for personal gain is somewhat secondary to the fact that their activities were in open defiance of the English colonial authority and the landlord system and possessed political implications in terms of the uneasy relations between the coloniser and the colonised.[2] In 1835 Alexis de Tocqueville reported that the Irish peasantry had no confidence in English law, harboured practically any fugitive going and were in an almost perpetual condition of conflict with the state in the form of its agencies the magistrates, revenue collectors

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[1] Lineabugh, 2003 *op. cit.*, Cashman, R. 2000, 'The heroic outlaw in Irish folklore and popular literature' in *Folklore*, 111 (2) 191-215
[2] *ibid*

and the military. A Secretary of the Poor Law Commission explained to de Tocqueville that "…in Ireland almost all justice is extra-legal".[1]

Those who, like Joseph Lee, criticise the temporal progression drawn between the peasant uprisings of the late eighteenth century to the Land League of the late nineteenth and beyond as being too simplistic are broadly correct, in this researcher's opinion. That progression, so beloved of certain historians, ignores clear intra-class conflict and places all rebellions on the axis of the downtrodden native Irish versus the brutal, alien English interloper. These criticisms are entirely valid and when Lee denies the proto-Bakuninst tendencies (as he calls them) of the Irish rural peasantry, citing regional and local antagonisms, he is more than likely correct. However, the state and the local ruling elites saw the Whiteboys, the Terry Alts and highwaymen all as 'banditti', manifestations of the unruly, violent and barbarous Irish who were unwilling to accept the 'proper' and 'natural' order of the tenant-farmer-landed gentry paradigm as the authority to which all should submit and which, to the state and the ruling classes, was the very essence of true civilisation. To return to Peter Linebaugh, highwaymen and robbers may not have been a political grouping or a religious sect bent on emancipating the labouring classes but their antinomianism was the essence of resistance. It was in their attitude, their lifestyle, their habits and their deeds which, although to the distaste of observers past and present, were celebrated by the labouring classes in song and verse.[2] The highwaymen and robbers need not have been great men or even good men. They simply needed to do what the rural peasantry could not: move, harass, take from the economically and politically

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[1] *ibid*, 193
[2] Linebaugh, P. 2003, *op. cit.*

powerful and do so in such as way as to capture the imagination through their chutzpah and panache. That is itself resistance.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Chapter 8 Conclusions

8.1 A brief overview

The one consistent element running throughout this research project has been the concept of change. In the period in question in Ireland the theme of change was ever present. The geography of the postal network was never static, it retained a degree of movement in terms of its structure which impacted on the nature and geography of information circulation at the time. The changing nature of the state and those groups whose vested interests were directly at stake as a result of the instability created by these changes found expression in space as the structures of power manifested themselves in the various material and abstract landscapes of Ireland. The postal network was both an abstract and a material network which was affected by the changes taking place and it played a substantial role in shaping those changes. The Post's transition from being an organisation whose drives and imperatives were laced through with strong elements of private enterprise (illicit private enterprise in many cases) to a fully functional agency of intercommunication whose activities possessed an importance beyond the accumulation of revenue is an illustrative example of the changes which were occurring in government at the time. The fact that the Post Office was a government department means that any substantive analysis of it must take into account its relationship with the state and be cognisant of how that relationship affected its operations and its structures and, ultimately, its geography.

What this thesis has achieved is to highlight the importance of the Post as an element of the historical geography of the first half of the nineteenth century in Ireland. For the first fifty years of that century, the Post was the *only* system of intercommunication that existed. The telegraph would not make its impact until much later in the century and so the system of 'asking and telling' which the postal network represented was the only one available. The profile of those who used the Post began to change in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Its use began to spread beyond the confines of local and metropolitan elites and its importance as a tool of economic distribution and exchange grew. That fact notwithstanding, there were large swathes of the population who did not use the Post and for whom written communication was something only others took active part in. it was not a part of their daily activities. This would only really change with the introduction of the Penny Post system in 1840, a change which drastically reduced the expense of sending mail.

