

THE IRISH POST OFFICE 1638-1703

By T. V. Jackson

THE publication of Gardiner's *Survey of the Post Office* by The Postal History Society has stimulated me to try and outline the development of the Post Office in Ireland in the seventeenth century. Anthony Trollope in his article on the history of the Post Office in Ireland in the P.M.G.'s report for 1857, says of the seventeenth century "for this period information is lacking." This is not so. I have collected a fair amount of information despite the fact that it is widely scattered through the available sources. The collection and fitting together of the evidence on which this article has been based has been very enjoyable, but laborious due to this scattering. The sources are listed in the bibliography.

The public use of the post in Ireland probably began in 1638. In this year, Evan Vaughan was appointed Post Master in Dublin. He held office until at least 1646, though whether the post extended much outside Dublin at this time is not yet apparent. There is unlikely to have been any regular public post outside Dublin, during and following the rebellion of 1641. In 1646, Vaughan claims to have been sent in the King's Service to Newcastle and to have performed this journey at great danger. This appears to end his connection with the post office until 1655. In December, 1655, he was appointed Deputy Post Master in Ireland by the Lord Deputy and Council. The years following the rebellion of 1641, including the Civil War, cannot be described as peaceful, and conditions in Ireland were such that it is most unlikely there was any Post for the country outside Dublin. There is no evidence to support Vaughan's statement that he was appointed Post Master in Ireland by Cromwell in 1649, though there is a reference to a Post Master at Dublin in 1654. Otherwise I have, so far, found no information on this period.

Vaughan's appointment in 1655 by the Lord Deputy and Council was "to receive and dispatch the public packet and other private letters, to ride the roads and settle the post stages." His salary was to be £200 per annum. John Thurloe objected to this appointment as an encroachment on his monopoly as Farmer of the Post Office. He was finally persuaded to appoint Vaughan his deputy in June, 1656. Vaughan was paid £50 in April, May and August 1656 by the Council, but thereafter was to be paid by Thurloe.

Vaughan along with a Captain Talbot arranged the Post stages. One of the payments of £50 mentions Vaughan's "riding to and fro in settling post stages to all the ports and considerable places in this nation." The arrangement of these stages may be seen from the Account made to Thurloe by Vaughan for the period June to September 1656. This lists 26 post offices excluding Dublin. The list may be split up so as to fit into a system of 3 main post roads, Ulster, Munster, and Connaught.

Ulster. Belturbet, Drogheda, Dundalk, Newry, Armagh, Londonderry, Antrim, Coleraine, Belfast, Carrickfergus.

Connaught. Athlone, Castlerea, Loughrea, Galway.

Munster. Kilkenny, Clonmel, Mallow, Youghal, Cork, Cashel, Limerick, Gowran, Wexford, Waterford.

By 1657, there was a weekly post on all these roads. Documents testifying to Vaughan's diligence in settling the post indicate that the service was reliable.

The management of the post during the period 1656-59 is most confused. Vaughan was displaced for a time by Talbot, who had accompanied him in settling the post. Then Thurloe in the latter part of 1658, sent a Samuel Bathurst to be Post Master in Ireland. Bathurst however does not seem to have been as efficient as Vaughan in management. Thurloe, sometime in 1659, agreed to Vaughan holding the office in common with Bathurst.

Full lists of the post roads and post masters written in 1659 are available. The list of officers in the Dublin Office includes Vaughan, Talbot and Bathurst. Bathurst and Vaughan each receiving a salary of £200 per annum, and Talbot £100. The three post roads differ very little from those shown by Gardiner in 1677. The Post Masters' names are in some cases the same, and there is little substantial change in salary. I hope to make a detailed comparison of these lists at some future date.

Vaughan's appointment with Bathurst was said to have improved the system. Vaughan was sent to London in February 1660, with a declaration in favour of a free parliament. His absence gave Bathurst the opportunity to take control again, and Vaughan never regained office.

Vaughan made strenuous efforts to have Bathurst removed by petitioning the King, but to no avail. The position became more confused, when at the end of Bishop's farm of the Post Office, the new farmer O'Neale removed Bathurst and replaced him by Robert

Ward. Bathurst objected to his removal, and the wrangling extended from 1661-63. The evidence produced by rival claimants gives us some information about the post of the period.

