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NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

The horse in nineteenth century Ireland: a socio– economic study

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Introduction

The ancient mare

She was born in Connemara,
And brought up in Castlemaine,
She won cups at the Curragh,
And a charger was in Spain.
All countries and conveyances,
She has been buckled to.
She lost an eye at Limerick,
And at Augrim lost a shoe.

The above verse appears in a hand coloured print by Jack Yeats that hangs on my study wall. It is accompanied by the depiction of an ungainly equine trotting purposefully across a flat indeterminate landscape, the latter standing starkly against a tumultuous sky. The verse does not of course, refer to any individual animal, but to what is in effect, a notion or idea of the quintessential 'Horse', a kind of composite of all Irish equines, and it is this amalgamative vision of the horse and its place in nineteenth century Irish life and culture, that is the subject of this thesis.

It seemed to me that the role played by that animal in our history would form a worthy subject for study, and that such a work would help to record and preserve much traditional knowledge that is in danger of being lost. In addition, I felt that I was reasonably well qualified to undertake such a study, as I had a considerable amount of hands-on experience with horses for many years, having hunted extensively in both Ireland and England, point-to-pointed, and ridden competitively in my youth, as well as having worked with and ridden stock horses in Canada and Australia. In addition, I hold a M.Litt. degree from Trinity College Dublin, in an aspect of Economic History.

Looking more deeply into the subject, I realised that hippology, or the academic study of horses, is a broad-ranging field of study, covering as it does, many sub-divisions ranging from aspects of veterinary science to a whole range of such diverse subjects as mammalian paleontology and modern racing. However, the strictly academic study of

the Irish horse has been almost completely ignored by scholars to date. Here was a manifest gap in knowledge crying out to be filled.

I was however aware that such a broad field of study would inevitably involve a degree of selectivity as to parameters of period and content. The economic and social history of the horse in nineteenth century Ireland, appeared to present a convenient field of enquiry on several counts. Firstly, in spite of the fact that the ancient techniques of horse management appeared to have changed remarkably little over the centuries,[1] there were more study sources available from that period than from earlier centuries, and secondly, to my mind, in spite of the introduction of steam power, the nineteenth century represented the apogee of horse usage in Ireland, and formed a kind of watershed between the pure horse economy of earlier times, and the development of the internal combustion engine which revolutionized the twentieth century.

It was inevitable that certain material would have to be left out, and it would be my task to decide what was relevant. As a format of study, I decided to concentrate on such topics as the background to the subject, the types and breeds of horses used in Ireland during the period under review, their regional distribution, the socio-economic attitudes of various classes to horse ownership, statistics, the horse in agriculture, general transport, and urban life, the role of the agricultural improvement societies, military purchases of Irish horses, and the horse in recreation and sport.

The standard publications on Irish economic and social history such as Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland, a new economic history*, L. M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660*, Mary Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland since 1800*, and John O'Donevan, *The economic history of livestock in Ireland*, were general works, and as such could not be expected to cover a special aspect such as horse economics in depth. Nevertheless, most contained useful snippets of information. Good secondary source material was not as a rule, as plentiful as one would wish, in spite of the fact that numerous general publications on equestrian subjects had been produced in Great Britain and Ireland over the last two centuries. However, the vast majority of these appeared to have been derivative and rather lightweight. Two notable exceptions were F.M.L.

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[1] It is remarkable that some techniques of horse management advocated by the Greek writer Xenophon (c,425 –354 BC.) are still being used today.

Thompson's pioneering paper 'Nineteenth century horse sense' which appeared in the *Economic History Review* 29, 1976, and Juliet Clutton-Brock's *Horse Power* published by the Natural history Museum, London in 1992, both of which were of high academic standard, and were of benefit to the present thesis. Other useful sources were F.E.Zeuner, *Domesticated animals* (London,1965), and Mary McGrath and Joan Griffith,*The Irish draught horse* (Cork, 2005).

The primary sources for the general history of the Irish horse during the nineteenth century looked quite hopeful. For example, there had been a useful series of county surveys commissioned by the Royal Dublin Society in 1800 to report on the state of agriculture and industry in most of the Irish counties. These surveys appeared intermittently from 1801 to the early 1830s, and although they varied in quality of content, and not all counties were covered, they nevertheless, provided an invaluable insight into the state of Irish horse use and husbandry during that period. Data from this source was supplemented by information derived from a number of nineteenth century manuals concerned with horse management and husbandry, as well as a from a run of the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* dating from the 1850s to the 1880s, fortunately preserved in the Russell Library in Maynooth College. This publication proved to be a goldmine of information, as did the 1897 report of the Parliamentary Commission on Horse Breeding in Ireland. The latter was particularly useful in obtaining further information on the types and breeds of horses extant in Ireland during the period under review, as it was concerning the traditional horse-breeding areas in the country, with their regional distribution. Information regarding the statistics of horse ownership and use from 1847 onwards was obtained from the agricultural census returns of the period concerned. The socio-economic attitudes to horse ownership of different elements of the population was also examined from information derived from a variety of provenances.

I found that, very little work has been done to date, on the use of the urban horse during the nineteenth century. There seem to have been slight variations in vehicle types popular in various Irish towns. However, for reasons of convenience, I decided to concentrate principally on the horse-scene of the capital. It was interesting to note that Dublin had some unique public transport vehicles plying its streets in the first decade of the century. These included the quaintly named noddies and jingles though the former

were phased out round about the year 1800, and the latter three or four decades later. Of particular interest was the Irish side-car or jaunting car which seems to have evolved from the 'low-backed' car of the peasantry at the very beginning of our period, and in spite of obvious design flaws, in a few years became recognised all over Ireland and abroad, as the Irish national vehicle. It is still operating in tourist areas of the country.

My principal sources for the study of urban horse-drawn vehicles were early prints and photographs of town street scenes showing horse-drawn vehicles, some of which like horse trams, were well documented, while others were not. A good deal of data regarding hackney cabs and other forms of public transport could be found in the various police acts, and information concerning the type of private carriages in use at specific times during the century was obtained from advertisements in the contemporary press, as well as from prints and photographs of the time. A number of nineteenth century publications on carriage building were also consulted and provided much useful information on this subject.

I found that the inter-regional public transport of the time such as stage and mail coach services, canal barges, and Carlo Bianconi's 'long-cars' had been already well discussed in a number of secondary sources. However, I succeeded in gleaning some useful additional information from a series of primary sources including published accounts of travellers from Britain and the Continent, contemporary time-tables, and official regulations concerning the operation of public transport

A few carriages and other vehicles used for public and private transport in both town and country in Ireland during the nineteenth century have been preserved notably in the museum of Dartfield Equestrian Centre, Co. Galway, Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford, Newbridge House, Co. Dublin, and the National Transport Museum at Howth Castle, Co. Dublin. A more substantial number of similar types were preserved in English museums and private collections.

The beneficial influence of the Royal Dublin Society on the development of the Irish horse as a national economic asset during the period under review could hardly be exaggerated. Premium schemes for the importation of stallions in order to improve the indigenous breeds of horses at the beginning of our period, the commissioning of the county surveys in 1800, the establishment of the Dublin Horse Show in 1868, which led

to the development of the international sport of show jumping, and the registration of Irish stallions at the end of the century are only a few examples of the work of this fine institution, the first of its kind in the world.

Several excellent histories of the R.D.S. have been published and have proved of use to this study. However, the most useful sources were found in the detailed accounts of the society's activities that have been preserved in the R.D.S. library such as the *Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society*, as well as in published reports in the press such as the *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, the *Freeman's Journal*, the *Irish Times*, etc.

It is of interest to note that the Irish horse industry during our period was not as concerned, with the bloodstock industry which achieved such importance in the twentieth century, as with the export of half-bred horses for use as hunters and military remounts to Great Britain and a number of European countries. This trade had been a significant source of income for Irish breeders during the nineteenth century, and has to date, been hardly examined by economic historians if at all, and as such was a virgin field for research.

Investigation revealed that a sizeable percentage of the horses used by the British cavalry and artillery had been purchased in Ireland. For most of the period under review, the purchase of military horses had been the responsibility of the regimental colonel or commanding officer of the unit concerned. It was normal practice for an officer, sometimes the colonel himself, to attend horse fairs and buy the horses on the open market. Later on in the century this task was often undertaken by authorised dealers acting on behalf of the regiment. Dealings at the principal horse fairs such as Ballinasloe were well reported in the press, and as military purchases usually accounted for a sizeable percentage of the business transacted at fairs, a wealth of detail has been preserved in local and national papers. In 1887 the old system of the purchase of military horses by the British army was discontinued and a special Remount Department was set up at Island Bridge Barracks in Dublin, the registers of which are now preserved in the Public Record Office at Kew, and were available for study. In addition, there is a published report of a court of enquiry into the operation of the Remount Department of the British army in 1902. This provided a wealth of detail concerning the operation of that department during the last years of the nineteenth century.

A wide groundswell of public and government disquiet concerning a decline in the general standards of the Irish horse population during the middle years of the nineteenth century, resulted in the setting up of a parliamentary commission in 1897 in order to report on the state and recommend measures for the improvement of horse breeding in Ireland with special reference to the work of the Congested Districts Board, as well as the supply of draft horses, hunters, ponies, and cavalry remounts. The report of this commission is a goldmine of information concerning the state of the Irish horse industry during the second half of the nineteenth century. The next such commission for Ireland was held in 1913, which was concerned mainly with the thoroughbred industry in the country. In addition, a series of royal commissions on horse breeding were held in 1901, 1903, 1905, 1907, 1908, 1910, and 1911. However, these were concerned solely with the thoroughbred industry in Great Britain rather than Ireland.

The supply of military remounts was of particular concern to the British army as a number of other European armies also bought horses in Ireland, often outbidding the British for good animals. The 1897 commission was particularly worried about the maintenance of a strategic reserve of military horses in Ireland, and was concerned about the sale of Irish remount-type horses to foreign governments. Information concerning the latter was obtained through a number of sources, including the report of the 1897 commission, press reports of fairs, and information from the military archives of the countries concerned.[2]

Hunting was a social phenomenon in nineteenth century Ireland – the natural manifestation of an equitative society, and I found it best to approach the subject almost in an anthropological way as the study of a distinct sub-culture in Irish society. The sport tended to be a more demotic activity in Ireland than in contemporary Britain, where the rural population were generally less horse-minded than in Ireland. Hunting was important to the Irish rural economy, as it generated commercial activity in the districts where it was practised. Hunt horses required hay and oats from local farmers, and employment was given to such trades as farriers, saddlers, loriners, boot makers etc. In many cases, the sport had something of an ecumenical flavour as it was enjoyed by both Protestants

[2] This is covered, particularly in chapters 7,8,and 9 of this thesis

and Catholics even in Penal times, when the official sanctions imposed on the latter were often ignored. In addition, the military regarded it highly as a training for war.

Sources for a new study of Irish hunting presented something of a challenge in view of the fact that, although many popular books had been published on the subject during the last two hundred years, the majority of these were light-weight and derivative, and concerned mainly with rather trivial material such as accounts of the details of notable hunts in past years, anecdotes about prominent hunting characters, and so on Their contents were largely rehashed from one or two prominent nineteenth century publications, notably B. M. Fitzpatrick's *Irish Sport and Sportsmen* (1878) and Morris O'Connor's *Hibernia Hippica* (1877). These accounts by Victorian sportsmen which were based largely on material derived from their own experiences, as well as oral interviews and conversations with individuals, seldom contained any meaningful data concerning the actual *ethos* of hunting, and although many of the practitioners of the sport were obviously obsessed with it, there was no indication as to *why* they were. However, this would be a question for the anthropologist or psychologist, and beyond the remit of this study.

I found that the two most useful modern books on hunting for the present study were Muriel Bowen, *Irish Hunting* (1954), and Colin Lewis, *Hunting in Ireland* (1975). Other useful sources included press reports of specific hunts in local papers, a few nineteenth century hunting diaries, and published accounts of overseas visitors who came to Ireland for the hunting.

Horse racing in Ireland was originally an eighteenth century spin-off from hunting, and continued to be largely a gentleman's pursuit in which the participants were accustomed to lay wagers among themselves. This situation continued for most of the following hundred years. Unlike the situation in Ireland, the sport in England, had become commercially orientated, and the trade of race- course bookmaker had evolved in order to cater for those classes with disposable incomes generated by the Industrial Revolution, and who could afford a 'flutter' on the races. This commercial integrant so prominent in British racing, was largely lacking in Ireland, where bookies were a rarity until the latter part of the century. Nevertheless, the sport was extremely popular with

large sections of the Irish rural population, who although they had virtually no spending power, enjoyed a good day at the races simply through a natural love of the horse.[3]

The sport in Ireland has been exceptionally well documented since 1790 when Irish racing acquired its own periodical, the *Irish Racing Calendar,* the organ of the Turf Club. It is still being published and contains details of all race meetings, runners, distances, owners, breeders, riders, racing colours, stud information etc. It thus provides a fully documented history of Irish racing right up to the present day, and I was fortunate enough to be allowed access to a complete run of this publication preserved in the archives of the Turf Club on the Curragh.

Racing also received extensive coverage in the local press which proved an additional source of data for this study. In addition, a number of useful modern books on Irish racing have been published. Prominent among these are S. J. Watson, *Between the flags* (1969), and Fergus D'Arcy, *Horses, lords, and racing men. The Turf Club 1790 – 1990.* (1991).

It was considered useful to include a section on the economics of keeping a horse in this introduction, the sources for which would include, (a) information derived from pre-1900 manuals on horse management, (b) queries concerning various aspects of horse management sent in to the *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, together with answers published by the paper's in-house agricultural experts, and (c), the practical experience of the present writer who worked on the basis that nineteenth century horses whatever their function, had the same basic needs as twenty-first century ones. These included food, shelter, shoeing, sufficient exercise, a good bed, and a reasonable amount of health care. In addition, they needed grooming in order to keep their coats clean, and tone up their muscles.

In his wild state the horse fulfilled his dietary needs with various forms of grasses and herbs. Some of these had slight medicinal properties that horses would seek out by instinct in order to maintain good health. I have observed domesticated horses digging up earth in search of health-giving minerals.

When a horse is domesticated and required to work, a diet of grass and wild herbs is no longer sufficient as he requires additional protein supplement in order to maintain

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[3] S. J. Watson, *Between the flags* (Dublin,1969), p. 45.

the strength needed to carry out whatever function he is expected to perform. This is provided in the form of 'hard feed' such as oats, beans etc. He also requires to be shod in order to cope with hard surfaces such as roads. The inevitable wear and tear on the working animal's constitution necessitates a certain degree of medical attention. During the nineteenth century this was provided, for those who could afford it, by professional veterinary surgeons, many of whom would have studied veterinary science in Edinburgh or Glasgow, before the first veterinary college in Ireland was established at Ballsbridge in 1900. However, many of country people were unwilling to pay for the services of a vet, and would have relied on tradition folk remedies, which were sometimes reinforced by charms and spells.[4]

It is not possible however, to set out any general or all-inclusive principles for horse management and feeding, as this would have depended on the specific task for which the animal was intended. The horseman's maxim 'feed for work' served as a good rule or guide, and indeed, the temperament of the animal had to be taken into account, as too much oats or protein-rich hard feeding such as beans would tend to make him obstreperous - literally 'full of beans'.

Thus, agricultural horses of various types, commercial dray horses, hackney cab horses, private carriage horses, hunters, racehorses etc., would all have received different degrees of attention, and would have had different dietary needs. For example, the poor cottier's garron which would probably have spent his life tied to a bush on the side of the road when not pulling his owner's home-made cart, was very likely to have been totally dependant on a grass diet, without receiving much in the way of hard feeding, while the gentleman's well-groomed and cosseted hunters or carriage-horses would have lived in comfortable stables with warm beds, a scientific diet, and full veterinary care.

At this point it would probably be useful to detail some of the types of horse-feed available during the nineteenth century. When the horse was not working he would be out at grass, but if stabled, his natural diet of grass and herbs would have been replaced or augmented by green fodder (cut grass, with herbs such as cow-parsley), hay, 'hard feed' such as oats, maize, beans etc which provided protein, supplemented by 'soft' or 'wet feed' such as mashed or boiled turnips, or boiled barley to which has been added sliced

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[4] Stuart Lane, 'The origins of veterinary science', *Irish Field*, 29 December 1990.

carrots, linseed cake or flax seeds. This could be mixed with bran, chaffed hay or straw to provide fibre and to act as an absorbent. Chopped furze was another equine foodstuff widely used at the time that was considered to be highly nutritious with some medicinal qualities, and was said to give the horse a good coat.[5]

Traditional skills in feeding in order to cater for individual needs and temperaments of farm horses in particular are now largely lost due to the replacement of the agricultural horse by the tractor, as well as to the present availability of factory-made horse-feeds. However, these skills survive in other fields as many stable managers and head grooms employed in hunting and racing stables, are still proficient in the art of making up feeds for their charges on an individual basis.

As for the expense of keeping a horse, this would have varied tremendously according to circumstances. For example, the expense of provender for a hard-working dray horse in Dublin in 1871 was reported as having averaged 17s. 9¾ d. per week.[6] The annual costs of maintaining a coaching establishment appropriate to the standing of an English Victorian gentleman of means are detailed in a manual of 1889. While these do not refer specifically to conditions in Ireland where costs were probably somewhat cheaper, they give a general idea of relative expenses in this field.[7] :

	£.	s.	d.
Head Coachman's wages	40.	0.	0.
Second Coachman's wages	26.	0.	0.
Board wages for two coachmen	80.	0.	0.
Helper	44.	0.	0.
Livery for two men	34.	0.	0.
Six horses : eight months in country	136.	0.	0.
Six horses : four months in London	72.	0.	0.
Rent of six-stall stables in London	120.	0.	0.
Coals, stable tools, cleaning helper's rooms, and sundries	68.	0.	0.
Farrier's account for year	35.	0.	0.
Veterinary surgeon	11.	0.	0.

[5] *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, 11 November 1871.
[6] ibid.

Subscription to Veterinary College	2.	2.	0.
Repairs to coach	20.	0.	0.

Finally, with regard to the language used in this thesis. Over the centuries, those who have had business with horses have developed their own specialist jargon with its own rich vocabulary intended to designate the multiplicity of terms and expressions relevant to their calling. All things equine, have their own specialist names which range from terms relating to the 'points', i.e. the physical features of the animal – 'withers', 'fetlocks', etc., to items of horse gear, saddlery, stable features, implements, and so on. As specialist terms such as these might possibly present problems to the non-expert, and in the absence of a glossary, which I considered unnecessary, I have tried to minimise such terms as much as possible. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that a few might have crept into the text.

[7] Alfred E. T. Watson, 'The cost of a carriage', The Duke of Beaufort ed. *Driving* (London, 1889), p. 115.