8.2 The geography of the network's development

Throughout the nineteenth century the Post was increasingly making its impact felt and this was nowhere more evident than in the villages and towns across Ireland which saw the opening of new receiving houses and post offices. The badge of the Royal Mail was an increasingly common sight hanging from the lintels and doorways of pubs, shops and hotels as were the activities of the mail coaches, horse post riders and post boys. Having outlined the narrative of the Post Office's growth and development and having analysed some of the significance and implications of that growth in the body of this thesis, we

will now go on to draw some conclusions from current research and to use both the empirical and theoretical narratives to show how the geography of the postal network in early nineteenth century Ireland fits into the overall schema of Irish historical geography and historical geography in general.

In order to accomplish this goal the various elements of that network and the procedures and personnel which constituted and ran it are described in detail. The network of receiving houses which comprised the postal network in the closing years of the eighteenth century was widely and unevenly distributed. This uneven distribution was due to the fact that the Post Office developed its network of receiving houses along the existing road network pattern. The Post Office had neither the money nor the authority to build roads to provide for the creation of new postal routes. The pattern of the postal network was thus linear with the lines of communication following those lines of transportation which had been established in the previous centuries. With the dawning of the new century, there was an increasing focus on the development of a more efficient system of communication, the calls for which came from a wide number of groups from the landed gentry to the professional classes to merchants and traders. Yet the impetus for the development of the Post had to come from the state before any change could be effected and whilst that impetus did come it took several years before it gained any momentum. The arrangements for the collection and receipt of mail were unwieldy. One of the central difficulties was that mail was only paid for when it was delivered, there was no prepaid system in operation and would not come into existence for several decades. Dublin was the exception to this rule as it possessed its own system of delivery which

was separate from the General Letter traffic. This system was a precursor of the nationwide Penny Post system and was remarkably efficient by comparison with the General Letter Post. On a nationwide scale, however, the network was not as efficient as the Penny Post system. Poor organisation and mismanagement meant that the routes taken by letters could frequently double back on the routes they already travelled, in many cases so as to meet the traffic travelling from Dublin. With the creation of a mail coach network matters were improved somewhat and the speed of delivery of mail increased. However, as the delivery speeds increased so did the costs and these costs were passed on to customers in the form of consistent rises in the postal rates, a situation which prompted much abuse of the franking system and illegal private carriage of mail was widespread. Despite these difficulties as the century wore on the spread of the postal network meant that the reach of this intercommunications technology also increased. People could communicate more effectively and more quickly as the network developed.

The British state, in the shape of its parliamentarians and colonial bureaucrats, was not satisfied with this. Although speedy and secure communications were one of their main goals in the reforms of the Post, they saw one major stumbling block which these improvements did nothing to solve: the focus on Dublin. All of the routes in the postal network were organised to provide a link with Dublin. Dublin was the centre of administration and the economic hub of Ireland. However, the state saw this emphasis as being something which prevented the far more important correspondence from London from taking primacy. They wanted to tie all of the principal ports and towns of Ireland far more directly to the metropolitan centre of London. The particular focus on one spatial

element within a myriad of discrete nodes (postal towns) meant that the network was consequently warped in terms of its orientation and organisation. Dublin was the gateway through which Imperial metropolitan central was organised but that status meant the elevation of Dublin in a metaphysical sense. This distorted Dublin's relationship with the rest of the postal system and in doing so distorted the system itself. Whilst the metropolitan authorities recognised the significance of Dublin as the seat of colonial control, they felt that undue emphasis was being placed on all communications *with* Dublin whereas, in practical and symbolic terms, the emphasis should be shifted to communication with the *real* seat of power, namely London.