An affidavit in 1662 in favour of Vaughan states " Bathurst, last winter altered all the post stages on the roads in Ireland, putting two into one and turning many post masters out of their places. The post boys leave packets at ale houses of no repute, where if they are not called for they may be lost. *The letters are not as formerly delivered to the addresses from the various stages.*" A petition from the leading merchants of Dublin in the same year asks for some trustworthy person to be appointed Post Master in Ireland or Vaughan restored. They say " The safe and quick despatch of the posts is an urgent public necessity."

Bathurst claimed to be a partner with Bishop in the grant of Letters Patent for the Postage of Ireland, arguing that O'Neale as an assignee of Bishop could not displace him. He says that he received one third of the profits of the Irish Post. The Lord Lieutenant when instructed to remove him from office and to prevent him obstructing Robert Ward says " We have observed him to be very competent." However he did not regain his office.

By 1663, there appears to have been a post twice a week to the country. A letter in 1663 from Newtown in Co. Limerick states :

" The post from Dublin sets out every Tuesday and comes thither every Friday, and is back at Dublin the Monday following. The post also from Dublin comes thence every Saturday, is here every Tuesday, and is back at Dublin Friday following."

Little information is available concerning the Post Masters in towns outside Dublin, one exception being the Post Master at Kinsale, by name Thomas Burrowes. He, fortunately, was a writer of news letters to Joseph Williamson, the Secretary of State, and hence many of his letters have survived, mainly for the period 1663-70. These letters occasionally contain references to the post. The major business at Kinsale was with the fleets from America and the Indies. Burrowes writes in July 1666, " The Virginia and Barbadoes Fleets about seventy ships and seven frigates are here."

He claims to have had about 2,000 men to *receive* and hand letters to him, that day. Again in September of the same year, he writes " if the ships had not gone so sudant (sic) I should have this day sent you several letters of theirs, but they think to be at home before the post can go to London." In 1667, " I send 5 lb. 9 oz. of letters which were handed out of the East Indies Ship." His salary increased from £2 12s. 0d. per annum in July, 1666 to £3. 10s. 0d. in 1667. In August 1667, he threatened to leave the post office as his salary was so small " but 9d. a post day for my man and one of my best rooms." It appears that ships would occasionally go out to meet the various fleets, as in 1666, a letter states " The *Sapphire* and *Forester* are to lie in 48 degrees of latitude expecting the New England Fleet with mails." There are further references to the large business in ship letters at Kinsale in the Roger Whiteley Letter Books, and suggestions that they be marked distinctively. Burrowes was still Post Master at Kinsale, forty years later, though this may possibly be a son of the same name.

In or around May, 1667, George Warburton became Deputy Post Master in Ireland. He appears to have held the farm of the Irish Post Office until 1677, paying a farm rent of £2,500 per annum in 1673. The Roger Whiteley Letter Books contain over seventy letters to Warburton. These to a large extent concern his delay in making payments to Whiteley and the condition of the packet boats. There is little information on the actual conduct of the post in Ireland, apart from some references concerning ship letters at Kinsale. Warburton was closely watched by Whiteley, and this was obviously required. As an example, his claims for English letters undelivered in Ireland were considered too high. Whiteley directed him to send the dead letters back to England. Warburton sent over a collection of letters, which were examined and found to be mainly Irish letters.

Gardiner's survey describes the organisation in 1677. His lists of the post masters and post roads, are I feel based on lists compiled before 1675, probably when he went to Ireland to re-organise the Dublin Office. They contain references to J. Knight, probably the James Knight, who was first connected with the Dublin Post Office in Vaughan's time, and who by 1668 was Accountant in the Dublin Office. Knight appears to have acted as a forwarding agent. Burrowes writes from Kinsale " I have engaged Mr. James Knight of the Dublin Office to be carefull of all those letters, your Lordship, shall favour me with," and letters exist addressed to his care. He however died in June 1675, and was succeeded as Accountant by one Robert Mason.

The use of postal markings in Ireland began at this time, the Bishop Mark Circa 1670, and possibly a post-mark in the form of a " W " in 1667.

The Farm of the Irish Post Office was taken over by the Farmers of the Irish Revenue. The farm rent in 1682 was £3,600 according to Gardiner. The Farmers of the Irish Revenue were described as "the arrantest jugglers in Christendom." On one occasion they went so far as "to oppose proposals for additional taxation lest it should prejudice their pre-existing interests." By 1681 one of the Farmers, Murtough Dowling, was managing the Post Office. The Lord Lieutenant in 1681 had no trust in the chief management of the Post Office, and considered that it should be in the hands of those who could be trusted by the Government. Complaints were still being made in the early part of 1683, the Lord Deputy writing "the post office is in such hands that I am not certain but even my letters to you may be opened." The actions of the Farmers of the Revenue in Ireland resulted in the end of farming in Ireland. The post was taken out of farm in Ireland and controlled from England.