Chapter One

Background

The Horse Family

In normal speech when we use the word 'horse' we are invariably referring to one of the many breeds or strains of the domestic horse or pony *(Equus Caballus)*. However, if one looks at the Linnean hierarchy it is apparent that the horse-family is quite an extensive one. According to the scientific zoological classification the *Genus Equidae* includes all caballine horses, several species of asses, half-asses (hemiones or onagers), three sub- species of zebra , the recently extinct quagga of South Africa and all their extinct ancestors and relatives up to and including the last Ice Age. Virtually all of this genus are closely enough related to interbreed and produce hybrid mules. However, the latter are always infertile and incapable of breeding.[1]

The *Species Equus Caballus* includes all varieties of modern horses and ponies together with their wild relatives two distinct sub-species of which survived at least into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when there appears to have been only two sub-species of *Equus Caballus* surviving in the wild, the European Wild Horse or tarpan, together with its Asiatic relative, Przwalskii's Horse.[2] The so-called wild horses of North and South America and Australia are not really 'wild' in the true sense of the word, but *feral,* in other words, introductions by man that have escaped from domestication at some time in the past.[3] All members of the species *Equus caballus* are able to interbreed with each other and produce fertile offspring.

Geographical Distribution of Wild Equidae.

In early historical times the wild caballine horse which was principally a plain or steppe-dwelling herd animal whose main protection against predators was flight, had a

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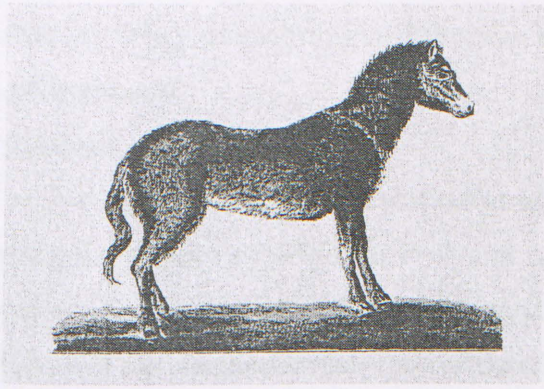
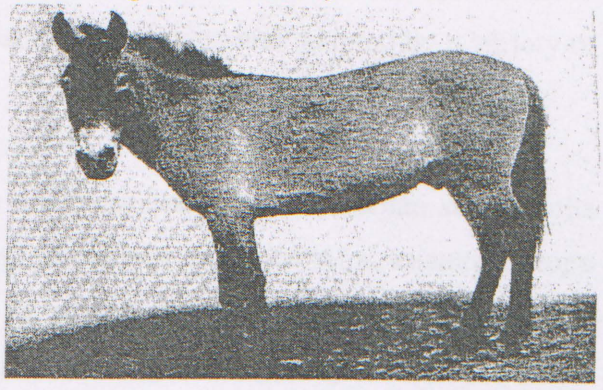
[1] Frederick E. Zeuner, *A history of domesticated animals* (London 1965) , p. 301 (hereafter cited as Zeuner, *Domesticated animals*).
[2] ibid., pp 302-3.
[3] W. Ridgeway, *The origin and influence of the thoroughbred horse* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 18. henceforth cited as Ridgeway.

range extending from Europe through to Central Asia. The various sub-species of true asses were to be found in the North and North-Eastern parts of Africa, while the



Tarpan filly from Gmelin, *Reise durch Russland*, (St. Petersburg, 1770).



Przwalskii's Horse,.Photograph from G. G. Simpson, *Horses*, (New York, 1951).

range of the half-asses (onagers or hemiones) was the dry zone of Asia from the Gobi to Persia, with extensions into northwest India, Syria and Arabia. The several races of zebras including the quagga occupied the southern and eastern areas of the African continent. The evidence is that different species of horse cannot normally occur in the same region without interbreeding, and consequently tended to be restricted to well-defined areas in order to maintain the integrity of their respective races.[4]

The Tarpan (*Equus caballus ferus ferus*)

The European wild horse which most authorities regard as the principal ancestor of all modern domestic horses and ponies. It was a small mouse-grey horse with a light coloured belly. It had the erect mane characteristic of wild breeds and a dark stripe from the neck to the tail. By the end of the eighteenth century true tarpans survived only in the Forest of Bialowieza in eastern Poland, when the last few were captured in 1812, and in the Ukraine, where the last survivors were killed in 1851. Tarpans may have survived as late as the twentieth century in eastern Russia, but it is probable that the last survivors had crossed extensively with domestic horses and have long since ceased to represent the pure wild type. In any case they are now extinct in the wild. However, an approximation of the type has been artificially re-bred at the end of the nineteenth century by Hellbrun

[4] Zeuner *Domesticated animals* op. cit., p 308.

Animal Park near Munich and distributed to a number of zoos.[5] Most authorities agree that the modern domestic horse – even the Asiatic breeds - is almost certainly descended from a variety of ancestors of European tarpan stock, molded and adapted by a variety of environments.

Domestication

The fact that the domesticated horse is almost exclusively of tarpan stock limits the possible area of origin to west and central Europe north of the Alps, eastern Europe and western Asia north of the mountains as far east as Russian Turkestan. Przewalski's Horse is not deemed to have contributed much to the general gene pool of the modern domesticated horse. It is generally thought that horse domestication did not originate in western or central Europe partly for chronological reasons and partly because much of the region was covered by forest, whereas the tarpan and other wild horse types were essentially steppe-dwellers.

Nevertheless, some authorities have suggested that a heavy, slow-moving forest-dwelling variant of the tarpan once existed in northern Europe, which was the ancestor of the modern European heavy draught breeds, while the lighter breeds would have evolved from the steppe or plain-dwelling animal.[6] This hypothesis is supported by the fact that many woodland animals have spotted or striped coats as protective coloration, and the occurrence of dappling in some modern strains of draught-breed horses, is very likely the legacy of spotted ancestors. This feature is lacking in the light modern breeds which are descended from the plain-dwelling tarpan.

Most authorities agree that the probable area of domestication of the horse was restricted to the Ukrainian and east Russian steppes, Kazakhstan and the steppes of western Asia mainly around Lake Aral and including the plains of Turkestan, Ust-Urt plateau and Turan. The western part of this zone was still a centre of horse domestication in Scythian times.[7] From this centre of early domestication, the technology spread not only westwards to Europe but to the Near and Middle East, and further afield. It has been surmised that this process of domestication took place some 5000 years ago, and that the

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[5] G. C. Simpson, *The story of the horse family in the modern world and through sixty million years of history* (Oxford, 1951), p.17.
[6] Elwyn Hartley Edwards, *Horses: their role in the history of Man*, (London, 1987), pp 24-5.
[7] Zeuner, *Domesticated animals*, p. 314.

earliest horse-tamers were Indo-European nomads the ancestors of the Scythians. These people may have been originally rein-deer herders and their status as horse-nomads evolved from that. Some years ago Soviet archaeologists discovered the frozen tombs of similar nomads at Pazyrk high in the Altai mountains of western Siberia. These tombs contained not only the bodies of the nomads together with their horses, but also their saddles, bridles, horse-bits and other gear and weapons perfectly preserved in deep-frozen condition. Detailed examination of these grave goods provided much information about the culture and life-style of these early Indo-Europeans.[8]

The acquisition and domestication of horses represents one of the major cultural advances of mankind. A technical advance of this type by a formerly sedentary people opens up immense new horizons of range and mobility including increased opportunities for hunting, warfare and trade formerly unavailable to them as well as access to new feeding grounds for stock . A similar cultural revolution is well documented in more recent times with the acquisition of a horse culture by the American Indians from European colonists.[9]

Steppe Nomads and Celtic speaking peoples.

In Classical times, Caucasian Scythian and Sarmatian steppe nomads exported their horse technology to the Greeks and other peoples including their neighbours and fellow Indo-Europeans, a complex nexus of diverse ethnic groups that were united by a common Celtic language.[10] These peoples were spread widely along the Danube and eastwards over the Hellespont into Asia Minor, and westwards into Bohemia, the Black Forest, northern Italy, Switzerland, Gaul, Belgium, the Iberian peninsular, and across the Channel into the British Isles.

Archaeologists studying the complex subject of this latter culture have invented convenient labels to differentiate the various cultural upsurges of Bronze Age pre-history. Thus, the title *Hallstatt* was adopted to designate a central European culture of the Eighth century B.C. which was characterized by wagon burials which included bronze horse-bits and bridle fittings which were closely related in form to types found across the Pontic

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[8] S. J. Rudenko, *Frozen tombs of Siberia the Pazyryk burials of Iron-Age horsemen.*, (London 1970).
[9] F. G. Roe *The Indian and the horse* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1955), pp 11-33.
[10] Tadeusz Sulimirski, *The Sarmatians*, (London, 1970). Modern scholarship regards the appellation 'Celtic' as a linguistic rather than an ethnic distinction.

steppes in Caucasia and even further afield in Iran, demonstrating the cultural links between these people and the original Eurasian horse-masters. The *Hallstatt* culture was to spread over much of central and western Europe into the British Isles.[11]

The succeeding culture to *Hallstatt* was *La Tene* which was coeval with the rise of Rome. It got its name from a town in Switzerland where an early form of this civilization was discovered. These *La Tene* culture-bearers further developed the horse technology of the *Hallstatt* people; and alongside other artifacts in fine metalwork, produced magnificent chariots with iron tyres and richly wrought bronze fittings; as well as bronze horse-bits and bridle bosses with characteristic decoration including polychrome enamel work. The *La Tene* culture represented the finest flowering of art among the Celtic speaking peoples of Britain and Ireland during the Bronze Age, and its emphasis on equine motifs indicates the importance of the horse among the early cultures of those lands.

The Celtic Pony *(Equus caballus celticus)*

J. Cassar Ewart, Professor of Veterinary Medicine at Edinburgh University, advanced the theory in an important paper of 1904, that many of the blood-lines of an ancient North European horse were still to be found in certain breeds of ponies existing in Great Britain and Ireland as well as Scandinavia and the North Atlantic islands including Iceland, Greenland, the Lofoten islands, the Faroes, the Hebrides, Shetland etc. The professor using the accepted nomenclature of the time, labeled this postulated archtype of the modern North Atlantic pony races – the 'Celtic Pony',[12] an animal which though introduced by man, was ultimately descended from a northern variety of the tarpan.[13] Ewart's theory has on the whole, received general acceptance by modern authorities though some have preferred the term 'North Atlantic Pony' for a type that in many cases originated in regions outside the traditional Celtic speaking lands.[14]

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[11] T.G.E Powell *The Celts* - Ancient Peoples and Places, (London 1980), pp 41-2.

[12] Modern academic practice ascribes the term 'Celtic' to a linguistic rather than an ethnic usage.

[13] J. C. Ewart, 'The multiple origin of horses and ponies' *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland* (1904) pp 19 ff. It should be noted however, that the modern understanding of the term 'Celtic' refers to a linguistic rather than an ethnic label.

[14] Anthony Dent and Daphne Machin Goodall, *A history of British native ponies* (London 1988), p. 15.

The Horse in Ireland

Van Wijngaarden-Bakker in her report on the animal remains from the Beaker Settlement at Newgrange , suggests that the domestic horse was probably introduced by these early Indo-Germanic metal-working immigrants from the Rhineland who entered Ireland via



Rider with *echlasc*. Monasterboice North Cross. Photograph from Henry *Irish art to 800 AD.*

Britain sometime around 2000 B.C. [15] There is evidence in these early times the horse was often another food source for its owner. In early occupation sites, the bones of horses are found intermingled with the remains of other domestic animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep and goats in such circumstances as to suggest that they formed part of the normal household diet. From an examination of these equine remains it is possible to form an idea of what these early horses were like. The finding of a metacarpal at Newgrange enabled scientists to calculate the height of the animal's wither as 120 – 128 cm., the size of a modern child's pony about 12 to 12.2 hands. Near contemporary horse remains from archaeological sites in the Celtic-speaking areas of mainland Europe were found to be of similar size, and considerably smaller than the wild tarpan from which they developed. It seems to have been a common feature of the early generations of domesticated animals that they were often smaller than their wild forebears. Several types of horse are distinguished in Old Irish literature, a work-horse (*capall*), a pack-

[15] Louise H. Van Wiijngaarden-Bakker, 'The animal remains from the Beaker settlement at Newgrange, Co. Meath: first report, *PRIA* 74C (1974) pp 313-83.

horse (*gearán*),[16] and a horse for riding (*ech*). These correspond to the Latin *caballus* and *equus* which are 'almost certainly a borrowing from Celtic'[17]

Chariots and other draught vehicles were used by the early Bronze Age , and finds of *La Tene* horse-gear including bridle-bits and chariot fittings in finely worked bronze are not uncommon from Irish archaeological sites. In addition, a number of the high crosses, particularly. those at Clonmacnoise, Tuam and Monasterboice depict such vehicles, and the early heroic tales such as the Ulster Cycle are full of references to Irish horses and chariotry. One must of course, be wary of accepting as Irish what may well have been drawn from a foreign original, as it would seem at least possible that these tales could be derived from folk memories of lands and cultures from which their forefathers originated as emigrants. Even if the Iron Age Irish did possess chariots, it would seem probable that they would have been of limited military use in view of the difficulty of much of the Irish terrain. Their function was probably more symbolic of aristocratic prestige than practical military hardware. Nevertheless, a wooden wheel hub probably from a chariot that was found in a crannog at Lough Faughan provides material evidence of the use of spoked wheels in early Celtic Ireland.[18]

Foreign Imports

According to early literary sources, 'foreign horses' were much prized in Ireland. There are references in Irish sources that suggest that horses were imported from Britain (*ech bretnach*) in order to improve the local breeds.[19] It is possible that some of these animals were descended from the large Roman cavalry horses of a type which originated in Scythia, the bones of which have been found in archaeological excavations from different parts of the Roman Empire including Britain.[20]. Carvings on the west side of the base of the north cross at Ahenny, Co.Tipperary depict draught horses with a type of

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[16] Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 2000), pp 90-1. Henceforth cited as Kelly, *Early Irish farming*. The word *gearrán* entered the English language as 'garron' referring to a small Irish or Scottish work-horse.

[17] Juliet Clutton-Brock, *A natural history of domesticated animals* , (London 1987) p. 86. (henceforth cited as Clutton-Brock, *Domesticated animals*).

[18] Máire & Liam de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland*, (London, 1961), p, 98.

[19] Fergus Kelly, *Earl Irish farming*, (Dublin, 2000), p. 90.

[20] ibid.

harness developed in the Roman world.[21] Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that such importations could have been very numerous at any time

It has always been a feature of the climate and soil of Ireland which are particularly suited to the production of high class horses, that imported breeds become materially altered in their general characteristics and, when crossed with earlier imports, are assimilated by them until they produce a single type which is characteristically Irish.



Twelfth century Irish horseman from Giraldus Cambrensis, *The history and topography of Ireland.*

Riding Horses

Early generations of domestic horses in Ireland appear to have been used only as draught animals for pulling chariots as they were generally too small to be ridden. However, a strain of horses large enough for riding (Ir. *ech immrimme*) had been developed by the middle of the first Millennium, probably through the influence of British imports. Certainly, horse riding was widely practiced in Ireland by the twelfth century. Giraldus Cambrensis described the Irish mode of equitation in 1187:

Likewise in riding they neither use saddles nor boots nor spurs, but only carry a rod in their hand having a crook at the upper end with which they both urge forward and guide their horses. They use reins which serve the purpose both of the bridle and a bit, and do not prevent the horses from feeding as they always live on grass.[22]

The 'horse-rod' (Ir. *echlasc* or *slat*) to which Giraldus refers is mentioned frequently in Irish literature, [23] and a rider equipped with such an instrument is depicted

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[21] Françoise Henry, *Irish art in the early Christian period to A.D. 800* (London, 1965). Plate. 79. (henceforth cited as Henry, *Irish art to 800.*)
[22] Thomas Wright (ed) *The historical works of Giraldus Cambrensis* (London, 1894), pp 122-23.
[23] Patrick Weston Joyce, *A social history of ancient Ireland* 2 vols. (Dublin, 1920), ii p. 417.

on the shaft of the Banagher High Cross. However, this has been universally misidentified as a bishop with a crozier.[24]

The Hobby

When the Anglo-Norman invaders arrived in Ireland towards the end of the twelfth century, they found an indigenous breed of small, hardy horses which they nick-named 'hobins' or 'hobbies'[25] which is generally accepted as a diminutive for Robert. Another version of the same name is 'Dobbin' which survives to the present day as a childish pet-name for a farm horse. The term 'hobby' is of course, still current in the form of 'hobby-horse', as well as in the derived sense of an absorbing interest or pursuit. From it is also derived *hobelar,* a type of mediaeval mounted soldier, apparently originating in Ireland and used for scouting and reconnaisance work in the armies of Edward 1 and 11 of England.[26]

As we have seen, Irish horse breeds have been strengthened from earliest times by out-crosses from abroad, particularly from Great Britain, and this process has continued until the present day. Welsh horses were especially prized by Gaelic chieftains, and the proximity of Scotland to the Antrim coast has from time immemorial enabled the import and export of horses between the two related peoples. In addition, there is a general acceptance by many authorities, that the hobby had a strong dash of Spanish blood either through Andalusian stallions imported directly through Limerick and Galway, or indirectly via England. The Spanish origin of the Irish horse was a widespread folk tradition in Ireland. The chronicler Johannes Major reported in 1522 that an ancient breed of Spanish horses were known as Asturiones, because they were brought from the Asturas in Spain into Ireland.[27] The tradition of a 'Spanish Connection' later took the form of a myth that the native stock was 'improved' by Spanish horses escaping from Armada wrecks. A similar legend occurs in many other coastal regions of the British Isles where Armada ships were wrecked, e.g. parts of Scotland and Devon.[28] The fact that the Irish hobby was an 'ambler' (i.e. an unusual form of trot by which the legs on the

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[24] E.g. , Henry, *Irish art to 800.* p. 100.
[25] R.F. Scharff, 'The Irish horse and its early history' *PRIA* ,XXVII, Sec.B. (1908-09) pp 81 ff.
[26] James F. Lydon 'The Hobelar : 'An Irish contribution to mediaeval warfare', *Irish Sword,* 2, (1954-6) pp 12-16.
[27] A Constable (trans), John Major, *History of Great Britain.* (Edinburgh, 1822), pp 53-4.

right and left sides are raised and lowered alternately)[29]. The same unusual gait is also found in the Andalusian horse, which perhaps gives some credence to the theory of some Spanish influence in their breeding. It is interesting to note that the same gait is also found in some American breeds, likewise descended from Spanish stock.