This fact was what lay behind the reforms of the postal system which occurred in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The examination of the internal network, its bureaucratic structure and the external links between Britain and Ireland came about as a result of this desire to bind Ireland's communications network to the metropolitan centre of London. The packet lines in particular were found to be ineffective in both financial and operational terms. The corruption and inefficiency which the parliamentary investigations found was rife in the Irish Post Office gave the state further reason for its proposed amalgamation of the Irish and British Post Offices. That was the ultimate outcome which came about after the state saw that in order to create those stable communications links it would have to intervene directly in the Post Office. Those links were essential in order to achieve the control the metropolitan government saw Ireland as lacking in the early nineteenth century. The system as it was at the passing of the Act of Union was insufficient to provide the platform of information exchange that the state

desired. This impacted on the network in the increased focus on the port towns as being nodes which should be developed and on the internal to external links between rural inland towns and villages and the mail traffic from London. The situation of Dublin being the centre of postal organisation was one which the state saw as negative and inimical to the development of trade and, more importantly, control.

The network in the thirty year period after the Act of Union saw many changes in its orientation and operation. However the *pattern* of the network did not alter significantly in terms of its development. The cross post system of delivery which was organised to carry letters between the mail postal routes meant that overall the network pattern was a dendritic one. Significant and heavy mail traffic travelled in a linear fashion along relatively straight routes and less significant sporadic traffic branched off at various points to be delivered to the smaller towns and villages. With the creation of the mail coach network and the appointment of greater numbers of postmasters and postmistresses to more and more towns and villages the postal network spread across Ireland's landscape. This spread was slow and fitful in comparison with the rapid growth in the network in the latter half of the nineteenth century as by the end of the nineteenth century 1600 postal towns received mail from and sent mail to all over Ireland. It was this growth that laid the foundations of the stable, speedy system of intercommunication which the colonial state so plainly felt was needed. The growth of the network in the early years occurred in a reactive pattern as access to the postal network was lobbied for, and granted to, by different local groups within Irish society. Yet as the century wore on the Post

Office authorities began to activate the nodes of the postal network in a more coherent and planned manner.

8.3 The Post Office, information circulation and governmentality

In light of these changes in the postal network, what were the implications and importance of postal communication and the new forms of knowledge that increased correspondence offered? The Post Office's relationship with the state altered significantly in the early nineteenth century and it is that alteration which is a microcosm of wider shifts in the conception and organisation of government which occurred around this time. Over the course of the early nineteenth century, new forms of governmentality began to emerge. These new forms of governmentality comprised a range of structures and institutional reconfigurations which were either created or modified to achieve the changing aims of the state. The postal network was one of these structures but the changes which occurred in the postal network require contextualisation against the wider backdrop of state formation. Michel Foucault is the principal theorist of governmentality and it was his ideas and theories which were most useful in attempting to provide a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the changing nature of information circulation and the shift in government. Initially the Post Office was a state agency intended to be used by the state alone (and a few wealthy, influential individuals). It was a medium of state-centric communication which government officials used to communicate with one another. It was how the state spoke to itself and the Post was essentially a carrier of state knowledge in which the transfer of knowledge, as opposed to

its circulation, was paramount. This is in direct contrast to the postal service which emerged in the eighteenth century. The pervasive embourgeoisment of 'Old Corruption' meant that any activity or agency which could assist in the creation and consolidation of the new forms of capital exchange was encouraged. In the eighteenth century, as opposed to the early modern period, the post was opened up and the circulation of information was not restricted in a legalistic sense. The Post Office was open to anyone, anyone who was literate and could afford it at least. The eighteenth century state saw the Post Office as an agency for the generation of revenue, a cash cow the profits from which could be used to fund other ventures which were, in the short term, less profitable such as war. The mails were opened up to provide a point of contact between the state and mercantile capitalism. The flexibility or weakness of the state meant that those structures which created conditions conducive to the development of mercantile capitalism were expanded. But this did not mean any interference on the part of the state in the operation of the postal service. Not directly in any case.

