



ELSEVIER

Journal of Historical Geography 31 (2005) 459–477

JOURNAL OF
HISTORICAL
GEOGRAPHY

www.elsevier.com/locate/jhg

The social magic of correspondence: conceptions of the mails in early nineteenth century Ireland

G. Prendiville

Department of Geography, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the post in Ireland underwent fundamental changes in terms of its methods of operation, the scope of its delivery and the actual usage of the postal service. The volume of mail sent, the changing pattern of delivery routes and the time and expense of sending a letter all changed over the course of the century. The conceptions of the post were changing from that of being a purely functional instrument of limited appeal to that of being an acknowledged tool in the growth and development of industry and trade, in the operation of the structures of government and a vital link for individuals to people and places outside their immediate social circle. This paper draws upon various sources, both those of the state and of private individuals, and uses Bourdieu's theoretical perspectives, to build a framework for analysing the differing conceptions of the mails. These changing conceptions reveal how different groups positioned themselves in order to take advantage of and shape new forms of cultural capital in the early nineteenth century.

© 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Ireland; The mails; Bourdieu; Class formation; State formation; Early nineteenth century

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 seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was widely, if highly 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.¹

E-mail address: prendivg@tcd.ie

0305-7488/\$ - see front matter © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1016/j.jhg.2004.07.018

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 (see Figure 1). Compared to the 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. In 1791 there were only two mail coach routes operating in Ireland whereas by 1820 there were 78.

What occurred in the early nineteenth century was that the desperately needed reforms of the Post Office were lobbied for by a number of distinct groups within Irish society. These groups included titled nobility, the landed gentry, the professional classes, the clergy, merchants and traders in both Ireland and Britain, Chambers of Commerce, banking concerns and, of course, various bureaucratic departments of the State. It was within the thousands upon thousands of pages of correspondence between the administration in Dublin Castle and the office of the Postmasters

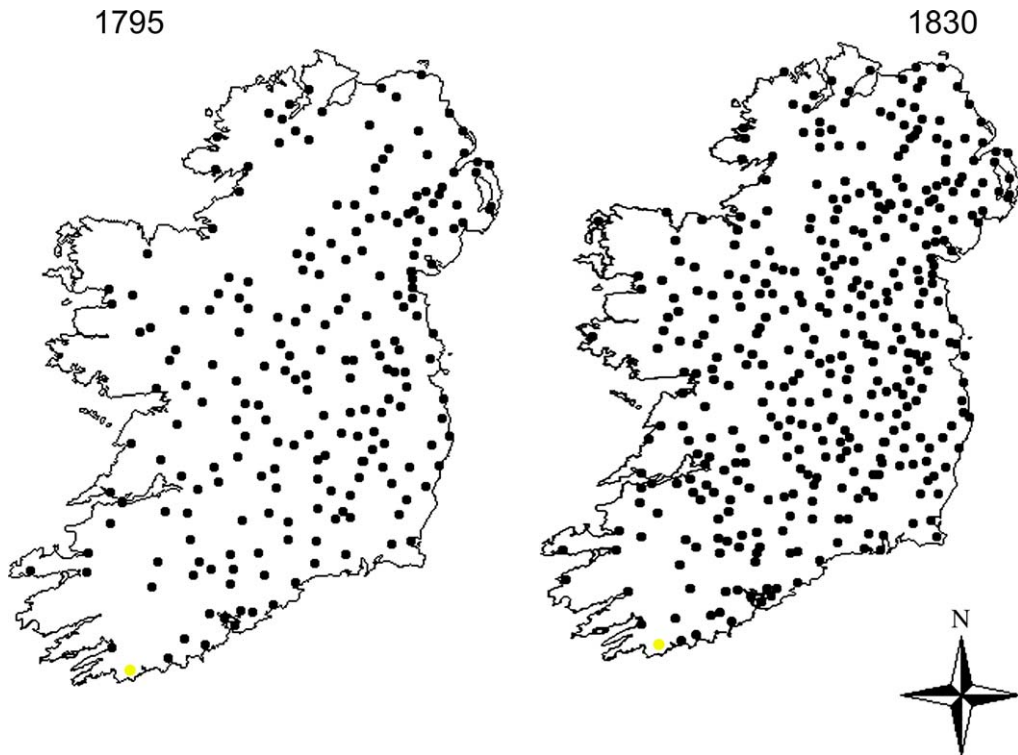


Figure 1. The changing distribution of postal towns in Ireland between 1795 and 1830. Source: *19th Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into Collection and Management of Revenue of Ireland and Great Britain (Post Office Revenue – Ireland)*, 1829, H.C. (353) xii.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10500606>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10500606>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)