The ambling gait of the hobby gave it a particularly comfortable riding pace especially as a lady's hack. For this reason, Irish hobbies were in demand in England and the Continent during the mediaeval period. They are frequently mentioned in the stable inventories of the various English royal houses and nobility from the Twelfth to the Seventeenth Century. Both Henry VII and Elizabeth I had them in their stables. Their popularity extended to Italy. They had a place in the Papal stables, and an extensive correspondence dating from 1498 to 1528 between the Dukes of Ferrara and the first two Tudor monarchs concerning the purchase of hobbies for the former's stables is preserved in the archives of Modena.[30] The hobby was the usual native riding horse of Ireland at this period, but it was not the only equine in service. Draught horses are also mentioned.[31] An interesting account of different types of horses found in Ireland during the sixteenth century appears in Holinshed's Irish Chronicle. It is worth quoting in full:

The horses are of pace easie, in running wonderful swift in gallop both false and full indifferent. The nagge or the hacknie is very good for trauelling, albeit others report the contrary, and if he broken accordingly, you shall haue a little titte, that will traueyle a whole daie without any byit. Their horses of seruice are called chiefe horses; being well broken they are of excellent courage. They reyne passingly and champ upon their bridles brauely; commonly they amble not but galloppe and run. And these horses are but for skirmishes, not for trauelling, for their stomackes are such as they disdaine to be hacknied. Thereof the report grew that the Irish hobbie wyll not hold out in traueilling. You shall haue of the third sort a bastard or mongrele hobby , neere as tall as the horse of seruice, strong in trauelling, easie in ambling and verie swift in running. Of the horse of seruice they make great store, as wherein at tymes of nede they repose a great peece of safetie. This brood Volaterane writeith to have come from

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[28] Anthony Dent and Daphne Machin Goodall, *A history of British native ponies* (London, 1988), pp 147-48. Henceforth cited as Dent and Goodall, *British native ponies.*

[29] Ibid., p.156.

[30] Michael Cox, *Notes on the history of the Irish horse* (Dublin, 1897), pp 22 – 32.

[31] ibid., p. 40.

Austerea, were the countrie of Hispayne, between Gallicia and Portugall, whereof they were named Austurcones, a name now properlie applied to the Hispanish Genet.[32]

Here we have mention of three types of Irish riding horses ; (a) The little ambling hobby famous as a light travelling hack, (b) the larger 'horse of service' or 'chief horse', perhaps derived from English stock which didn't amble, and was used principally as a war horse; and (c) a half-bred between the first two, which could amble and yet have the advantage of size. Holingshed also refers to the Irish name *capall.* 'Cappoule, of caballus, a plough horse, or according to the olde English terme, a caballe, or caple.[33]



Hobby from Derrickes, *Images of Ireland*, 1581

The Seventeenth Century

The Flight of the Earls in 1607, followed by the confiscation of their lands and the Plantation of Ulster led to the weakening of the ancient Gaelic culture including their style of equitation that was characterized by riding with a simple pad in lieu of a saddle (*echdillat*) and without stirrups. [34] The use of saddles and stirrups were originally introduced by the Norsemen, but never became popular with the Gaelic population.[35] Their Anglo-Norman successors followed the usual English and European practice of equitation with saddle and stirrups. This imported style gradually replaced the old Gaelic

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[32] *The Historie of Irlande from the First Habitation thereof, unto the Yeare 1509. Collected by Raphaell Holingshed, & continued till the Yeare 1541 by Richarde Stanyhurst.* p. 38.
[33] Ibid., p. 18.
[34] Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, p. 98.
[35] Ibid.

method of riding until the latter finally faded out in the early years of the seventeenth century.

There does not appear to have been any specifically English breed of riding horse of any quality at that time, with the exception of the 'English Great Horse' used for war. By 1630 the ancient breed of Irish hobbies had gone into decline, and gradually disappeared from the eastern, north eastern and south-eastern parts of the country. Horse breeding was at a low ebb, and as it was necessary to replenish the country, licenses to import horses from England were frequently granted.[36] By the end of the seventeenth century only a few survivors of a once widespread race of native horses was to be found in the remoter regions of the west and south west, though the term 'hobby' continued to be used occasionally until the nineteenth century to describe any small fine limbed Irish horse or pony.

According to a letter written by Lord Esmonde to Viscount Dorchester dated Dublin, 9 May, 1630. 'The country contains no suitable present for your Lordship; for the dainty breed of hobbies, which used to be here are quite extinct'.[37] Again, on November 20, 1633, Coke wrote to Strafford: 'Ireland in my memory, was so replenished with fair hobbies, that they furnished England and other countries and were everywhere much esteemed. Now we hear so little of them that it seemeth the honour of breeding for service hath no more esteem'. Strafford complained that the English export duty on horses was very high, especially as a good breed was needed so much in Ireland. In 1641 the King decreed that horses for private use were to be imported and exported duty free.[38]

. During the Commonwealth period, Dr. Winter Provost of Trinity College (1652 – 1660) had a great interest in horses, and imported a number of particularly fine animals from England. However, some of these were requisitioned by the Irish army on one of his journeys with Cromwell's Commissioners.[39]

In spite of the vigorous opposition of the then lord lieutenant the Duke of Ormonde, a bill to ban the import of Irish livestock into England was introduced in the

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[36] John O'Donevan, *Economic history of livestock in Ireland* (Dublin, 1940). p.45. Henceforth cited as O'Donevan.
[37] Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland 1625-1632 (London, 1900), p. 536
[38] O'Donevan, op. cit., p. 45
[39] J. P. Mahaffy *An epoch of Irish history : Trinity College, Dublin. Its foundation and early fortunes, 1591 – 1616* (Dublin, 1903), p. 301.

English Parliament in 1663. Three years later in 1666 a clause was added banning the importation of Irish horses. This caused the value of Irish horses to fall from 30/- to 1/- each. However, by the amended Navigation Act of 1663, the export of Irish servants, horses, victuals and salt to the American colonies was permitted.[40] Nevertheless, the breeding of horses mainly from imported stock continued among the Irish gentry. In 1670 Colonel Daniel O'Brien, writing from Co. Clare to Secretary Arlington, reported ;

I begin to be the greatest breeder of horses in the king's dominions for I keep about my house 16,000 acres for my mares, colts and deer, of very poor barren land ...I have enclosed it with a pale two miles long and there have 100 breeding mares. While I have so many there you shall not want horses.[41]

He further informed the secretary that he was sending 'a gelding that I have some time tried after the hounds, and though he be of an Irish breed, I think he will not be left behind by any company that hunts in England'.[42] In 1673 Sir William Temple presented an address to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in which he wrote that, 'horses are a drug but might be improved to a commodity'. He proceeded to suggest how the latter objective might be attained, suggesting that three days of racing, followed by a horse fair, be held annually near Dublin with the King presenting two plates. The Lord Lieutenant approved Sir William's suggestion and Charles II duly gave two plates, to be competed for at the Curragh in April and September each year. The rules for the plates stipulated that runners had to carry twelve stone each, Sir William had argued that these races, being highly prestigious, would encourage owners to breed horses of quality. ' The soil (of Ireland) is of a sweet and plentiful grass which will raise a large Breed; and the Hills, especially near the Sea coasts are hard and rough, and so fit to give them Shape and Breath and sound Feet'[43] Temple goes on to say that :

In the studs of persons of quality in Ireland, where care is taken, the Cost is not spared, we see Horses bred of excellent Shape and Vigour, and Size, so as to reach great Prices at-home, and encourage Strangers to find the Market here ; among whom I met with one this Summer that came over on that Errand, and bought about Twenty Horses to carry over into the French Army, from Twenty to Threescore Pounds at the first Hand.[44]

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[40] Cox, op. cit., pp 72-3.
[41] *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland preserved in the Public Record Office,* September 1669 – December 1670. (London, 1910), p. 206.
[42] ibid., p.205
[43] Sir William Temple, *An essay upon the advancement of trade in Ireland* (Dublin?, 1673), pp 24-5.
[44] ibid., p. 22.

Cavalry actions played a prominent part in the Irish wars of the seventeenth century; however, by the middle years of the same century, the old Irish style of riding without saddle or stirrups had virtually died out. The Irish cavalry of the Cromwellian and Williamite Wars, were largely officered by Catholic gentry of Old English lineage, and mounted and equipped in the same manner as their adversaries. At the time of the Battle of the Boyne, the cavalry under Hamilton was probably the most efficient section of the Jacobite army, and it was probably largely due to its success that clauses prohibiting Catholics from owning horses of a value greater than £5, or being apprenticed to a gunmaker were included in the Penal Laws of 1695 and later.

The English authorities were always conscious of the need to deny war materials to potential enemies, and horses were regarded as being of military importance. It is interesting to note that this process was not confined to Ireland. In fact, during the early years of the seventeenth century, James I, concerned about border raiding between Scotland and England, issued an edict prohibiting the inhabitants of the Debatable Lands from owning 'a horse, mare or gelding above the value of 50/- Sterling or £30 Scots'.[45]

The Eighteenth Century

During this period the usual work-horse of the small Irish farmer and small-holder was the 'garron'. Generally of mixed breeding, it seldom exceeded fourteen or so hands in height. To judge from contemporary reports, many garrons were poor and overworked. The type varied a good deal from district to district depending on breeding, climate, and the nutritive value of the grazing. It is probable that those found in the more remote and mountainous parts of the country particularly west of the Shannon, and in the poorer parts of Ulster retained a greater proportion of the old hobby blood than did those in the more favoured limestone grazing lands of East Leinster and the Midlands.

The garron was not a specialist draught-horse in the sense that the word is used to describe the functions of certain English, Scottish and Continental breeds which were bred for specific tasks such as ploughing or draught, he was rather a horse-of-all-trades as the small size of the majority of Irish small-holdings precluded him from having the luxury of concentrating on any particular function. In many parts of the country, it was

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[45] Dent and Goodall, *British native ponies*, p. 150..

customary for farmers to pool their resources for such activities as ploughing etc. by assembling horses belonging to neighbours in the practice of *meitheal* .[46]

Improved Breeding Practices

As far as the Irish horse was concerned, the eighteenth century was a period of development and improvement in specialist breeds for sport and agriculture. However, the class that benefited principally from these improvements was the newly established Protestant gentry. Catholic horse breeders were disadvantaged to some degree by the ban imposed by the Penal Laws, but this prohibition was not always strictly carried out in practice.[47] In 1748 the Government took an important step in encouraging horse breeding in Ireland. Commissioners were appointed and premiums were offered for the importation of English Black horses into Ireland. The impetus for the award of these Government premiums may have been provided by the premium of £20 given for the importation of suitable mares in 1747. That was given by the then Provost of Trinity College 'Premium' Madden.[48]

In addition to the premiums given by the Government, in 1748 the Limerick and Clare Society gave prizes for the best draught filly and the best draught colt exhibited at its show. Some people also imported Eastern (or Thoroughbred stallions) mainly for racing and breeding purposes, and by 1750 over eighty imported stallions existed in Ireland.[49]

Throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century premiums were awarded by various bodies for the importation of livestock and crops, and even of industrial processes, into Ireland. Nevertheless, there was no real control over horse-breeding or even guidance except in the most general of senses, by any central authority.[50]

The Dublin Society in accordance with its policy of granting premiums to improve the general standard of Irish horses, on 9.February 1769 ordered that £30 should be given to Mr. Thomas Johnston, 'being at the rate of £5 each, for six strong able mares

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[46] Daniel Corkery, *The hidden Ireland* (Dublin 1975), p. 33
[47] See Chapter 9.
[48] H. F. Berry, *A history of the Royal Dublin Society* (London 1915), p. 35.
[49] Colin Lewis, *Horse breeding in Ireland and the role of the Royal Dublin Society's horse breeding schemes* 1886–1903 (London 1980), p.18.
[50] ibid.

fit for the Plough and other Country Work, and from four to six years old, imported by him into this kingdom since February last', and 'that a premium of £10 be given to Mr. Philip Hutchinson of the county of Dublin, being at the rate of £5 each, for two able strong mares fit for the plough and other country work, and from four to six years old, imported by him into this kingdom since February last.[51]

Again, Richard Berenger, who occupied the position of 'Gentleman of the Horse' to King George III, wrote in 1771: 'Ireland has for many centuries boasted a race of horses called Hobbies, valued for their *easy paces* and other pleasing and agreeable qualities, of middling size, strong, nimble, well-moulded and hardy'. [52]

Arthur Young provides a great deal of information in his *Tour of Ireland* concerning the ownership and breeding of horses at that period.

Concerning the landed gentry he writes :

In this business they are assisted by two customs that have an admirable tendency to great numbers of horses and servants. The excess in the latter are in the lower sort ; owing, not only to the general laziness, but also to the number of attendants every one of a higher class will have ; this is common in great families in England, but in Ireland a man of five hundred pounds a year feels. As to horses, the number is carried quite to a folly ; in order to explain this point, I shall insert a table of the desmesnes of many of the nobility and gentry, which will shew not only the number of horses, but of other cattle, the quantity of land they keep, and other circumstances explanatory of their country life.

All the main trends in the nineteenth century Irish horse industry, in fact had their origins some hundred years previously in the eighteenth, and these factors will be further dealt with individually in the following chapters, each of which researches a different rôle of the Irish horse in all aspects of work and recreation. But to look at the bigger picture, if one wishes to highlight the two principal developments of the Irish horse industry during the eighteenth century, these would probably be the development of the thoroughbred racehorse, and the importation of various British working breeds in order to improve the indigenous breeding stock.

Horse Breeds in 19th. Century Ireland

The Irish Work Horse

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[51] *Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society from October 1768 to July 1769*, Vol. 5, p. 293.
[52] Dent and Machin-Goodall, *British native ponies*, p. 276.

The county surveys commissioned by the Dublin Society in the early years of the nineteenth century, as well as the reports of contemporary commentators, reveal that the average native work horse of the period was generally a poor creature seldom exceeding fourteen or so hands, usually overworked and undernourished. These animals were generally of very mixed breeding, the mares being covered by stallions chosen on no other basis but the cheapness of their fees.[53] The situation was made worse because of the continuing tendency of many of the smaller farmers to sell their best mares, and to breed from the inferior ones.[54] This had the inevitable result that the progeny were of poor quality. In addition, the mares were frequently worked even while a foal was sucking 'a practice which is highly injurious to both and indeed the whole treatment of this noble and useful animal is exceedingly cruel and barbarous'.[55]

The increased use of scientific farming practices by the larger farmers in the later eighteenth century had caused large areas of grassland to be put under the plough with the object of increasing tillage for food production necessitated by the exigencies of the Napoleonic Wars, and discerning breeders selected the best of the native stock, and crossed them with good imported breeds such as the Suffolk Punch, to meet the increased agricultural demands. Large numbers of war-surplus horses had also become available for civilian use after the ending of hostilities and were added to the number of horses available for farm use. Following the usual pattern of alien breeds introduced into Ireland, these divers elements had become to some degree homogenized over the years, and by the alchemy of climate, geology, and environment, had produced an agricultural work-horse with characteristics that were distinctively Irish. This improved type of work animal became known simply as the 'draught horse'. Like its predecessor, the garron, it did not specialize exclusively in draught work as its name might suggest, but was required to performed other functions as well. It tended to be smaller and lighter than its British counterparts such as the Clydesdales and Shires which were accustomed to perform specific tasks such as ploughing the extensive areas of tillage found in many parts of Britain, or hauling the large farm wagons typical of that country, whereas the

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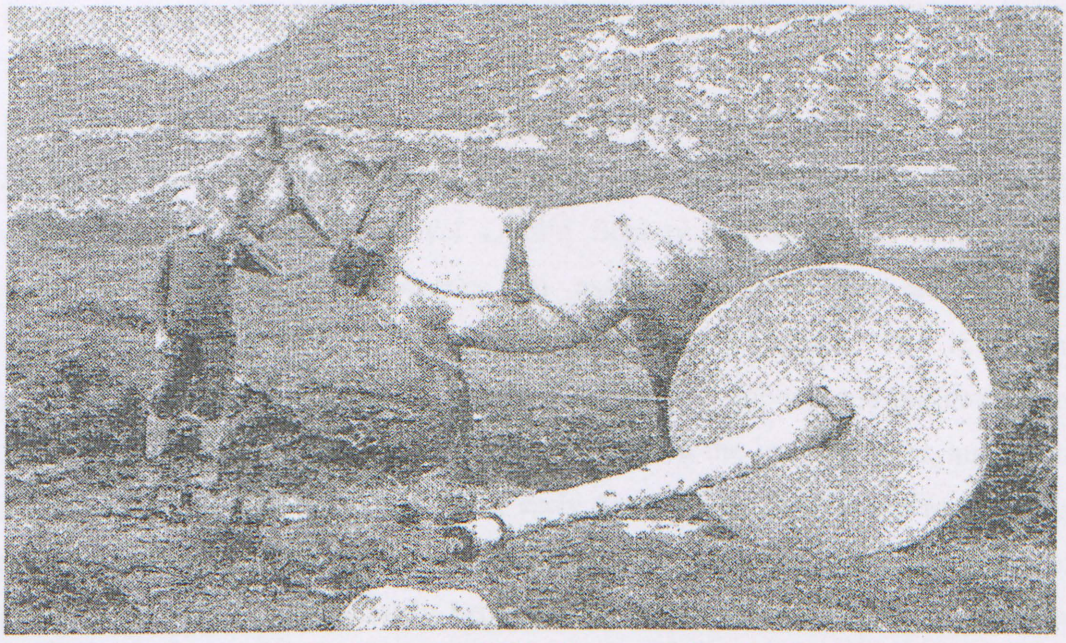
[53] E. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political,* 2 vols. (Dublin, 1812), i, p. 352. Henceforth cited as Wakefield, *An account of Ireland.*

[54] *Reports of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland.* (Dublin 1897), p. 9

Irish farm horse tended to be a lighter, general purpose animal better suited for working the small agricultural units characteristic of Ireland. These varied tasks included ploughing or harrowing the owner's few acres one day, pulling the small Irish block-wheel car or Scotch cart with farm produce the next, and driving the family vehicle to market or to mass. It also was a roadster [56] of sufficient merit to suit the requirements of a farming population.

Although somewhat coarse for hunting, it was often called upon to have a day's sport with the local farmer's pack where it had sufficient jumping ability to follow hounds. In addition, certain strains of the same general breed, were sometimes crossed



Work horse crushing flax in Co. Donegal. c. 1900. Photograph from McCracken, *Irish woods since Tudor times*.

with thoroughbred and other blood-lines in order to perform other specialist functions such as that of saddle-horses, carriage horses and the like.

Another factor which influenced the development of the Irish work-horse was the type of farm vehicles used. Ireland in common with Scotland, Wales, and many of the more mountainous parts of Europe traditionally used light two-wheel cars or carts that required small, light horses for traction, while the ponderous four-wheeled wagons which

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[55] E. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland,* p. 352.
[56] A riding or driving horse used for travel.

were usual in more level lowland regions such as South East England, East Anglia and parts of the Continent including the Netherlands, had to be hauled by heavy breeds of draught horses.

During the nineteenth century progressive agriculturists in Ireland, anxious to improve the standard of the work-horse population, subjected the native stock to out-crossing with various British working breeds, including Suffolk Punches, and to a lesser extent Shires. The importation of Clydesdales became popular as the century progressed. After about 1850 the numbers of native draught animals declined in Ireland due to various economic reasons, and more emphasis was placed on the use of English sires. Increased numbers of Clydesdales and Shires were imported particularly in Cork and Ulster. The consequence was a marked deterioration of the standard of the indigenous horse breeds that took place during the middle years of the nineteenth century. This decline of the Irish work-horse population was eventually remedied by ameliorative action on the part of the Royal Dublin Society together with a number of local agricultural improvement societies, in association with the recently established Department of Agriculture, organized the holding of classes and the awarding of premiums for working horses in various shows. They encouraged the development of a specifically Irish work-horse breed which was called the Irish Draught, and established a registration scheme for stallions in the early years of the twentieth century. In addition, the breeding and use of the large British agricultural breeds was discouraged except in areas where they had previously become well established, specifically the province of Ulster, the counties of Dublin and Louth, and the district comprised within a radius of the city of Cork [57] where there were already large numbers of the British breeds.