The nineteenth century saw a change in the state's conception of the Post. The disturbed nature of Ireland in the aftermath of the bloody 1798 Rising meant that the state was anxious to provide for a more stable colony. Britain was at war with France for the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century and so the questions of how best to govern Ireland were temporarily shelved. However, the end of the Napoleonic Wars refocused the state's attention and saw a re-examination occur of the nature of government was and how it should be constituted. The origins and nature of this re-examination of government, and what it resulted in, is a disputed topic among historians yet in this researcher's opinion

there was indeed a re-conceptualisation of the nature of government on the part of the state which occurred throughout the 1820's. It was not a top-down imposition of legislation and re-organisation. The state did expand its activities and gaze, collecting information on an unprecedented scale.

The new technologies of governmentality which were created in the early nineteenth century were transformations of the older 'Political Arithmetic' pioneered by William Petty in the Down Survey. Sophisticated, elaborate census tracts, registers of births, deaths and marriages and educational surveys all formed part of the new modes of liberal governmentality which were instituted in Britain. This flowering of information in the public and private realms was facilitated by the development of postal communications. The situation in Britain and the situation in Ireland differed somewhat with regards to governmentality. Yet at the same time the colonial state was active in instituting new methods of knowing in Ireland. The Post Office was a part of the new methods of governmentality which would allow for greater centralisation and thus greater control. From the National Boards of Education to the creation of the Ordnance Survey and the activities of the Griffith Valuation, these grids of specification were laid across Ireland and assisted in the re-imagining of Ireland's national space. As a result the state began to view the Post Office and its potential quite differently from its earlier incarnations. Previously the state saw the Post as a revenue generating body. With the desire on the state's part to accommodate information flows for the public and the private their conception of the Post began to change. The state saw the Post as playing a vital role in securing Ireland as a viable colony. Expanding its activities would encourage the

development of business and industry, facilitate trade and generate happiness among its citizens as a result.

With the passing of the Act of Union the British state was left with the problem of how to effectively deal with Ireland. Governing the island required a great deal of attention, thought and careful judgement, three qualities which did not always come together in the upper echelons of government. The creation of a national police is an example of dealing more immediately with the instability of Ireland. Developing the postal network was both a short term and a long term solution. In the short term a state must have adequate communications links in order to communication with itself. But in the long term the British state recognised that an extensive communications network could have corollary benefits which would assist in creating the stability that Ireland lacked. That Ireland required a far greater degree of intervention in the private realm than was, or could be, the case in Britain does significantly qualify the tag 'Liberal Governmentality' when it is applied to government during this period. Yet the argument is made that although Ireland may not have been a fully 'Liberal' state in the theoretical or practical sense, it was the case that the colonial state was using the postal service as a stalking horse to create a 'Liberal' state in Ireland. That the sophisticated techniques of governmentality introduced were defeated or modified by conditions of existence does not deny that the state was attempting to secure a field in which information could be freely exchanged, in which it circulated without restriction. Matters of security may occasionally have compromised that lack of restriction but the desire and intent to create it was still there.

8.4 The Post and the changing social geographies of nineteenth century Ireland

The state did not simply attempt to improve this sphere of information in Ireland without recourse to (some of) those it affected. In recounting the narrative of the postal network and its relationship with the developing colonial state we have focused on either the Post Office or the state. There remained, of course, those whom the Post and the state were purported to serve: society. In the reconfiguring of the postal network, a consistent characteristic to appear was the existence of a dialogue between the central state and the localities to which the Post Office delivered mail. The political and economic changes which occurred in the early nineteenth century were mirrored by deep changes in the structures of Irish society. The emergence of a Catholic bourgeoisie was one such a change, fostered by the campaign for Catholic emancipation.