George Warburton was appointed Deputy Post Master General in Ireland at Midsummer 1683, managing the post and receiving a salary. The removal of the farmers was very welcome, a letter in July 1683 stating "the post office is in so secure hands that you need not be put to the bother of writing in cipher."

An inquiry into Warburton's accounts in 1694 gives us some idea of the financial state of the Irish Post Office between 1683 and 1689. The income from Lady Day (25th March) 1685 to the 16th May, 1689 for English letters and up to Christmas 1688 for Irish letters was £33,095 6s. 0d. This gives an average income of about £8,000 per annum. The period 1683-89 was one of unrest in Ireland. By 1686 many people had begun to leave Ireland fearing the consequences of James II's tolerance of Roman Catholics. In August, 1687, William Petty writes "Now also it hath been said with a loud voice that the people of Dublin are half run away, and by good observers that 1100 houses are voyd." Warburton claims that the post was seriously affected in 1687 "the inland post decreased that year by the storm impending on Protestants many leaving the Kingdom, others fearing to correspond and all manner of traffic ceasing."

On the 16th May, 1689, the Post Office in England ceased sending letters to Ireland. James II was by now in Ireland and Warburton was soon turned out of office. The arrears resulting at the time of his dismissal were those investigated in 1694.

The existence of two rival armies in Ireland and their resultant spheres of influence, may have caused there to be two separate posts. Information is available on the post organised in the North of Ireland after William III's arrival there. I have been unable to find any record of what happened to the post in Dublin, when Warburton was removed. It seems unlikely that any public post was continued.

The headquarters of the post in the North in June 1690, seems to have been at Lisburn, this being near to King William's Camp. A letter from Robert Mason, who was accountant in the Dublin office before 1680 contains information on the arrangements for the post. There was a post twice a week "to England by way of Portpatrick thro' Scotland." From Lisburn the post went every Thursday to Antrim, Coleraine, Londonderry, Lurgan, Armagh, Belturbet, Enniskillen, Loughbrickland, Newry and Carrickfergus, and came from these places on Wednesday. Mason states that for the office at the court or camp, he had provided two officers in attendance to receive in and deliver out letters, and that he would endeavour to get more if the business required it. As keeping horses at the camp would have been difficult, he proposed that the Post Master in the town nearest to the camp should send on post days to take the packet away.

By September, 1690, Dublin was in the hands of William, and Mason writes from the Letter Office in Dublin to Clarke, William's Secretary of War :

"Some of the army being marched from the camp, we are at a loss how to send their letters, and there being early sent to them, wherever they are will be an early advantage to their Majestys' revenues of the Post Office, as also a contentment to those of the Army, who have letters." In 1691, an advertisement in the *Dublin Intelligencer* announced a post three times a week "to the Camp commanded by General Ginkel viz. from the General Post Office at Dublin every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday night during the campaign."

Franked letters posted in Ireland during the years 1690-91, may be found with Mason's initials beneath the manuscript "Free." Letters may also be found with the manuscript charge crossed out and initialled "R.M."

Warburton probably took charge again near the end of 1690. By 1691 a third post a week to Kinsale and perhaps to other parts of the country was established.

Warburton's arrears due to the war were investigated in 1694. The Post Masters General at this time, said of him, that they "have found him very carefull and industrious to improve the revenue and punctual in his payments." The investigation recommended

Warburton's discharge from the greater part of his arrears £6,363 14s. 8d. However in 1697, it was decided that he should pay £2,386 4s. 8½d.

Warburton was still in arrears in April 1703, and Isaac Manley was sent to attempt to recover the money. He produced a report on the organisation of the Dublin Office, and suggestions for improvement, and was appointed Deputy Post Master General in Ireland. The last reference to George Warburton is a petition in 1709 that the £500 his son is willing to pay may be accepted in discharge of his debt and that he may be set at liberty.

A comparison of Manley's report with Gardiner's Survey shows that there was little change in the methods used in the Dublin Office between 1682 and 1703.

The above account of the Irish Post Office in the period 1638 to 1703 is by no means complete. I hope it will show that a fair amount of information is available. The complete story can probably never be told, but there are still many sources to be sifted for information. The bibliography below lists the major sources and authorities consulted. I will be glad to supply the references for any of the facts in this account to anyone who requires them.

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*The Bibliography in this book will provide sufficient references for building up a background on Ireland in the 17th Century.

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