Registration for non-thoroughbreds in Ireland was not established in Ireland until the early years of the twentieth century when ordered that no new sires of the Clydesdale or Shire breeds should be registered The Irish Draught was finally registered as an established breed with its own stud book in 1911. Its breed characteristics which were set out at that time owed much to the influence of an authority on the breed, R. G. Carden who set out the characteristics of the typical native draught horse as it was at the turn of the twentieth century. It was described as : a long-backed animal, rarely exceeding 15.3 or

16 hands high, with strong, short, clean legs, plenty of bone and substance, short backs, strong loins and quarters, the latter however drooping and inclined to be what is called 'goose rumped' quarters, slightly upright shoulders, strong neck and smallish head. They had good straight and level action, without its being extravagant, and could trot, canter and gallop. They were also excellent jumpers and this is generally recognized as being in some measure the result of their having the strong peculiarly formed quarters mentioned above.[58]

The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland issued a report on the Irish Horse-Breeding Industry in 1902. It admitted that the average Irish farm horse was of very mixed breeding, and described it as the progeny of common 'country sires' of indiscriminate ancestry, to which the various British breeds and the thoroughbred had contributed some blood. The report however, recognized that it was the strong infusion of 'Old Irish' blood which they had inherited from their forebears and passed on to their progeny, that was largely responsible for the 'strong, clean bone, the hardy constitutions, and the great determination which Irish-bred horses are noted for displaying when called upon to perform any particularly trying class of work.' [59]

However, it was the Irish work horse breed that proved to be the most valuable, as these were used to breed first class half-bred hunters when covered by thoroughbred stallions. The Irish hunter had acquired an international reputation for excellence not only in the hunting field, but also as cavalry chargers for the British, as well as various European armies. The economic value of this animal was commented upon in the Report of the Parliamentary Commission on Horse-Breeding in Ireland of 1897, when it asserted that 'much credit was given by breeders and dealers to the influence of the 'old Irish mare', a legendary animal with clean legs and good solid bone, from which many 'good ones' were bred.

The 1897 commissioners made an attempt to trace the history of the 'old Irish mare' without success, and came to the conclusion that she 'happened to be an occasional good one, not traceable to any particular breed, but the happy accidental product of a hardy dam and a lucky horse, bred without system and moulded by the exceptional conditions

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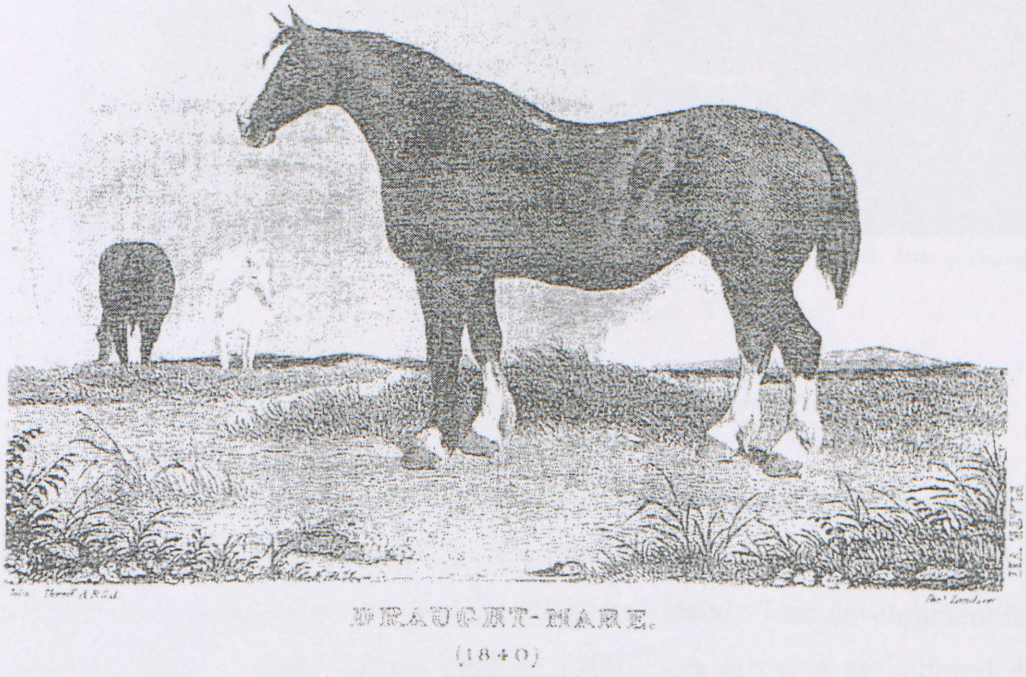
[57] Colin Lewis, *Horse breeding in Ireland* (London 1980), p. 164.
[58] R. G. Carden, 'The Irish hunter' in Sir Humphrey de Trafford (ed.) *The Horses of the British Empire* (London 1907), pp 230-31.
[59] William P. Coyne (ed.), *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, (Dublin 1902), p. 328. Henceforth cited as *Ireland industrial and agricultural.*

of her surroundings'[60] The old Irish mare was said to have possessed a natural hardihood of constitution 'begotten of the conditions under which she is kept and the work at which she is engaged, that the progeny of the Irish mare are indebted for many of the good qualities possessed by them'[61]

At the end of the nineteenth century, a large percentage of the mares used to breed Irish hunters were owned by small farmers who also used them for various tasks around their farms such as ploughing and harrowing, as well as carting or riding work. The fact that they were often under-fed, and kept out in all weathers, had given them a hardiness, staying power, and physical fitness which stood them in good stead in their capacity as breeders.



Old Irish Draught Mare 1840. Low 1842. From a painting by William Shiels.

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[60] *Reports by the commissioners appointed to inquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland*.(Dublin 1897), p. 32. Henceforth cited as *The report of the commission on horse breeding in Ireland* 1897.
[61] *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, p. 327

hardy dam and a lucky horse, bred without system and moulded by the exceptional conditions of her surroundings'[62] The old Irish mare was said to have possessed a natural hardihood of constitution 'begotten of the conditions under which she is kept and the work at which she is engaged, that the progeny of the Irish mare are indebted for many of the good qualities possessed by them'[63]



J. Wootton] [*By permission of the Duke of Portland*

PLATE 110.—THE BYERLEY TURK

The Byerly Turk. Painting by John Wooten.

In 1897 the Commission on Horse Breeding in Ireland had reported that both the Famine of the 1840s and the agricultural recession which peaked about 1879 had led to a decline in the number of horses used for tillage in Ireland. This development is reflected in the agricultural census figures 1853 to 1900.[64] A growing agricultural depression which began in the 1870s, had led to a decrease in the areas under tillage. It had begun on the larger farms, and by degrees, many of the working horses passed into the hands of the smaller farmers. The agricultural depression continued into the 1890s, and crippled the small farmers to such an extent that they were compelled to part with their good colts

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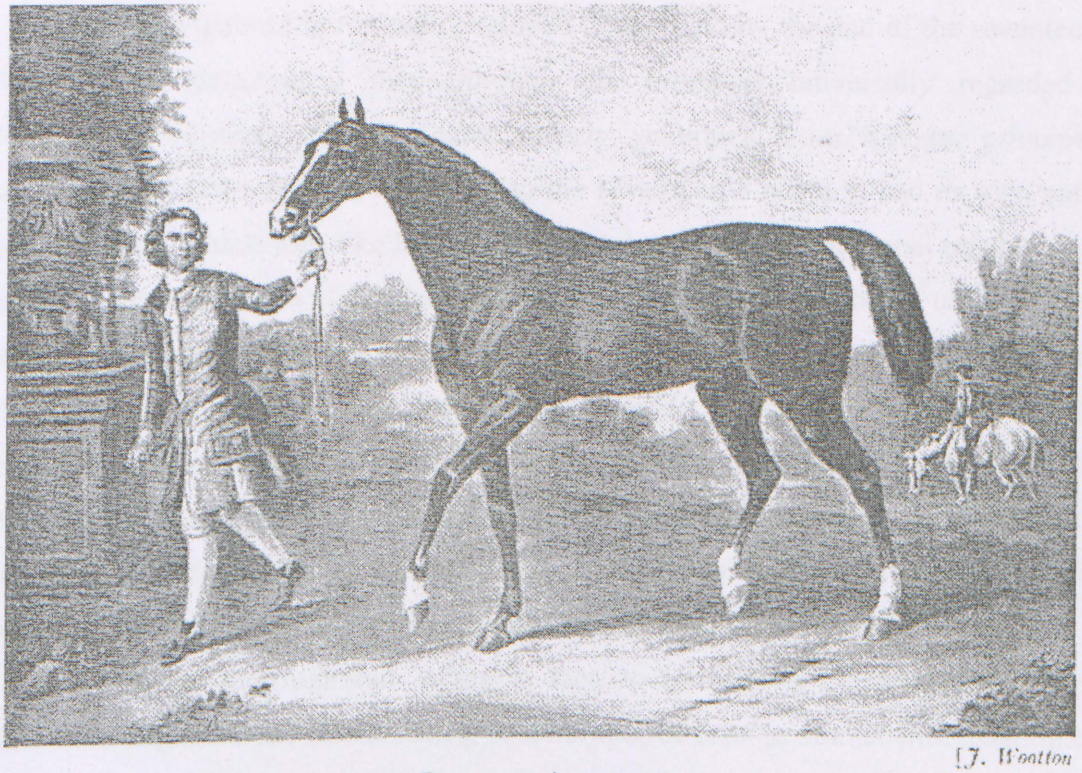
[62] *Reports by the commissioners appointed to inquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland* .(Dublin 1897), p. 32. Henceforth cited as *The report of the commission on horse breeding in Ireland* 1897.
[63] *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, p. 327

and fillies to meet their financial obligations. Consequently, by the time the Commission into the Horse Breeding Industry in Ireland had been set up in 1897, there were 'left only some very old and degenerate specimens of a very valuable breed'.[65]



The Darley Arabian. Painting by J. Wooton

During the early years of the twentieth century Government efforts were made to resuscitate the Irish Draught breed. In 1904 a scheme was introduced under which subsidies of £50 were offered in respect of approved stallions. Twelve stallions were subsidized in 1905 and 1906. The following year the number was increased to thirty-eight. In 1911 the Department of Agriculture set up a subsidized in 1905 and 1906. The following year the number was increased to thirty-eight. In 1911 the Department of Agriculture set scheme for the registration of mares of Irish Draught type. [66]

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[64] See chapter 3.
[65] *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland Journal*, vol. v (Dublin October 1904 to July 1905), p. 26.
[66] Colin A. Lewis, 'Recognition and development of the Irish Draught horse', Mary McGrath and Joan C. Griffith, *The Irish Draught horse*, (Cork, 2005), p.149.

The Thoroughbred

The Thoroughbred horse had developed in England by the end of the seventeenth century. It is paradoxical that although the breed is universally regarded as quintessentially English, it was almost entirely generated from foreign, principally Oriental, stock. Unlike Ireland which, up to the seventeenth century, had its own native breed, the hobby, which had, like later Irish equine breeds, an international reputation for excellence, whereas England had never been remarkable for its horses until after the Stuart period, when interest was generated in improving the quality of the equine stock in order to cater for an increased demand for good quality horses for racing, light cavalry mounts, carriage horses, roadsters, and the like. Foreign breeds such as Arabs, Barbs, Turks, Spanish, and Neapolitan horses were imported in large numbers, for this purpose of breeding animals suitable for these purposes. Consequently, these breeds had become commonplace in the stables of the great houses of England, both royal and noble.

The English thoroughbred seems in fact, to have been the result of a happy accident resulting from the interbreeding of a number of foreign strains with existing old English stock. In this way, a strain of horses which achieved near perfection as a racing animal was developed almost by chance. The breed was complex in origin, having been derived from a number of diverse strains. Some of these had originated from old English mares which had themselves, been partially bred from Andalusian and English stallions, and mated to a number of Middle Eastern stallions, among these was an Arab or Barb stallion called Markham's Arabian which had been brought into England during the reign of James I, as well as a stallion known as Place's White Turk, and three Turkish horses which had been brought over from the siege of Vienna in 1684. The arrival of these in London was noted by John Evelyn the diarist : 17th. December 1684.

> Early in the morning I went into St. James Park to see three Turkish or Asian horses, newly brought over, and now shown to his Majesty. There were four but one died at sea, being three weeks coming from Hamburg. They were taken from a Barshaw at the siege of Vienna, at the late famous raising of that leaguer[67]

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[67] William Bray (ed), *The diary of John Evelyn, 1641-1705* (London n.d. c. 1900).

However, the main lineage of the English and Irish thoroughbred horse can be traced back to three famous sires at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, and all modern thoroughbred horses are descended from them. The first of these bloodlines was that of the 'Byerly Turk' . This famous stallion was said to have been captured by Captain (later Colonel) Byerly at the relief of Buda from the Turks in 1683. Interesting enough, this animal had an Irish connection in as much as he was said to have been used as a charger by his owner at the Battle of the Boyne.[68] His origins are however, somewhat obscure as the term 'Turk' or even 'Barb' was often used for an Arab and it is most probable that Byerly's horse was in fact, an Arab.[69] The Byerley Turk is recorded in the first volume of the General Stud Book in 1791 as having stood as a stallion at his owner's estate in Yorkshire, where his progeny later proved to be hugely influential in the breeding of the modern thoroughbred horse.

The second of the great thoroughbred bloodlines was the 'Darley Arabian', which was imported into England in 1704. Mr. J. Darley who lived in Yorkshire, had asked his brother, a merchant in Asia Minor, to procure him a suitable Arabian horse, and the Darley Arabian was the result. The animal was said to be a pure bred desert Arab of Kehilan stock.[70] He was a 15 hand bay, and although he was indifferent as a racehorse, he was used to cover mares and produced a number of progeny, one of which was the ancestor of Eclipse, the progenitor from whom the greatest line of English and Irish thoroughbreds are descended.[71]

The third main bloodline was that of the 'Godolphin Arabian' which was bought in Paris in 1729 by Mr. Edward Coke of Derbyshire. There is a story, almost certainly apocryphal, that the horse, a lop-eared bay of 15 hands, was pulling a Paris water cart when Coke found him. He was almost certainly not an Arab at all, but a Barb from Morocco. Coke died in 1733, and the horse was purchased by Lord Godolphin where he

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[68] R. S. Summerhays, *Summerhays' Encyclopaedia for Horsemen,* (London 1959), p.49.
[69] ibid. p.32
[70] *Kehilan* is an Arabic word which means something like the English 'thoroughbred'. See Elwyn Hartley Edwards, *Horses: their role in the history of Man*, (London 1987), p. 36.
[71] R. S. Summerhays, *Summerhays' Encyclopaedia for Horsemen,* (London 1959), p.76.

became the foundation sire of .one of the most influential lines of English thoroughbreds in the British Isles. [72]

The thoroughbred horse in the nineteenth century had retained many of the features of his Eastern forebears including their elegance and fineness of bone. The colours of the breed were generally bay, brown, or chestnut. Grey and black were uncommon , nevertheless they occurred occasionally in some bloodlines. Other colours such as roan, dun, sorrel, etc. do not occur in true thoroughbreds, and are indicative of non-thoroughbred lineage. Sometimes the basic thoroughbred colours of chestnut, bay, or brown included a certain amount of white, in the form of blazes on the face or white legs and feet.[73]

Since 1808 the thoroughbred bloodlines have been officially recorded in a register known as Wetherby's Stud Book. However, the breed had been meticulously documented in a number of private records kept since its early origins. This provides the thoroughbred horse with the oldest documented lineage of any modern equine race in the world.

Thoroughbred horses were introduced into Ireland very shortly after their evolution in England, and by the end of the eighteenth century, they had became widely distributed in gentlemen's stables all over the country, particularly in the traditional horse-breeding areas south of the Boyne. There, they thrived particularly well on the highly nutritional and bone-building limestone grazing, and developed a distinctive type that was characteristically Irish. The thoroughbred was responsible for introducing into Ireland, the fine qualities of 'bone' characteristic of their Eastern forebears.

It is interesting to note that the earliest thoroughbreds were similar in size to their Middle Eastern forbears, and few of them exceeded 14 ½ hands in height. However, the breed gradually increased in size through a process of evolution. It has been estimated that the average increase in height of the breed from 1700 to 1850 was one inch every 25 years.[74] One factor which has been suggested in order to account for this, was the influence of the Godolphin Barb, who was himself larger than most of the Eastern sires,

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[72] Lady Wentworth, *Thoroughbred racing stock*, (London, 1938), p,. 218.
[73] J. H. Walsh, *The horse in the stable and the field*, (London, 1873), p. 93. Henceforth cited as J. H. Walsh.
[74] Major General William Harding Carter, *Horses of the World,* (Washington 1923), p.55

and was inclined to produce large offspring,[75] This gradual increase in size of the thoroughbred was common to both Britain and Ireland, partially through continued selective breeding from other size-inducing sires continued selective breeding from size-inducing sires, and partially through the excellent nutritional quality of the rich limestone grazing in much of Ireland.