As the postal network expanded local ruling elites saw the activation of a postal node in their locality as being of great significance for them. They viewed access to the postal network as an opportunity to reconfirm their status within their communities and assure their positions within their respective social arenas. They lobbied for greater access to the network by petitioning senior figures within the colonial bureaucracy and the Post Office hierarchy. Petitions were drafted, approved and transmitted to any government officials or persons of influence whom the petitioners felt would be able to help them. The petitions were delicately worded and were a form of state discourse in which the centre-local relationship consisted of language and knowledge. The petitions were constituted as

a framework for negotiating access to the knowledge/power structure which the postal service represented.

Gaining that access was a contested procedure in which various groups lobbied intensively in order to accumulate the social capital that the network embodied as the groups entered into the discourse that the Post both carried and symbolised. The Post was both a network and a field of power. The Post Office and the colonial state saw the petitions as part of the process whereby the network itself was deployed. 'Gentlemen', 'freeholders', 'clergy', 'merchants' and 'principal inhabitants' all sent petitions in which they voiced their concerns and desires. In the establishment of a post office in their locality they recognised that a link could be created with the centres of administrative and military decision making. This would provide a more tangible form of political and economic security. The local groups deployed the social and cultural capital they possessed in order to gain access to the disparate strains of informational capital that the postal network embodied. The petitions and memorials were examples of the contestation for resources and hence power which was occurring at a time when communication by letter was becoming increasingly common. Those who drafted and sent the petitions possessed a power which Bourdieu called the power of nomination. They gave voice to and named the groups they purported to represent. The agent in question would yield a power proportionate to the recognition they received from the group and they used that authority so that the groups would gain or even retain a stake in the struggle for power and control over the differing forms of capital.

However, members of the local ruling elites were not the only members of Irish society who wished to use their symbolic, economic and cultural capital to gain access to the Post and thus further their interests. The ruling elites operated in a restricted plane in that their fields of contestation centred on the local whilst at the national level another class was emerging which was becomingly increasingly influential: The Catholic middle class. With the increasing momentum of the movement for Catholic Emancipation a confident Catholic bourgeoisie became increasingly politicised and their potential for playing a role in parliamentary politics became increasingly apparent.

In light of this Daniel O'Connell's support for the introduction of a universal Penny Post is an illustration of using the Post to create and further class interests. The Penny Post reforms were initiated by one man, Rowland Hill. Hill, in a pamphlet on Post office reform, argued that Britain's wealth and prosperity were continually increasing but postal flows remained static. He blamed this on what he saw as the unreasonably high level of postal rates. After a concerted campaign the Penny Post was established in 1840. Paying one penny to send a letter weighing less than half an ounce was intended to have many other benefits beyond simply increasing postal revenue. The sense of isolation that those living in rural communities felt was to be diminished by this measure, families would be able to gain access to news of distant relatives and those benefits were particularly aimed at the poor and the working classes. O'Connell vigorously supported the introduction of a national Penny Post system. He stated publicly that it was a measure which would be of great benefit to the 'poor' Irish immigrant communities in Britain who could not communicate with loved ones living in Ireland as the existing postal rates prevented

them. Postal flows doubled after the introduction of the Penny Post yet there was little evidence of any great benefit accruing to the 'poor Irish'. The middle classes, on the other, found it to be highly advantageous. O'Connell correctly identified that the measure would be a very popular among the Irish Catholic bourgeoisie, the class from which O'Connell drew his most effective support. The process of misrecognition was at work here as O'Connell provided a political smokescreen in deploying his symbolic capital to support a measure which would boost his popularity. He transformed self interest into a logic of disinterest the result of which was the reconfirmation of his position within Ireland's existing social and political fields.