Naturally, the principal object in the breeding of thoroughbreds was racing performance and the most rigid selection was practised when choosing bloodlines, but they were of course, used to improve other breeds as well. It would in fact, be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the influence of the thoroughbred on the horse population of Ireland, and it was the introduction of this breed during the course of the eighteenth century that laid the foundation of the later world-wide reputation of the Irish horse for quality and excellence.[76]

In 1897, the report of the Commission on Horse Breeding in Ireland advised that 'thoroughbred sires of the right stamp are to be preferred above all others *where mares are suitable.* [77] It was admitted however, that with unsuitable dams the progeny often turned out undersized and 'weedy'. However, It was evident from the evidence presented by witnesses to the commission, that many breeders who wished to produce weight carrying hunters from non-thoroughbred mares, distrusted the use of thoroughbred stallions, preferring something with more 'bone'.[78] This meant a good measurement of bone immediately beneath the knee or hock which was desirable in weight carrying horses, even though this would mean sacrificing qualities of 'blood'. This distrust of thoroughbred blood by conservative Irish breeders was nothing new, Maxwell having referred to it as early as 1832 :

> The number of English thorough-bred horses introduced within the last thirty years into the Connaught racing studs, gradually introduced a slight and unservicable hybrid – and, too late, gentlemen discovered the error of endeavouring to procure a cross, which should combine increased speed with those durable qualities that alone can enable a horse, under reasonable weight, to live with fast hounds in a

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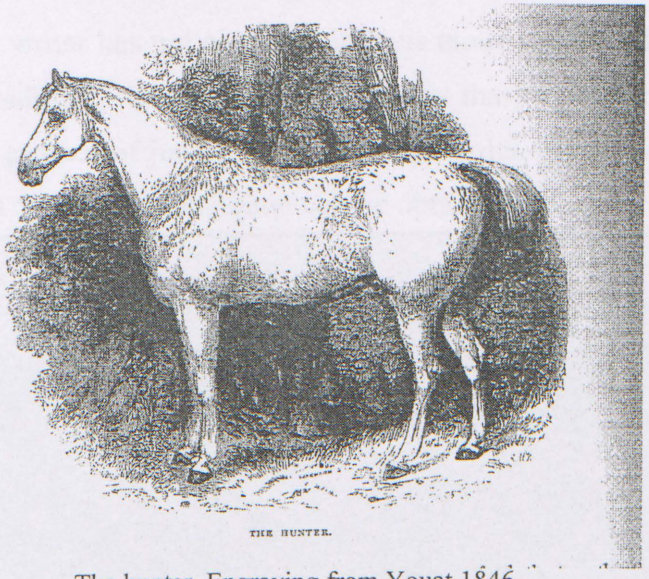
[75] J. H. Walsh, op. cit., p. 72.
[76] *Report of the commission on horse breeding in Ireland*, 1897, p. 10
[77] ibid., p.21
[78] ibid., p.22

country where they can go for miles without a check, and where the leaps are always severe, and occasionally tremendous. [79]

The Irish Hunter



The hunter. Engraving from Youat 1846

During the nineteenth century, as now, Ireland had an international reputation for the excellence of its horses, but unlike the situation today, the reputation was not as much for its thoroughbred blood-stock as its hunters – the progeny of thoroughbred sires and 'Old Irish' draught mares. The alternative cross was not normally so successful. These half bred hunters formed a valuable export commodity, with the better quality animals being sold to the English shires where there was a large demand for hunters with a lot of blood, and who could jump well. Those of lesser quality were generally sold as harness-horses or went to the British and Continental armies as cavalry troopers. The same type was favoured by Carlo Bianconi as harness animals to draw his cars.[80]

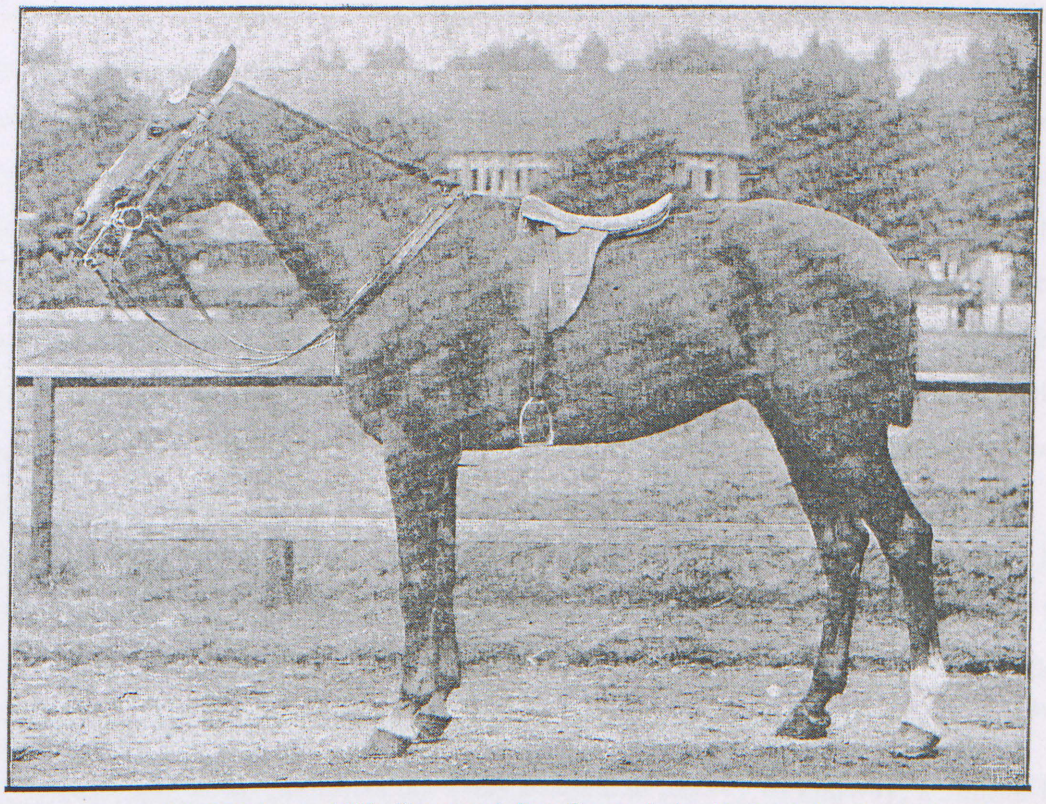
It had been observed that by the second half of the nineteenth century, the Irish half bred hunter had evolved somewhat since its origin some hundred years previously. J. H.Walsh reported in 1873 that :

> Between the English and Irish Hunter there are several slight points of difference. Thus the latter is remarkable for a particularly neat head, almost too narrow across the forehead, but full between the ears. The muzzle is small, but with good nostrils ; jaws open, and head well set on. The shoulders are

[79] W. H. Maxwell, *Wild sports of the West* (London, 1832), p. 389.
[80] See Chapter 5.

particularly sloping and powerful, middle-piece well ribbed but slightly flat, hips wide and powerful, the loins also being muscular and well united to the back. Legs and feet clean and sound. [81]

He did admit however, that the Irish hunter of the time often had a bad temper, a trait which the present writer has not observed in their modern descendants except when it is caused by bad handling. But he did go on to say that 'the combination is almost always hardy, and the powers of jumping are of a high order, displayed in height rather than in width', and that 'when an Irish hunter can be obtained possessed of good



Heavy weight Irish hunter 1900. Photograph from Coyne, *Ireland industrial and agricultural.*

manners, he is very valuable indeed, but there is so much doubt on this particular point that a careful trial should always be obtained'[82] The 1897 commission was unable to obtain any information to indicate even the approximate number of hunters sold during the year of their report or what proportion they bore to approximately 40,000 horses which had been sold for export in 1896. A majority of these were probably sold for military purposes. The commission noted however, that Ireland was 'clearly at the head of the market in selling hunters', and went on to explain that 'these are chiefly bred in the

[81] J. H. Walsh, op. cit., pp 99-100

midland and southern districts', and 'although they are the most valuable horses sold, form only a portion of the Irish horse trade, the big prices given for the few attracting attention whereas nothing is heard of the numbers and numbers sold at small prices.'[83]

Mention had been made by commentators at the beginning of the twentieth century of the existence of a notable breed of large hunters from Co. Roscommon, a breed which had also been referred to as early as 1812 by Wakefield who reported that the local strain of hunters had 'acquired a habit of jumping over walls, and in this they are so expert, as almost to exceed belief'.[84] Sadly, this old Roscommon breed now appears to have died out. Contemporary sources reported that although rather coarse and angular in build, they were especially noted for their size and great development of bone, as well as for their great courage and exceptional jumping ability over the stone walls of their native county.[85] Compared to them, hunters, horses reared in the richer grass-lands of Meath and Westmeath, attained more quality but didn't grow as big, and although possessed of good bone were scarcely equal to the Roscommon horse in this respect. The physical characteristics of the Roscommon horse were credited to the particular qualities inherent in the soil of the region. According to Ridgeway, first-rate hunters were produced in Roscommon in spite of 'the regrettably low standard of quality in the brood mare kept in that fine horse-breeding county, and the very indifferent attention paid to the young stock'. He pointed out that, besides the horse, other forms of livestock such as cattle and sheep grow very much larger in Roscommon than in other Irish counties.[86]

According to the author of the 1824 Statistical Survey of Galway, a similar breed of sturdy but slow weight-carrying hunters had once existed in that county, but they had become 'contaminated' by the newfangled thoroughbreds in order to increase speed and 'quality'. 'That old breed of strong hunters, for which this county was famous, has almost disappeared, and given place to a breed of mongrel racers, who are not able to carry weights, and

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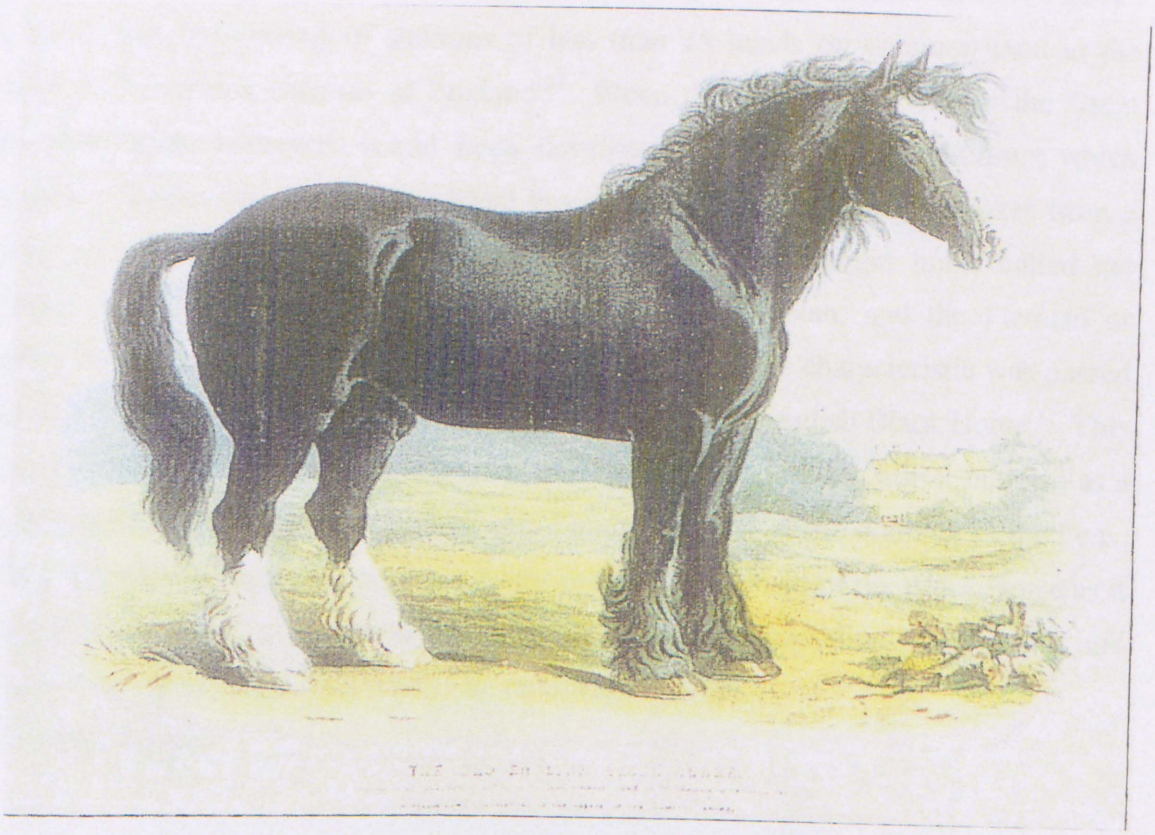
[82] ibid.,
[83] ibid., p.32
[84] Wakefield, p. 351.
[85] W. Ridgeway, *The origin and influence of the thoroughbred horse,* (Cambridge 1905), p.414. 'The Horse in Ireland', *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland Journal*, Vol.V. (October 1904 to July 1905), p.20.
[86] ibid., p. 21

who cannot bear to stand a moment without exercise, they are so bandaged up with sheets and rollers'.[87]



The Old English Black Horse. Later known as the Shire. Low 1842. From a painting by William Shiels.

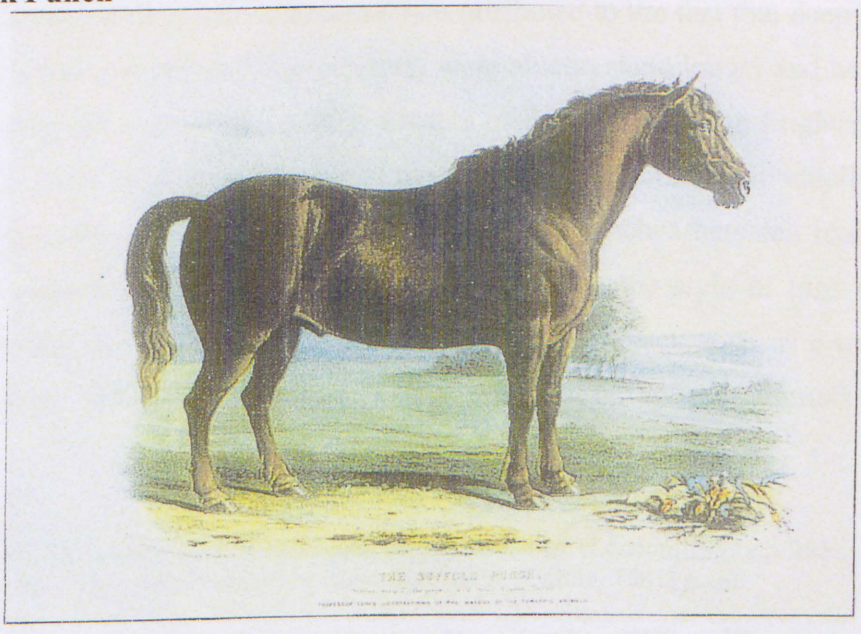
The English 'Black Horse' (later, the 'Shire')

During the eighteenth century, a number of 'English Black Horses' were imported into Ireland under the auspices of the Dublin Society with the object of improving the quality of the indigenous work horse stock. This breed had a long history, being originally derived from the heavy horses brought into England from the Continent soon after the Norman Conquest. Over the years, these horses developed into the 'English Great Horse' which was used during the mediaeval period as a war-horse large enough to carry a man in armour. Nevertheless, this animal would have been quite small compared to its modern descendant. This is apparent on the evidence of the horse armour which can be seen today in the Tower of London, which shows that the English war horse of the period could not have stood much over 15½ hands, and it was very far from resembling

[87] Hely Dutton, *A statistical and agricultural survey of the county of Galway*, p. 113. Henceforth cited as *Statistical survey of Galway*.

the massive modern shire horse into which it evolved. During the Tudor period, selective programmes were established to encourage the breeding of larger horses. In 1541 Henry VIII prohibited the grazing of stallions of less than 15 hands on common land in the midland and southern counties of England.[88] When the military function of the Great Horse had become redundant, it had been developed as a heavy draught horse which was later to evolve into the English Shire having received significant outcrosses from a number of continental draught breeds including a German draught horse called the Almaine, and two breeds from the Low Countries, the Frisian, and the Flemish or Flanders horse, both of which were predominantly black. This characteristic was passed on to their English relative, which caused it to be named 'the English Black Horse.' This breed not only saw service during the seventeen century as a military horse, but also as a draught animal used extensively in agriculture and such tasks as the draining of the Fens. . This function had been an important factor in the development of the Black Horse as it required the breeding of big, powerful animals, the task demanding both weight and strength. The Black Horse was later to be renamed the Shire.

The Suffolk Punch



Suffolk Punch. Low 1842. From a painting by William Shiels.

[88] Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power*, (London, 1992), p. 156.

The second of the imported English breeds was the Suffolk Punch or 'High Suffolk' which as its name suggests, originated in East Anglia. The early origins of the breed are obscure, though it is said to date back to 1506, and every specimen extant today traces its descent in direct male line to a single stallion foaled in 1760[89] . He was known as Crisp's Horse of Ufford near Woodbridge, and although a few outcrosses were introduced at various times to improve the breed, every Suffolk alive today can trace his ancestry back to this single sire. They are all chestnut in colour, though their coats can vary somewhat in shade.

The clean-legged Suffolk was ideally suited to working on the heavy clay soils of East Anglia and at the time of its introduction to Ireland about 1800 [90] , the stallions were described as standing about fifteen one, 'very broad, round in the ribs, short in the back, well shouldered, deep and wide in the chest, up before, his head well set on, and his legs broad, flat, and free from gum or hair.[91] The mares would have been smaller, but as far as the present writer knows, only stallions were involved in breeding in Ireland. The action of the Suffolk was longer and lower than the high, more wasteful movement of the Shire, and East Anglian farmers maintained that no other horse exceeded it in working the heavy clays of the region. Suffolks were economical to keep, strong in harness, active and docile, and could manage on less food than other draught breeds.[92] Their excellent food to energy conversion rate was attributed to the fact that deep-bellied horses carried their food longer, and consequently were able to stand longer and harder work.[93]

During the eighteenth century, owners of Suffolk horses in England were said to have pitted them against each other in trials of strength, either individually or in teams. These contests not only involved hauling loads, but matches between individual horses and teams were arranged to pull against each other in the style of tugs of war, or by hitching individual horses or teams to an immovable object, such as a tree in order to establish their strength and courage, the winners being the animals which were

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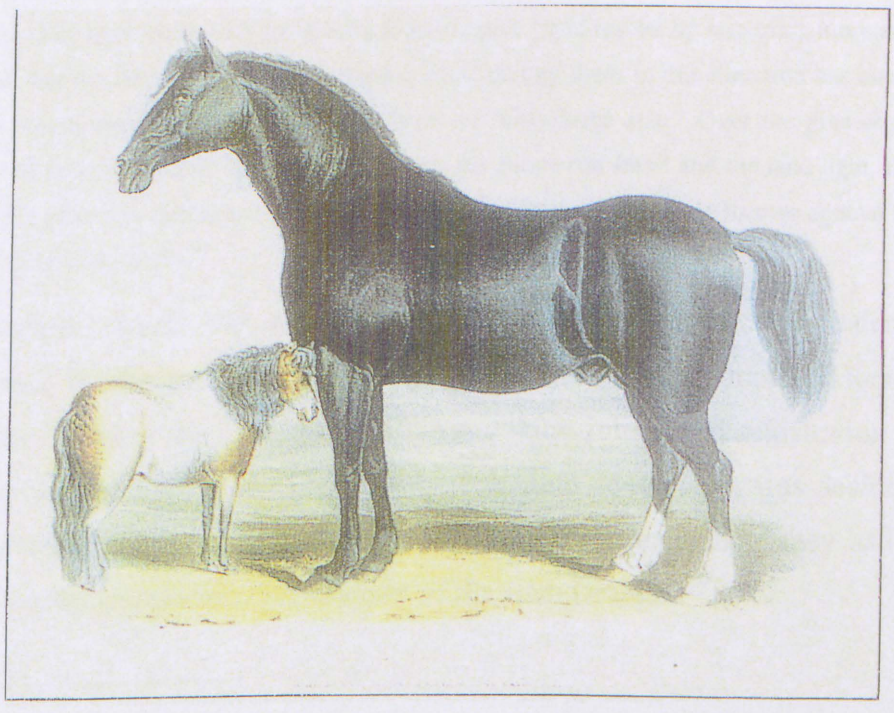
[89] R. S. Summerhays, *Summerhay's encyclopaedia for horsemen*, (London, 1959), p. 295.
[90] Joseph Archer, *Statistical survey of the county of Dublin*, (Dublin, 1801) p.xiii.
[91] ibid.,
[92] E. H. Edwards, *Horses: their role in the history of Man*, (London, 1987), p, 166.
[93] John Lawrence, *The sportsman, farrier and shoeing-smith new guide*. (London undated). p. 184..(my copy has 1797 on the flyleaf). Henceforth cited as Lawrence.

considered to have made the greatest effort by throwing themselves against their collars and pulling with all their strength.[94]

The Clydesdale

This breed originated in the early eighteenth century in the area round the Clyde valley in the county of Lanarkshire, Scotland, at the beginning of the eighteenth century when between 1715 and 1720, the sixth Duke of Hamilton, with others, imported Flemish stallions – probably coach horses,[95] to improve the small native draught horses of the time. Sometime later an infusion of shire blood was introduced into the breed in order to upgrade it to meet the demands of agriculture and trade for a horse with weight and substance. The Clydesdale was not as heavy as the shire, being more rangy and lacking the width and compactness of the other draft breeds. It had a prompt walk, a good snappy stride, and a smart trot, with hocks well flexed and carried close together, and well-set, fairly long and sloping pasterns giving it the best style and action of the British draught breeds.



The Clydesdale, Low. 1842. Note that this breed had yet to develop the characteristic 'feather' on its legs. From a painting by William Shiels.

[94] W. H. Carter, *The horses of the world*, (Washington, 1923), p. 47.
[95] Lawrence, op. cit, p. 186.

draught breeds. A characteristic feature of the Clydesdale was a moderate amount of fine feather or fine hair below the knees and hocks. Its prevalent colours were bay and brown, with a good deal of white on the face and legs, but blacks, greys, chestnuts, and roans are occasionally seen.

A description of the Clydesdale at the end of the eighteenth century is as follows :

The Clydesdale horses are probably as good and useful a draught horse as any we are possessed of ; they are larger than the Suffolk Punches, being from fifteen to sixteen and a half hands high, strong, hardy, and remarkably true pullers, a restive horse rarely being amongst them. In point of shape, they are in general plain-made about the head, sides, and hind-legs ; they are mostly of a grey or brown colour, and are said to have been produced by a cross betwixt the mares of the common Scotch kind, and six coach-horses, all stallions , brought from Flanders by a Duke of Hamilton, about a hundred years since.[96]

The breed which had been introduced into Ireland during the eighteenth century, continued to be brought in at various times during the nineteenth, but neither it nor the Shire ever became popular except in Ulster and a few areas in the South. A publication issued by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland reported in 1902 :

Except in a few districts in the neighbourhood of the larger towns, the breeding of cart horses of the Clydesdale and Shire type is but little carried out in Ireland. Some of these breeds have been tried in many districts, and in some cases they have been found to give good results by imparting more substance to the native stock; but the advantages of the influence exercised by them in this direction has been confined to localities in which the soil is heavy and the farms of fairly large size. Over the greater part of the country neither of these conditions holds, and wherever the farms run small and the land light, the smaller, smarter, and more generally useful native cart-horse continues to more than hold its own against its massive rivals, the Clydesdale and Shire.[97]

Clydesdale blood was regarded by most Irish work-horse breeders as an unsuitable cross for the generally lighter and more finely boned Draught Horse.[98] As mentioned above, when the Department of Agriculture introduced registration for non-thoroughbred horses in the early years of the twentieth century, it was decided not to register the British heavy draught breeds except in a few areas where they had become established in order to maintain the integrity of the Irish Draught.[99]

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[96] ibid.,
[97] *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, p. 328.
[98] ibid., p.20
[99] Colin Lewis, *Horse breeding in Ireland* (London, 1980), p. 164.

The Hackney

The hackney, which was characterized by its trotting action, had originated in Norfolk as a harness breed during the early years of the eighteenth century. It was like the thoroughbred, the result of judicial breeding from Andalusian and various Eastern bloodlines, and in fact, the original Hackney root-stock was in fact quite closely related to that of the thoroughbred. However, unlike the latter, which was developed as a racehorse, the Hackney was evolved as a high-class light harness animal with a distinctively extravagant action when trotting. This gave it a very stylish appearance when harnessed to a smart gig or trap. The breed was in fact, little known in Ireland until a controversial scheme by the Congested Districts Board in the 1890s to improve the native stock by introducing stallions of this breed into the West of Ireland, was made apparently at the instigation of a few individuals who were Hackney enthusiasts.

However, a majority of the commissioners appointed in 1897 to investigate the horse breeding industry in Ireland were not in favour of the breed, and were concerned that : the introduction of Hackneys will seriously prejudice the horse-breeding industry of Ireland on the following grounds. 'That whereas Ireland has hitherto been famous for riding horses and for harness horses of a particular stamp, hackney stallions being only calculated to get harness horses of an entirely different description, will prejudicially affect the present breed of horses throughout the country.' They further pointed out that it would be impossible to confine the hackney blood to any one district, and that as 'dealers will not buy a horse which is suspected of having a strain of Hackney blood in him for a riding horse or for the class of harness horse for which Ireland is the chief market', potential buyers of quality horses would look elsewhere to make their purchases with a consequent loss of revenue to the country.[100]

On the other hand, it was admitted that the introduction of hackney stallions into the congested districts would materially benefit the poorer farmers by enabling them to obtain an enhanced price for their young stock. But the pro-hackney members of the commission asserted that there would be 'no danger of the blood percolating through the country', and 'even if the hackney blood did disseminate through that portion of the

country devoted to the production of hunters, it would not prejudice the future of the hunter'. Some few even argued that it would even have a beneficial effect 'by infusing more substance into the hunter brood mares', as many of them were inclined to be a bit weedy. In any case there was a good potential market for harness horses, and that a good trotting action was the one quality most sought after by dealers when buying horses for that purpose, and that the Hackney was the best stallion to provide it. This argument by the pro-hackney lobby was in fact, over ruled by the pro-hunter majority.

In their final decision, the commission reported that some areas of the Congested Districts along the Western sea-board were :

so naturally unsuited to breed anything except the class of animal used for such purely local purposes as carrying turf or sea-weed, that any attempt to improve the breed must, we fear, be unprofitable. In other districts, where valuable ponies have been and can be produced, the Hackney is not in our opinion a desirable sire.[101]

Native Irish Ponies

By the beginning of the nineteenth century there were several races of native ponies established in the more remote areas of the country along the western sea-bord, as well as in parts of Kerry and North Antrim. These native breeds were considered to have retained much of the ancient bloodlines of Ewart's 'Celtic' pony as well as the old hobby breed, a genetic heritage which had been largely lost in other parts of the country where English influence had been dominant the longest.

The Difference Between Horses and Ponies

The label 'pony' to designate a small equine is apparently of seventeenth century Scots origin. According to the Oxford .English Dictionary, the word was thought to have been derived from the Old French *poulenet* (dim. of *poulain*) simply referring to a foal or small horse. The original meaning appears to have referred to a specifically Scottish horse of small size which was more or less, synonymous with 'Galloway nag'. However, by the early nineteenth century the term seems to have widened in meaning to include any small equine not exceeding 13 hands high, while the term 'Galloway' was reserved

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[100] *Reporst by the commissioner appointed to inquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland,* (Dublin 1897), p. 11.

for a slightly taller animal up to about 14 hands. The Galloway was more or less, the Scots equivalent of the Irish hobby.

However, the difference between horse and pony has not always been clear, the respective definitions having varied somewhat at different times. It could be argued however, that there are specific pony breeds which are quite distinct from small horses. True ponies tend to have temperaments rather different than larger horse breeds, and tend to live longer. In addition their physiology is somewhat different as they have shorter legs and heads rather larger in proportion to their bodies than most breeds of horses. These traits were probably derived more directly from their wild tarpan ancestors via Ewart's Celtic Pony, while the larger and 'finer' 'horse' breeds have derived from different strains more influenced by Eastern blood.

Professor Ewart describes his idea of the difference between ponies and horses, suggesting that 'the horse which found its way into Europe (perhaps from Siberia) in primeval times was of considerable size'[102] He goes on to argue that a pony is nothing more than a small horse with particular features resulting from a dwarfing process which characteristically takes the form of stunting of the legs together with a head, relatively large in proportion to the size of the body. Sometimes it is said of a particular breed that it consists of small horses rather than ponies, this generally means that if the legs were longer in proportion to the body they would rank as miniature horses. According to some authorities, a pony is defined as a horse not exceeding 52 inches (13 hands), while a horse over 52, but not exceeding 56 inches (14 hands), is classed as a Galloway. Nowadays, , a horse measuring 58 inches at the withers is often regarded as a pony mainly due to the influence of polo. Sometimes these 14.2 hands so-called ponies are in fact, dwarf thoroughbred or crossbred horses, and sometimes they are true ponies that by selection and good feeding have gained height. When one looks at pony breeds it is useful not only to note their size, but also to establish whether they are the stunted descendants of wild horses, or the result of selective breeding by man in the remote past.

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[101] *Report of the Royal Commission into horse breeding in Ireland*, 1897. p. 11.
[102] J.Ewart (unsigned) 'The ponies of Connemara', *Ireland industrial and gricultural*,(Dublin, 1902), p. 336

The Connemara Pony

Often described by modern experts as a small horse rather than a true pony, this was the best known of the native Irish pony breeds, and the only one surviving today. When the West of Ireland was opened to tourism in the nineteenth century, the hardy little ponies which Victorian visitors observed grazing on wild hillsides, or carrying creels of turf to romantic thatched cottages captured the popular imagination and generated interest in the breed. As with other breeds found in many Western coastal areas of the British Isles, there was a widely held tradition that the Connemara Pony had inherited Spanish blood in the sixteenth century from stallions escaping from Armada wrecks. This tradition is totally without any historical foundation. Nevertheless, a common folk tradition (apparently taken seriously by Professor Ewart)[103] holds that the breed contains an ancient strain of Spanish blood probably inherited from Andalusian horses imported via Galway or Limerick.

Hely Dutton reported in 1824, that 'Cunnamara has been long famed for its breed of small hardy horses ; but from an injudicious cross with large stallions , they have lost much of their celerity and it is now difficult to procure one of the true breed'.[104] Eighteen years later in 1842, the same breed was described in a two-volume work by Edward Low, Professor of Veterinary Medicine at Edinbugh University [105]. In describing the ponies, Prof. Low was influenced by the commonly held theory of the Spanish origin of the breed. 'Their characters are essentially Spanish. They are from 12 to 14 hands high, generally of the prevailing chestnut colour of the Andalusian horses, delicate in their limbs, and possessed of the form of head characteristic of the Spanish race'. The coloured print which accompanied Professor Low's section on the Connemara pony depicts a fine, smooth-coated dun pony with black points. He looks like a good specimen of a modern Connemara-Arab cross, with clean legs and a small, fine head of distinctly Arab or Andalusian type, with the small pointed ears characteristic of the Oriental breeds, and much finer than the shaggy little ponies of the area which appear in early photographs. It is therefore probable, that the artist deliberately exaggerated the

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[103] J. C. Ewart, *Department of agriculture and technical instruction for Ireland – Journal* 2, (Dublin, 1900), p. 183.

[104] *Statistical survey of Galway,*

supposed Arab or 'Andalusian' characteristics of the animal. There could be another answer however, in the form of a tradition that the Martins of Ballinahinch, the family of 'Humanity Dick', had introduced Arabs and Barbs into the country, early in the nineteenth century with a view of improving the class of ponies and keeping up the breed. This is just one of a number of traditions that Arab blood had been introduced had been introduced into Connemara sometime during the eighteenth century, and 'now and again during the nineteenth'[106] However, if one applies Occam's dictum '*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter neccessitam*' there is no need to infer multiple out-crossings. In any case, this infusion of oriental blood was said to have had a profound effect on the ponies of Connemara. Furthermore, between the date of Professor Low's publication in 1842 and the end of the century, there seems to have been a certain amount of further adulteration of the breed by coarser blood introduced by Clydesdales and Suffolk Punches.[107]

In the last years of the nineteenth century, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland commissioned one of Professor Low's successors - Professor J. C. Ewart of Edinburgh University, to make a 'study of the actual condition and possibilities of the Connemara Pony'. One of his briefs was to investigate the potential of the breed as a possible conveyance for the mounted infantry which had proved so successful in South Africa. The report of his investigation was published in November 1900.[108]

While making his survey of the breed in Connemara, Professor Ewart found not one homogenous race of ponies, but an assortment of varying types and breeds 'lumped together under the general label of Connemara pony.' However, he 'was struck with the general strength, endurance, and easy paces of the ponies, with their intelligence and docility, and with the capacity for work under conditions which would speedily prove disastrous to horses to horses reared under less natural conditions.' As he was confronted with a wide diversity of types, Professor Ewart classified his material under five

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[105] Edward Low, *The domestic animals of the British Isles,* 2 vols. (London, 1842),
[106] 'The ponies of Connemara', *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, p. 337.
[107] *Report of the commission into horse breeding*, 1897. p. 169. q. 5287.
[108] J. C. Ewart, 'The ponies of Connemara', *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland ; Journal No.2. November 1900,* (Dublin, 1900) pp 182-194.

headings. These he labeled respectively, (1) The Andalusian type which retained much of the character of the original breed which had strong Spanish characteristics, (2) The Eastern type which had Arab characteristics, (3) The Cashel type which appeared to have derived from a stallion standing in that area, (4) The Clydesdale type which had inherited Scottish blood from stallions introduced in the 1860s and 1870s, and (5) The Clifton type which had its own distinctive character.

The interest displayed by the Department of Agriculture in the Connemara ponies paid dividends, and steps were taken to regularize the breed. A description of it in 1902 is interesting. It described the Connemara as being 'inclined rather to the cob than the true pony in the matter of size' but 'they cannot be described as of a fixed or definite type'. Their average height is about 14 hands 2 inches, though when 'sold as yearlings and transferred to good land they frequently grow to a height of fully 15 hands'. The usual colours are grey or dun, but other colours occur as well. The breed was known for its sure-footed hardiness and intelligence, and 'with the exercise of more care and attention in their selection and breeding, they may yet work their way to the front as one of the most generally useful of the larger breeds of ponies in the kingdom.'

Connemaras had been successfully interbred with small thoroughbreds to get polo ponies, and the cross had 'the reputation of being second to none for smartness, lasting power, and "general intelligence" in the polo field'.[109]

It was not until 1923 that a Connemara Breeders Society was founded in Galway with the object of encouraging the breeding of Connemara ponies and their development and maintenance as a pure breed. Selective breeding succeeded in more or less homogenising the breed and producing a more refined animal, though the modern Connemara pony perhaps averages a little less than its nineteenth century forebears at about 14 hands.

The Work of The Connemara Ponies

During the nineteenth century the local pony breeds were essential to the economy of the West of Ireland. Harness and other horse gear were of the most basic

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[109] Anon.,'The Irish Horse Breeding Industry', *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, (Dublin,1902), pp 329-30.

kind. Bridles could be woven out of horse hair and a primitive pack-saddle could be constructed out of four pieces of wood. Straw mats or sacks were usually put under the saddle, and cushions or pillions placed on the hindquarters, on which the owner or his wife could sit on the way to market. Sugán or horse hair ropes held the whole thing in position.

The work of the ponies varied with the season of the year. They carried seaweed for fertilizer, turf , and potatoes, and brought farm produce to the market. Ewart noted that a good pony could 'easily carry two men for a considerable distance at the rate of ten miles an hour', and that 'the women seem to be quite as much at home on the pillion as the men.' In the more accessible parts of the region such as towns and places served by roads, cars and carts replaced pack-ponies.[110]



Connemara Pony, c.1900. Photograph from O'Connor, *Lost Ireland.*

Achill and Belmullet Ponies

A race of ponies similar to the Connemara breed was at one time to be found in parts of Co. Mayo around Achill and Belmullet. It is mentioned by Dr. James McParlan's in his 1802 *Statistical Survey of County Mayo.*, who related that when

travelling on the road from Tyrawley to Newport his horse became stuck in the mud, and he had to be rescued by what he described as 'a parcel of men passing with some hobbies loaded with little sacks'. He explained that the 'hobbies' were wearin 'pieces of board, about four times the breath of the hoof, fastened to the feet to prevent their sinking'.[111] The Mayo men removed these from one of their ponies, and put them on McParlan's horse, permitting him to continue on his journey.[112]

However, by the time the 1897 Commission on Horse Breeding had been convened, the old type of native Mayo ponies had become virtually extinct. A horse dealer from Dublin who was called to give evidence to the commission, described the breed as he had known it in his younger days, perhaps thirty or forty previously. He explained that when he first visited the area, 'there was a breed of ponies in it that you could get up on and ride them off the grass 30 miles across the mountains, as I often did from Belmullet into Ballina, and they would never tire'.[113] He explained further that 'they had heads, necks, and shoulders like thoroughbred horses, the best shape you ever saw, with poverty, the greatest poverty you ever saw, but they are gone out of that country altogether.'[114] This witness went on to mention the advent of Clydesdales into the region which had occurred around the middle years of the nineteenth century, and the ensuing hybridization which had destroyed the rugged quality of the native ponies which had been induced by centuries of virtually fending for themselves in the harsh environment of the Atlantic climate.[115]

Kerry Ponies

In its report, the 1897 Commission noted the one time existence of a distinctive breed of small native horses or ponies was said to have survived in parts of Kerry around Killorglin, until the latter part of the nineteenth century. This breed however, appears to have been affected by the same factors which caused the extinction of the old Achill and Belmullet strain of ponies in Mayo, namely the indiscriminate crossing with introduced

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[110] Ewart, 'The ponies of Connemara', pp 348-49.
[111] i.e 'pattens'.
[112] James McParlan, *Statistical survey of the county of Mayo*, (Dublin 1802), pp 93-4.
[113] *Report of the commission into horse breeding in Ireland*, 1897, p. 335, q. 10172.
[114] ibid., q. 10173.
[115] Ibid., q. 10175.

stock, and the pure race seems to have become more or less extinct by the time of the Commission's enquiry. A witness describes how they had virtually died out in his lifetime, to be replaced by 'a very mixed breed'[116].

However, during the last years of the Twentieth Century, Mr. John Muliville a pony enthusiast, observed several strange looking ponies in a remote area of Kerry. One of these animals was observed to have had a leg injury and was taken to a vet for examination. The vet agreed that the pony was significantly different from other small ponies in the area and suggested blood and DNA testing. The result indicated that these ponies formed a distinct breed or type which could have preserved some of the blood lines of the ancient Kerry race. A Kerry Bog Pony Society was formed in order to preserve the newly-discovered, or perhaps re-discovered breed.[117]

According to information from the Kerry Bog Pony Society, the average height of the breed is 11.5 hands for stallions and geldings and 10-11 hands for mares, while the average bodyweight is 190-220 kg. The coat is long and dense 'and easily capable of withstanding harsh winter conditions without shelter. Their colours are predominantly brownish black, though chestnut, bay, grey or dun sometimes occur. 'They have the common characters of round shoulders, stout limbs and short upright pasterns'.

The breed is extremely strong and hardy which enables them to live out all the year round and they are quite contented to browse on heath and furze. They are said to 'have an excellent temperament and are very easily trained to harness or saddle and can be worked as a child's riding pony.'