8.5 Correspondence and the subaltern

This proliferation of voices provides illustrative signifiers of society in early nineteenth Century Ireland. But there was one voice which remained relatively silent and whose access to the 'asking and telling' system of the Post was impaired by many factors: the poor; the working class; the artisans and urban proletariat. These groups were largely absent in the textual world of early nineteenth century Ireland. They did not as, as the gentry and the bourgeoisie did, habitually use the post to 'talk' to one another. In fact correspondence was relatively alien to them as the underdeveloped educational facilities available resulted in high rates of illiteracy. For the most part they could neither read nor write and their first language was Irish not English. Added to this was the fact that Irish culture was primarily oral as opposed to textual. However, as the diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan hints at there was a level of oblique access granted to the communities of the

labouring communities in contemporary Ireland. This access was facilitated by what might be termed 'textual gatekeepers', individuals who composed and read correspondence on the behalf of others. These individuals would typically be schoolmasters or priests. The power these individuals wielded was derived from the fact that they were the only ones able to decode the letter's contents. Yet despite the obliquity of this interaction with the post network the reading and writing of letters would have increased a community's sense of connectedness to the outside world, particularly in the case of emigrant letters. The connection of a community to the postal network meant that it was 'plugged into' a world wide system of communication, a system of communication which spanned the globe. The diversity of the national and global geographies which communities could gain access to via the proxy of correspondence would have facilitated the broadening of the perspectives of those living within those communities.

8.6 Resistance and the mails

The spaces of power and negotiation were among those which the post established itself and became an integral part of in the nineteenth century. That those spaces were arenas of contestation did not detract from the fact that the groups involved sought to stabilise them as coherently as possible. The boundaries and hierarchies of those spaces of power and control were continually altered and redefined but the agents (the local elites, the state and the Catholic bourgeoisie) all recognised that the potential that existed within those spaces of knowledge and power which the postal network exemplified would be to their mutual benefit. However, the spread of the network and the expansion of its activities

was not carried out without a degree of resistance. The link between crime and resistance is a problematic one and any attempt to define either runs the gauntlet of outright subjectivity.

Early nineteenth century Ireland was a land in which agrarian outrage, political unrest and rural poverty coalesced. When coupled with the outright sectarianism of certain sectors of the population and the ineffective judicial system it is not difficult to see how banditry could flourish in the rural hinterlands. In the two decades following the Act of Union there were consistent attacks on the postal delivery routes usually on the mail coaches. The question which must be asked is, what were the nature of these attacks? Were they simply crimes committed for personal gain or did they posses another motivation? And if they were primarily criminal to what extent could that be construed as a form of resistance? How did the state view the attacks and what was their response? Hobsbawm's model of the social bandit was useful in analysing the attacks and placing them in a socio-economic and political context. The point must be made that to judge an act as criminal from the perspective of two centuries later ignores the contemporary social context and moral economy in which the act was committed. Popular attitudes to crime and the law even today diverge from the written codes of the state but in the nineteenth century this divergence was highly pronounced. It should be remembered that any act which transgressed the law of the land is automatically a criminal act from the perspective of the state and the ruling classes. Yet such an action might not be condemned by the populace at large. In fact it may even be celebrated as evidence that there were those who did not accept the inequalities of the landlord system, the revenue

men and the constabulary. The confluence of heroic mythology and a primitive political consciousness found expression in the acts of highwaymen and thieves.

The mail coach network found itself under attack in early nineteenth Century Ireland. Such a bald statement may seem melodramatic but the reality was that mail coach attacks were a common occurrence. The Post Office recognised this when they employed two mail coach guards to travel with the mails. It was the practice in England for only one mail coach guard to be present yet the levels of violence used in the attacks in Ireland points to the logic behind the policy. Guarding the mail was a dangerous job and mail guards were frequently killed in the line of duty. The Post Office policy was to remunerate widows and dependents of those employees but it was a policy aimed at encouraging others to act in a brave and praiseworthy manner rather than a gesture of philanthropy on their part. Those who used the post saw the attacks as alarming and pleaded for greater protection for the mails. The climate of unrest and iconoclasm which saw expression in the secret societies in agrarian outrage and in the highwaymen meant that the traditional methods of law enforcement centred on the local magistracy and the assizes courts was being exposed as ineffective. The British state was extremely reluctant to divest itself of a system of law and order which had served it so well in the eighteenth century and were, in any case, ideologically opposed to the concept of a centralised police force seeing it as the mirror of the despotic and abhorrent practices of continental European government. Yet the conditions of existence in Ireland forced such a system upon them as they needed a nationwide constabulary to police the country and to maintain order. The mail coach attacks disrupted Post Office operations and were a