Ulster Breeds

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were a number of breeds and types of work-horses characteristic of Ulster. The majority of these were mostly small, hardy, animals seldom exceeding 14 or so hands. Wakefield (1812) mentioned 'one species of horse, a native hard-footed Irish hack, which I consider as a most useful animal.' He reported that the breed was 'very much used by the linen merchants of Ulster, who ride from market to market to transact their business. These animals seldom

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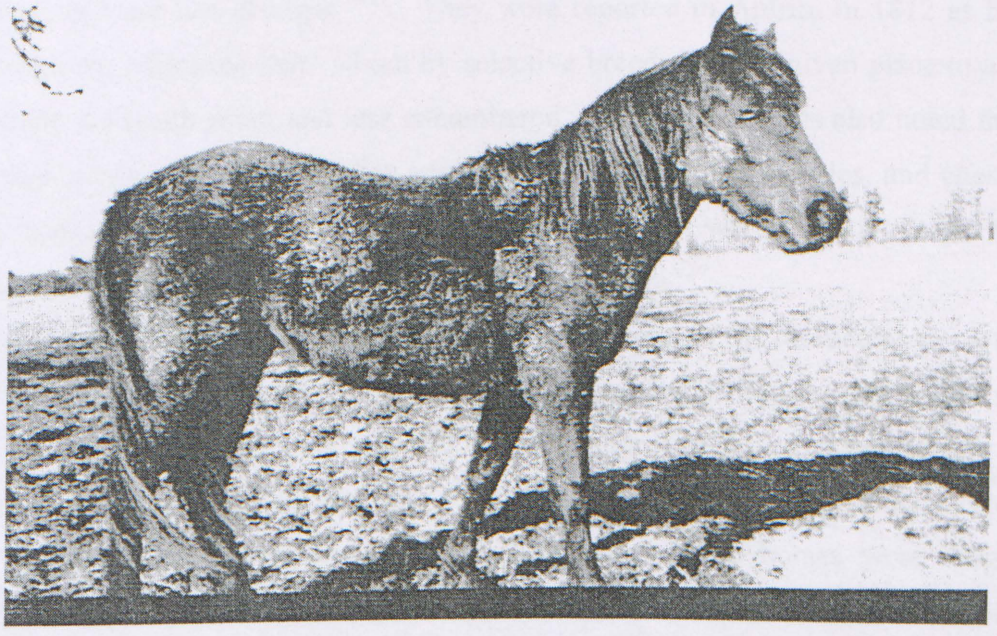
[116] *Report of the commission into horse breeding in Ireland*, 1897, p. 40, qs. 1029-33.
[117] Information from Mrs. Norma Cook to the writer, 10 October 2001.

exceed fifteen hands in height, but they are very hardy and sure footed.' [118] The 'Irish hacks' mentioned by Wakefield may well be the same as the Cushendall ponies from the Ballycastle district of North Antrim.

The eastern counties of the province were in fact, unable to produce enough horses to supply their own needs, and young stock to work the farms had to be purchased from the counties to the south and west. These could then be sold on at a profit after the spring ploughing.[119] But even if they only made the original purchase price, the animal's labour was usually considered sufficient to repay his maintenance.[120]



Pony of the old black race purchased 2003 by the writer in Co. Cavan

Lower quality working horses were sold in the spring for from £5 to £10 , the average being £7.[121] High priced horses were seldom offered for sale at local fairs in Ulster.

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[118] E. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political,* 2 vols. (Dublin, 1812), i, p. 351

[119] Charles Coote *Statistical survey of the county of Armagh,* (Dublin 1804), p. 291. Henceforth cited as Armagh *survey.*

[120] ibid p. 290.

[121] John Dubordieu, *Stistical survey of the county of Down,* (Dublin, 1802), pp 203-204. Henceforth cited as Down *survey.*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, large numbers of small horses were imported from Scotland for use in Ulster. These included both Lowland and Highland breeds, and later on in the century, Clydesdales as well. However, there also were a number of native breeds indigenous to the province, that were frequently interbred with Scottish imports.

By 1800, a few survivors of an ancient race of small black horses still remained in the counties of Derry, Down, Antrim, Monaghan, 'and other neighbouring counties.' In 1824, the same breed was reported as having once existed in Connemara, and no doubt contributed its genes to the modern Connemara pony.[122]

The black horses of Co. Derry were described as being 'broad behind, low before, generally black, with some white in the face and legs, very hairy on the fetlock , slow, but easily kept, and not bad drudges.'[123]. They were reported in Antrim in 1812 as having 'legs overgrown with long hair' which by selective breeding, had 'given place to a kind, whose limbs are much finer, and less encumbered with flesh.' It was also noted that 'in colour, also, a manifest alteration has appeared; bays of different shades, and chestnuts, being at least in equal number with blacks', a development which was attributed to the widespread introduction of thoroughbred sires into the area.[124]

A variety of the Irish native horse was found mainly in the mountainous parts of . Ulster. In Derry, they were reported as seldom exceeding 14 hands, and 'often much smaller', having for the most part 'a gentle head and aspect with nice shanks.' They were said to be 'almost indefatigable, but were 'thinly made up' and , 'in general have crooked hams'. Their prevalent colours were bay or sorrel. These horses were 'begotten promiscuously', generally by 'some year old or two year old sire called a *clib* or, using the diminutive, *clibbock.*[125] The Armagh survey described them as having 'slender bone', and being 'remarkable for speed and hardiness.' They were 'mostly in use about Newry, and on the borders of Monaghan county.'[126]

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[122] Hely Dutton, *Statistical and agricultural survey of the county of Galway*, (Dublin, 1824), p. 113. Henceforth cited as Galway *survey.*

[123] Rev.G Vautghan Sampson, *Statistical survey of Co. Londonderry*, (Dublin 1802) , p.203. Henceforth cited as Derry *survey.*

[124] John Dubordieu, *Statistical survey of the county of Antrim*, (Dublin 1812), pp 335-336. Hencewforth cited as Antrim survey.

[125] Derry *survey,* p.203.

[126] Armagh s*urvey,*p.291.

Co. Derry had several breeds of its own. Besides the native work ponies, there was another race, namely a 'cross between the blood horse and the stronger breed' which seems to have been an unspecified draught type. According to the survey for that county, 'In districts where the farmers have mares of larger bone, [the cross] might be useful to confer mettle and speed.' However, 'where the bone is scanty, this mixture ought to be depreciated'. The district of Myroe in the barony of Keenan in the same county was especially famous for its horses. :

Cushendall Hill Ponies

By the early years of the nineteenth century a distinct race of hardy native ponies had developed in the Glen country of North Antrim, the result of interbreeding between the old Irish 'garron' and imported Highland stock. This combination together with a small quantity of Arab and thoroughbred blood had produced a small, handy animal eminently suitable for work on the hill farms of the region. Again, the popular legend of Armada escapees having contributed to the ancestors of the breed was widely held by the local populace. By the 1830s, Cushendall had become the main centre for the sale of horses in the Glens of Antrim. Eight fairs were held during the year when large numbers of ponies were brought in boats from the Highlands of Scotland and landed in Cushendun, a small bay about 4 miles north of Cushendall, and then sold in the local fairs.[127] The breed had been mentioned as early as 1812 by Dubordieu :

There is a very hardy, strong, though small, race of horses, some bred in the country, and others introduced from Scotland, much in use on the northern and north-eastern coast, and in the mountains. They are very active and sure-footed, but few of them exceed fourteen hands high, and many are much lower. They are employed for every purpose, as far as their abilities will go, and sometimes farther than they ought to be. A little food will support them in a working state, and, when they are more plentifully supplied, they turn out very well for small weights on the road, though, from want of early attention in breaking, their mouths are often bad, and their tempers not so pliable as might be wished for. In shape, their defects are, want of height and length before, and, behind, their hams approach too close ; but their backs are excellent, and their paces far above what would naturally be expected from their apparent strength, being equal to support a journey of equal length with a horse double their bulk, when not unmercifully loaded. [128]

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[127] Mervyn Watson, 'Cushendall hill ponies', *Ulster Folklife*, Vol. 26, (1980), p. 14, n. Henceforth cited as Watson.

[128] John Dubordieu, *Statistical survey of the county of Antrim*, (Dublin 1812), p. 334.

Dr Michael Cox who provided the historical data for the 1897 Commission into Horse Breeding in Ireland, shed an interesting sidelight on the breeding of the Cushendall ponies when he reported that 'every year large numbers of Norwegian ponies are imported to Antrim when young, and afterwards sold as Cushendall ponies.'[129]

The typical Cushendall pony was described as short-backed and clean-legged with a distinctively high action. It stood about fourteen hands high and had an 'Arab head' with a characteristically arched neck and a heavy flowing mane which fell to the right. It was high-spirited in temperament, and slightly nervous but with gentle handling, easy to break and very obedient.[130] Like the Connemara, the Cushendall breed affords a striking instance of how horses and ponies have become modified through adapting themselves to their environments, and 'are admirably calculated to live and thrive and do useful work under the circumstance and amidst the surroundings in which they have been evolved'[131].

Rathlin (Raghery) Island Ponies

In addition to describing the Cushendall ponies, Dubourdieu mentions that 'a breed of horses similar to these, but smaller, is found in the island of Raghery'. He describes them as 'very sure-footed, and for their powers, very serviceable.'

Sir Charles Coote also refers to the same breed. 'In this and several counties of the North of Ireland, they use a small, strong, breed of horses which comes from Rathlin Island, off the Antrim coast. This breed seldom exceeds 3 guineas in price, and are most durable and serviceable, especially in a hilly country.'[132]

The Highland Pony

The Highland Pony played an important role in the economic life of Ulster in the early years of the nineteenth century as the breeding and rearing of horses was practiced less in Ulster than in any other region of Ireland. It was therefore necessary to bring them in from parts of the country and further afield, where conditions where more favourable

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[129] Michael Cox, *Notes on the history of the Irish horse,* (Dublin, 1897), p. 122. (Quoting Mrs. Stone, *A Tour in Norway.*)
[130] Watson, op. cit., p. 10.
[131] Anon, *Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland Journal,* Vol. V. October 1904 to July 1905, p. 19.

for the rearing of horses. A brisk trade existed between Ulster and Scotland for the importation of the small, hardy ponies of that country which were used both as breeding stock to improve the quality of the local garrons, and for selling on to dealers in other parts of the country. They were mentioned in Armagh survey of 1804 :

The hardiest breed of horses which they have is the Scotch poney [sic.], which for every purpose is excellent, and very easily fed ; his cost , at fairs, from five pounds to seven guineas. He appears clumsy, from the continual roughness of his coat, and very long hairs ; but, on a minute examination, he is a well-formed animal, with great strength of sinew ; and when he has been well kept, is perhaps, stronger at four years old than any other horse of his weight or age. His colour is frequently dark iron grey, with large reddish spots, black, mottled dun, and few or none with white hairs.[133]

Asses and Mules

Domestic donkeys (*Equus asinus*) originated in North Africa and were introduced into Ireland via Spain during the eighteenth century, when the females were used principally as milch animals, and the males as stud animals to breed mules.[134] At that time there was a particular demand for asses' milk, which was regarded as beneficial to sufferers from many ailments including tuberculosis and gout.

The domestic donkey was a most versatile animal capable of flourishing just as well in the damp climate of Ireland as it was in the Mediterranean regions. This is because, like other *equidae*, different races have evolved over time by natural selection in response to differing conditions of climate and nutrition.[135] The ass was also comparatively resistant to many diseases, especially those affecting bone tissue. On the other hand, once affected, it was often slow to recover, and in most cases, was not very amenable to treatment[136].

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[132] Charles Coote, *A statistical survey of the county of Monaghan*, (Dublin, 1801), p. 165.
[133] Charles Coote, *A statistical survey of the county of Armagh*, (Dublin 1804), p. 290.
[134] J.P.Mahaffy,'On the introduction of the ass as a beast of burden into Ireland',PRIA, V. 33 C, 1916-17, p. 532. Henceforth cited as Mahaffy, 'The ass as a beast of burden in Ireland'
[135] Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power : A history of the horse and the donkey in human society*, London 1992), p. 63.
[136] Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Journal*, Vol. V., 1904 – 1905, p. 19.



Countryman with his ass. Photo Ulster Folk Museum.

During the course of the nineteenth century asses had been increasingly used as draught animals by smallholders, earning them the title of 'the poor man's horse'. However, they seem to have been a rarity in Ireland before the beginning of the century. It is significant to note that the donkey was not mentioned in Arthur Young's 'Tour of Ireland', presumably because its comparative rarity at the time of his visit. Nevertheless, advertisements for the services of jack asses imported from Spain as stud animals, had been appearing in the newspapers from the 1750s onwards. [137] The average stud fee of two guineas asked for the services of these animals appear remarkably high for the time when compared to horses, and no doubt reflect their scarcity value at the time.

The Rev. J. P .Mahaffy in an important paper on the introduction of the ass into Ireland, confirms that the animal was of little or no account, until the first decade or so of the nineteenth century. He suggested that it was the drain on the Irish horse population caused by the military demands of the Napoleonic Wars that was responsible for its

[137] Michael, Cox, *Notes on the history of the Irish horse*, (Dublin, 1897), pp 105-06.

increased use as a substitute for the horse.[138] By 1841, the compilers of the preface to the census of that year were able to report, that 'asses are most numerous in the larger farms. In those under 30 acres they are one to every ten farms. In those from 5 to 15 acres, about one to 15 farms, and in those above 30 acres, one to every 5 farms.'

References to asses and mules were made in several of the county statistical surveys commissioned by the Royal Dublin Society in the early years of the nineteenth century In 1801 asses were said to have been common in Monaghan, and 'frequently 100 of these animals may be counted in the busy seasons, within the circuit of a mile or two.' They were found 'extremely servicable', and were very easily fed on 'the tops of furze and green whins' a diet similar to that of the of the Rathery (Rathlin) ponies.[139] Asses also appeared in Clare in large numbers after 1800. The agricultural Survey for that county reported in 1808 that : very great use is made of mules and asses for carrying baskets and small loads, such as poor people usually load them with ; for such persons as are not able to keep a horse they are a great convenience. It is astonishing what a load these little asses will carry, frequently twenty-four stones, much more than their own weight. [140]

The use of the ass for agricultural purposes, and as a general beast of burden increased during the nineteenth century, though its flat withers, and low head carriage militated against its use as a comfortable riding animal.[141] The activities of the Congested Districts Board in the 1890s did much to popularize its use in the areas under their control. Nevertheless, different attitudes regarding it prevailed in different regions. In Donegal for example, it was treated with contempt.[142]

Mules

The mule, which is unable to reproduce its kind, is the progeny of a male ass (jack ass) and a female of the horse species. Although it was also possible to obtain a hybrid

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[138] Mahaffy, 'The ass as a beast of burden into Ireland'.
[139] Coote, *Statistical survey of Monaghan*, p.165.
[140] Hely Dutton, *A Statistical survey of the county of Clare*, (Dublin 1808), p. 161.
[141] Clutton-Brock, op. cit., p.66.
[142] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish heritage the landscape, the people and their work*, (Dundalk 1967), p. 38.

the other way round, by mating a female ass with a horse stallion, the latter cross known as a jennet or hinny was not generally considered to be as useful a hybrid as the mule.[143]

The ability of mules to endure hardship and perform satisfactory service under adverse conditions is almost legendary. However, as might be expected, this animal like any other, was said to respond well to good feeding and care, and rendered his best service under favourable conditions. Those who knew and worked with mules maintained that in many cases, they would do the same work as horses on less food, and were not so inclined to lameness and disease. The mule was said to be of a better temper, less nervous, and was credited with a longer life span than a horse.[144] Mules were particularly plentiful in Leinster during the first decade or so of the nineteenth century, and less so in Ulster where attempts were made to introduce them, though with less success.[145] Great numbers were reported in use in Kildare in 1807, where they were 'much preferred for their easy keep, durability, smartness of foot, and length of life.' [146] They were also common in Kilkenny in 1802 , where they could be 'purchased at fairs in this county, and in Wexford, at a reasonable price.' These animals were 'generally low, but kind in draft ; a small mule, very fit for an Irish car, may often be had at four years old for eight guineas, and from that to twelve' Sixteen guineas was 'the highest price that very handsome mules have been sold for.' [147] One disadvantage of mules was that they had small feet which were more likely to sink in soft or boggy ground than those of horses or oxen, but mules were particularly useful in harrowing as the land was generally dry at the time of that operation, and the strength of traction required was much less than in ploughing. They were also much used in pulling the small vernacular two wheel cars and carts characteristic of the country, where the main strain of the draught was on the back rather than on the shoulders.[148]

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[143] W.H.Carter, *The horses of the world*, (Washington, 1923), p.70
[144] ibid.
[145] Antrim *survey*, p. 337.
[146] Kildare *Survey*, p.5.
[147] Kilkenny *Survey*, p. 305.
[148] R. Thompson, *Statistical survey of the county of Meath*,(Dublin 1802), p.330. henceforth cited as Meath *survey*.

Chapter Two

Socio-Economic Attitudes – Regional Distribution – Statistics.

Socio-Economic Attitudes

There was something deep in the rural Irish character that regarded the social status of horse ownership as being more important than good economic sense. This attitude appears to have applied to all classes and social groups in most of the country. It was equally persistent among the peasantry as the gentry. With regard to the latter, Arthur Young writing in the late eighteenth century, commented on the 'manner and customs' of that particular class. 'The number of horses [kept by the Irish gentry] may almost be esteemed a satire upon common sense, were they well fed enough to be useful, they would not be so numerous'. In spite of the large numbers of horses in the country, he complained that he was unable to find 'a good hack for a common ride scarce in a house where there were a hundred'.[1] But it wasn't only the gentry that kept an uneconomic number of horses. Even among small holders and cottiers, ownership of a horse was regarded as a desirable status symbol, and was not unusual in cases of holdings of a few acres which in no way justified such a possession in terms of commercial viability. Many small holders were inclined to keep a horse for social prestige, even if it was only a poor 'garron', possibly on account of an atavistic folk tradition of a past aristocratic horse culture. Edward Wakefield wrote in 1812 :

> There are many whose holdings are too small to maintain their families; and to purchase the necessities of life in a state fit for consumption is unusual. Some indeed possess only a 'dry cot' which is a house without any land ; in this case they become purchasers of a 'meadow', which is an acre or two of grass, sufficient to produce hay for a cow, and sometimes also a horse, the latter being one of the first acquisitions of an Irishman.[2]

The Rev. William Hickey, rector of Bannow, Co. Wexford, who, in the early years of the nineteenth century, wrote farming manuals under the pseudonym of 'Martin Doyle' with the intention of providing advice to small holders, likewise commented on the 'horse madness' prevalent among Irish small farmers. He asserted that smallholders who could not afford to own a cow, often owned a horse without economic justification :

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[1] Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland 1776 – 1779*, 2 vols (London, 1892) , ii, p. 151.
[2] Edward Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1812) i, p.262.