serious problem for the early decades of the century at least. To what extent they can be characterised as resistance depends on one's point of view. However there can be no doubt that, motivation aside, the state and the ruling classes saw the secret societies, the Whiteboys and the Terry Alts and the highwaymen as manifestations of the inherent violence of the Irish. That each refused to accept the tenant-farmer-landed gentry paradigm constituted resistance in itself. Interfering in the activities of the state, in the form of the Post Office, was resistance. The highwaymen may not have been great or even good men but the antimony of their activities and their existence meant that they created a mental space in the theatre of peasant life which was reserved for protest. Their deeds were frequently celebrated among the labouring poor in song and verse. The attacks may not have been the acts of freedom fighters but they were acts of resistance.

8.7 The new metropolitan focus: the growing significance of communications in early nineteenth century Ireland

Consistent references throughout the parliamentary reports and the transcripts of the evidence given by the various individuals examined by the parliamentary committees and the Treasury Commissioners to 'the importance of the London correspondence' highlights the changing significance of the Irish postal network for the British state. It was the intention of the civil servants and the parliamentarians to make plain how important a speedy and secure correspondence was between London and Ireland. A prerequisite of state formation is the ability on the part of the state to 'talk' to itself, to be able to communicate effectively and promptly with all of the areas it was trying to

control. But it was not simply the case that governmental activities were the primary

focus. Prominent attention was given to the mercantile and commercial interests

throughout Ireland whose focus itself was shifting from Dublin to London. The

metropolitans were using the parliamentary inquiries to examine ways in which that shift

could, substantially in the parlance of the day, be achieved. It was not merely that there

was a desire for a more efficient system of communication, although there clearly was.

Rather it should be borne in mind that this was a symptomatic desire as opposed to a

causative one. The process, the search for greater efficiency was a means to an end rather

than an end in itself. The state wished to provide its citizens with a useful, efficient

system of communication but even if this is to be regarded as an act of paternalistic

benevolence on the state's part, it should be recognised that it is impossible to separate

the two elements in the state-society matrix. Thus, the State wished for its own reasons to

provide this publicly useful service. This should not be taken to imply some sort of

Imperial conspiracy. No images of bearded, middle-aged men with dry voices sitting

around a table in a smoke-filled room in Whitehall chuckling with Machiavellian glee

should be entertained. What should be borne in mind, however, is that in relation to the

postal service, as so many other things, the state possessed its own motives, reasons,

opinions and ideas. Whilst these ideas, motives etc are difficult to ascribe to any unitary

being it is the case that they existed and that they were operationalised, that they were

played out in real space. These intangible things possessed real force and their own

implications. But in putting the ideas and thoughts of the State into action the necessity of

taking into accounts the needs and desires of the freshly constituted morass of 'Society'

was also recognised. It was this necessity which was one of the major reasons why the

process of negotiation is central to understanding not only the postal network but also how the postal network gained its power and inscribed itself upon the landscape. As the practice of correspondence became more widespread and the level of letters sent and delivered increased the Post carried new and differently constructed knowledges across Ireland and beyond. The story of the early nineteenth century Post Office is multifaceted and requires a sceptical eye in many instances in order to tease out the difficulties and hidden issues which this story contains. The changing geography of the postal network created new geographies of power, of arbitration and of resistance. These geographies were symbiotic and caught up in the wider discourses of power and contestation which characterised early nineteenth century Ireland.

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