I'll engage that, even if he has but half a dozen acres or even less – he has a horse – let him sell him – the horse must go – car, tackling and all – let him buy a *cow* and a *wheel barrow,* instead... I am within bounds when I say , that 100 Irish acres, if divided into 20 farms of 5 acres each, has to maintain (besides 20 families) at least 20 horses &c. – It is clear that, except, perhaps on the sea side, where the drawing of sea-weed and sand may repay, or where horse labour on public works, &c. can be constantly had, you should not keep a horse on a very small farm'. [3]

The same tendency of Irish small-holders to maintain horses to an uneconomic degree is mentioned in the preamble to the 1841 Census :

The too great number of Horses on small farms has long been the subject of remark. From the table it will be seen , that in farms between five and fifteen acres, there are nearly as many horses as farms especially in Leinster, of which the most remarkable instance is the county of Wexford where they exceed the number of farms. In other provinces they are not so disproportionately numerous. But on the whole country, they are not less than two to every three farms. In the larger farms they, of course, grow more numerous, and in those above thirty acres average more than three to each. It is however, necessary to observe, that the numbers in the table include all horses, whether employed as auxiliaries to production, or to luxury – a very important distinction, but one we deemed it would have been impossible to establish under the circumstances existing at the period of our enquiries. In the rural districts, however, the numbers of such cannot be so large as to disturb the proportion to any great extent. [4]

On the other hand, a different attitude to horses prevailed among small farmers in Ulster. Having inherited Scots Presbyterian culture and values, they were on the whole, less horse minded than other Irishmen and tended to consider the southern obsession with owing a horse frivolous and uneconomic. Many Ulster farmers considered the keeping of brood mares an inefficient use of land,[5] and would only purchase a horse for the spring ploughing, and when that was done they would sell him on, usually at a financial gain.[6] Sir Charles Coote (1804), the author of the statistical survey for Armagh, reported that in that county 'horses are speculated in for an exclusive trade, perhaps as much by townsfolk as farmers, and that oftentime only purchased for the probability of selling again at a large profit'[7].

As we have seen in chapter one, in the nineteenth century the ass was still a recent introduction in Ireland, and, by the time of the 1841 Census, it had not yet fully attained

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[3] William Hickey (pseud. 'Martin Doyle'), *The works of Martin Doyle* (Dublin,1831), pp 29-33.
[4] *Census of Ireland* 1841, p. xxx.
[5] Charles Coote *Statistical survey of the county of Armagh* (Dublin, 1804), p. 291.
[6] John Dubordieu, *Statistical survey of the county of Antrim* (Dublin, 1812), pp 335-36, and John Dubordieu, *Statistical survey of the county of London-derry* (Dublin, 1802), p. 203.
[7] Charles Coote, *Statistical survey of the county of Armagh,* (Dublin, 1804), p.235.

its later popularity as 'the poor man's horse'. The Introduction to that document reported that, 'asses are most numerous in the larger farms. In those under 30 acres they are one to every 10 farms. In those from 5 to 15 acres, about one to 15 farms, and those above 30 acres, one to every 5 farms.' [8]

Regional Distribution of Breeds and Types

The report of the 1897 Parliamentary Commission into Horse Breeding in Ireland divided the country into three principal regions or districts for the purpose of their investigation ; The western region including parts of Kerry, Mayo, Galway, Sligo and Donegal; The northern region comprising Central and Eastern Ulster, and ; the area containing the southern, eastern, and midland counties lying south of the River Boyne, and exclusive of the western sea board .[9]

The Southern, Eastern, and Midland districts.

This region was during the nineteenth century, and indeed is today, the classic horse breeding area of Ireland. The principal breeders of the best horses were the larger farmers and gentry, and although small farmers did occasionally breed good horses, it was the former class that was mainly responsible for producing some of the best racehorses, harness-horses, hunters, and cavalry horses in the world. There was also a considerable export market of jobmaster's horses from this region to England. The profession of jobmaster which today only exists for providing horses for films etc, once played an essential role in the commercial and economic life of the country. Their function was similar to that performed by present day car rental companies, in as much as they plied an intensive trade in renting out horses and vehicles to individuals and companies that didn't want the trouble of keeping them themselves. Advertisements in nineteenth century newspapers reveal that most firms of carriage makers and the larger horse dealers in Ireland offered this service if required. However, the principal firm of jobmasters buying horses in late nineteenth century Ireland was Messrs. East, Wimbush, and Withers of London, who were accustomed to purchase some 500-600 horses a year in Ireland. Their largest market was for 'high-class, blood-looking horses, standing about

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[8] 1841 Census, p. xxxi.

[9] *Reports by the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland,* (Dublin, 1897) , p. 7.

sixteen hands high, of good colours, bays and browns, which were almost invariably bred in the south of the country. [10]

The Western Region

This was the 'Pony District', the part of Ireland where the equine breeds had retained much of the blood-lines of the old Irish hobby. In some parts of this region, notably parts of Galway, Mayo and Kerry, a hardy race of ponies or small horses had survived in considerable numbers into the period covered by this thesis. Their survival in comparatively pure form until well into the nineteenth century was probably due to the remote and inaccessible nature of their habitat. However, the opening up of these areas with the building of roads etc., and the introduction of alien stock such as the Clydesdale in the 1850s and the hackney by the Congested Districts Board in the 1890s, had caused the indigenous breeds to decline. By the end of the century, the Kerry and Mayo breeds were virtually extinct in their pure form. The Galway or Connemara pony, nevertheless survived though much adulterated in blood. These western pony breeds had a certain economic value, the report of the 1897 Commission noted 'that large numbers of foals are driven from the western districts of Ireland to various fairs in the country, many of them being sold as far to the east as Kildare, Meath, Wicklow, Wexford, and other hunter-breeding districts'.[11]

In order to further increase the economic value of these ponies, the 1897 commissioners felt that it was important to re-establish and improve their breeds by cross-breeding them with other types, and suggested that the most suitable sires for that purpose would be 'a well selected small thoroughbred with bone and action, or an eastern or other pony of good stamp'. For other regions of the western division, such as parts of Cork and Kerry where there were larger type of mares, a good thoroughbred or half-bred stallion was recommended.

The Northern Region

This area consisted of the counties lying north of the River Boyne. The report of the 1897 commission commented that 'it cannot be said to be a horse-breeding country to

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[10] ibid., p. 8.
[11] ibid., p. 7.

anything like the same degree as other parts of Ireland as the natural conditions of the region did not particularly favour this industry.'[12] The Commission's report goes on to state that ' Farmers in this district breed or rear horses to a very limited extent, and then only as an inconsiderable adjunct to the main business. In the early years of the nineteenth century, such horses as were used in the region were mostly locally bred garrons or small Highland ponies imported from Scotland. [13]

Statistics for the Irish Horse Population

An examination of the agricultural census figures concerning the recorded number of horses in Ireland together with their respective categories as well as the changing ratio of the equine to the human population is very revealing. [14] With regard to the latter, it was decided that the decennial figures would give a clearer picture of developments than the annual ones. These are taken from 1851 onwards as the census for that year was the first to give reasonably accurate figures for the horse population.

Year	Human population	Total Horses	Horses per 100 people
1851	6,552,385	521,706	7.9
1861	5,798,967	614,232	10.6
1871	5,412,377	538,095	9.9
1881	5,174,836	548,354	10.6
1891	4,704,750	592,819	12.6
1901	4,458,775	564,916	12.7

It will be seen from the categorized annual census figures for the horse population quoted below, that during the period concerned the great preponderance of horses in Ireland were used for agricultural purposes. With regard to the figures quoted above, it is apparent that the figures for 1851 which show the lowest percentage ratio of human to horse percentage, reflect the gradual change over from manual spade husbandry to the use of horse-drawn machinery on the larger farms due to the decline in the number of

[12] ibid., p.8.
[13] ibid.
[14] Figures taken from the general and agricultural census returns for the years concerned.

manual workers available after the Famine. This development was to continue into the next century with the continued decline of the human population, with the expanding use and increased sophistication of farm machinery. Another factor was the general increase in the use of horse-drawn vehicles in all aspects of trade, industry, and transport .in order to cater for the needs of the developing urban middle class.

Numbers of agricultural horses

This study is based on data derived from the census figure for livestock numbers relating to the years 1841 and 1851 which lump the figures of horses and mules together, as well as the agricultural statistics for 1854 to 1900. The 1851 census increased the number of classifications of householders from previous years, and gave separate figures for horses and mules. The former were divided according to age; two years old and upwards; one year old and under two; and under one year old. The figures are given by counties, provinces, and nationally. Annual figures are given separately for horses and mules from 1847 to 1851.

The agricultural statistics for 1854 to 1900 divide the horse population both by age and the purpose for which they were kept, i.e. 'agricultural', 'traffic and manufacture', and 'amusement and recreation' with the latter category representing the activities of the gentry and leisured classes, i.e. hunting, racing and the like. With these figures it is possible to establish with some degree of accuracy, the numbers of the horse population divided according to their respective functions. These show fairly wide fluctuations in the number of horses used for agricultural purposes, with a marked peak from 1859 to 1862 which would appear to reflect the increased use of the horse drawn farm machinery to compensate for the decline in manual spade husbandry on Irish farms as cheap labour became scarce with the diminution of the population after the Famine

The figures for agricultural horses for 1849, 1850. and 1851 are estimated by taking the totals for 'two years old and upwards' and deducting a hypothetical 50,000 for the other two categories :

1849	462,463.	less 50,000	=	c. 412,000
1850	460,356	"	=	c. 410,000
1851	451,789	"	=	c. 402.000

1841 and 1847 have to be adjusted for mules. The average numbers of mules listed for 1849 to 1851 was about twenty two thousand. Thus, the grand total of all equines including mules, for 1847 was given as 557,917, so if we deduct a hypothetical twenty two thousand from that figure, we get approximately 536,000 horses of all categories for that year. Likewise, the grand total for 1841 (576,115) when adjusted for mules would be about 554,000.

All of Ireland

Year	Agri. Horses	Total	%
1854	388,024	545,929	71
1855	392,706	556,287	71
1856	406,646	572,266	71
1857	424,233	599,782	71
1858	432,398	611,321	71
1859	443,940	629,075	71
1860	440,978	619,811	71
1861	441,614	614,232	72
1862	449,233	602,894	74
1863	439,705	579,978	76
1864	430,815	562,158	77
1865	419,837	547,867	77
1866	407,090	535,631	72
1867	396,816	522,348	76
1868	392,545	522,964	75
1870	388,047	531,306	73
1871	385,176	537,633	72
1872	384,173	540,745	71
1873	376,207	532,146	71
1869	390,799	527,248	74
1870	388,047	531,306	73
1871	385,176	537,633	72
1872	384,173	540,745	71
1873	376,207	532,146	71
1874	366,181	525,770	70
1875	359,722	526,160	68

1876	361,009	534,833	67
1877	366,219	552,762	66
1878	372,572	561,595	66
1879	378,522	571,803	66
1880	377,761	557,153	68
1881	375,341	547,662	68
1882	372,200	539,431	69
1883	367,835	534,049	69
1884	363,835	547,132	66
1885	362,757	547,144	66
1886	362,849	549,257	66
1887	364,563	557,405	65
1888	362,492	565,697	64
1889	368,237	574, 264	64
1890	367,029	584,872	63
1891	363,492	592,819	61
1892	364,484	605,910	60
1893	368,190	613,927	60
1894	376,385	623,182	60
1895	386,385	630,287	61
1896	388,482	629,097	62
1897	385,504	610,215	63
1898	381,720	600,768	63
1899	379,078	580,286	65
1900	369,684	586,964	63

It will be seen from the national figures that although the total number of horses in the country rose with fluctuations after the Famine from 545,929 in 1854 to just under 587,000 in 1900, reaching 629,000 in 1859, the percentage of agricultural horses to the general horse population remained remarkably stable at 71% . From 1861 to 1865 the national percentages of agricultural horses continued to rise as the use of horse-power continued to develop.

It was decided to set out the figures taken from the annual agricultural census returns for the three principal categories of horse function in Ireland in graph form, during the second half of the nineteenth century, and on a provincial basis. This format

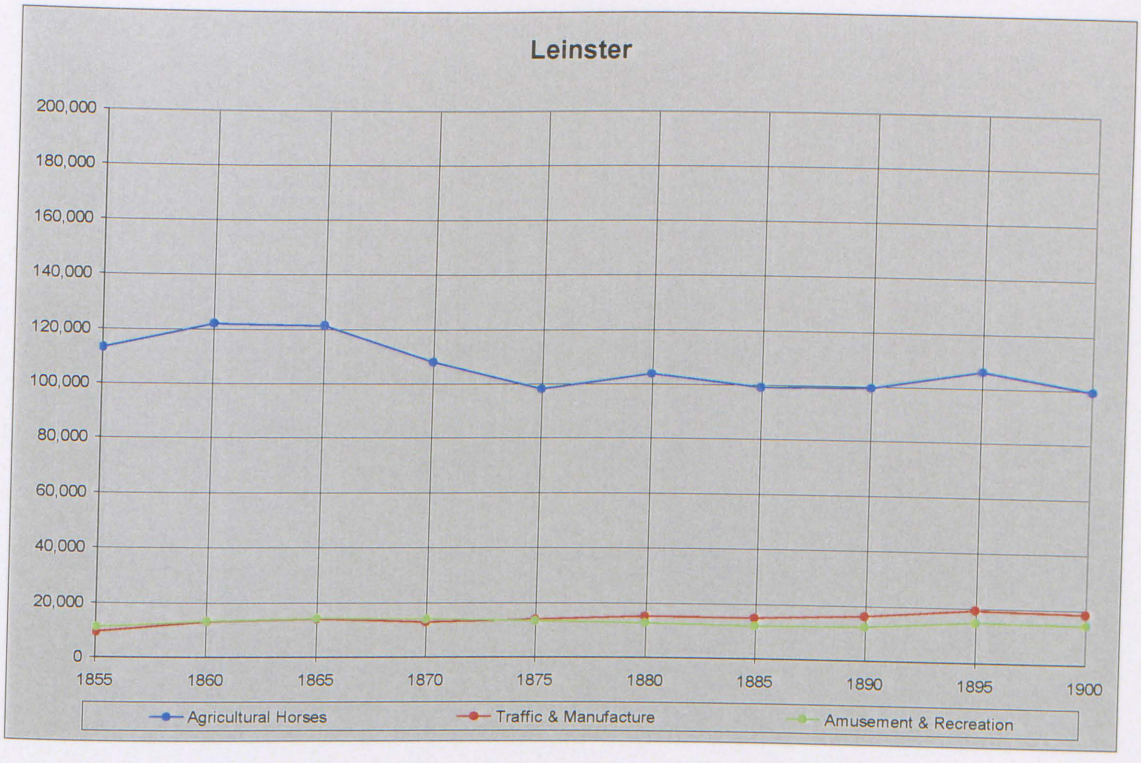
was chosen, as it seemed to form the clearest and most convenient mode of displaying the available data. It will be noted that the general trends were broadly similar in the different provinces in spite of the fact that the degree of commercialization varied a great deal between the different regions.

1855 was selected as a starting point simply because 1854 was the first year in which the horse population was divided into the convenient categories of 'agricultural', 'traffic and manufacture', and 'amusement and recreation'. The latter, no doubt, included such classifications as hunters and racehorses that nevertheless constituted important commercial resources.

Each of the provinces show a marked peak in the use of agricultural horses around 1860 indicating the general replacement of cheap manual spade labour by horse-drawn machinery, due partially to the post-Famine decline in the number of available labourers, and partially to the technical advances of farm machinery, even on the smaller agricultural units. A decade and a half later the agricultural depression that manifested itself during the mid-seventies, and continued with some ups and downs until the end of the century, is reflected in the lower figures from 1875 onwards.

The figures for the other two divisions are likewise interesting. The figures for 'amusement and recreation', show comparatively little change during the period under review. However, there is a minor decline in each of the regions from about 1880 that probably reflects the disruption to hunting caused by the Land War of 1881 – 1882.

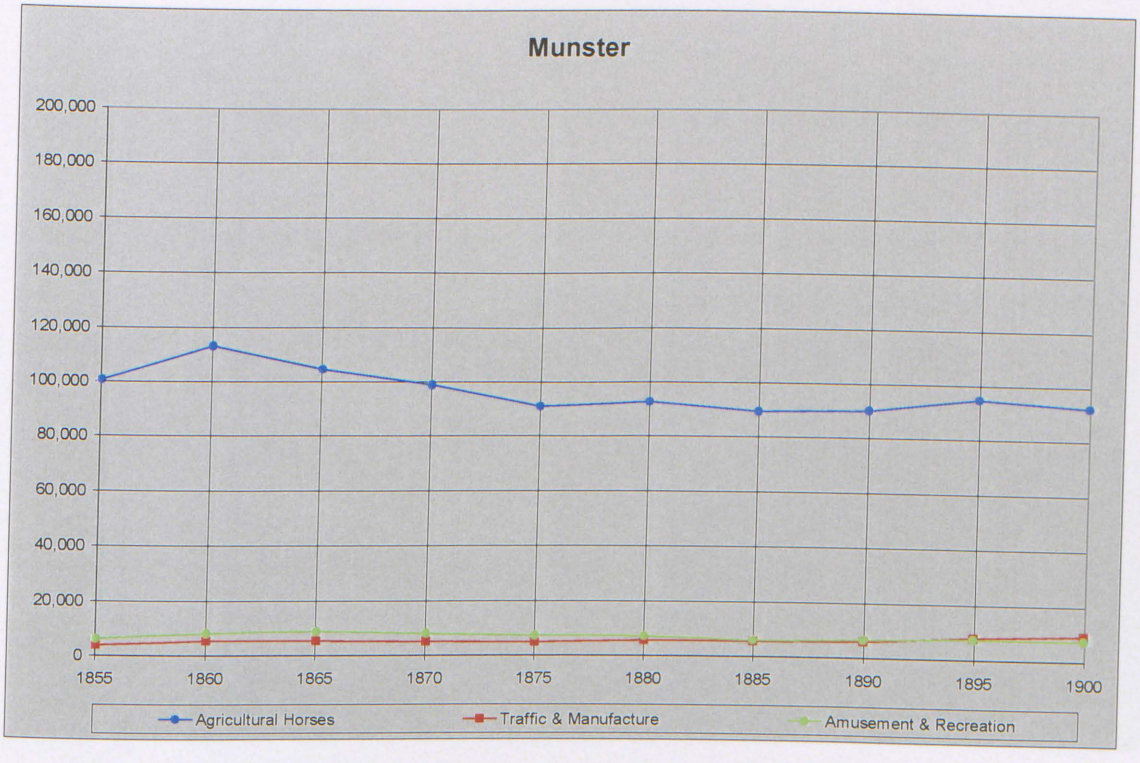
However, these figures had more or less corrected themselves by the end of the century. The figures for the category 'traffic and manufacture' from the mid-century onward display in most cases, a steady increase reflecting the increased use of horse drawn vehicles by railway companies, brewers, merchants and manufacturers, as well as a newly developing tendency for shopkeepers such as butchers and grocers to provide home delivery services to the increasingly affluent middle classes that were developing in the urban areas.



In Leinster as in the other provinces, the figures for agricultural horses indicate that the growth of the number of draught animals used in farming peaked at just over 120,000 in 1860, continuing with little change until 1865. This reflected the national change-over in the post-Famine period from a manual to a horse-assisted agricultural economy. The general agricultural depression is also apparent in the figures from 1875 onwards.

The figures for the category 'amusement and recreation' which included both hunting and racing, varied from just over 11,000 in 1855 to a high point in excess of 14,000 in 1870. By 1875 it had declined to 13,200, and sank further to 12,700 in 1880.It dropped even more in 1885, perhaps reflecting the upset to hunting caused by the recent Land War. However after that, the numbers of horses in this category rose gradually to 14,700 in 1900.

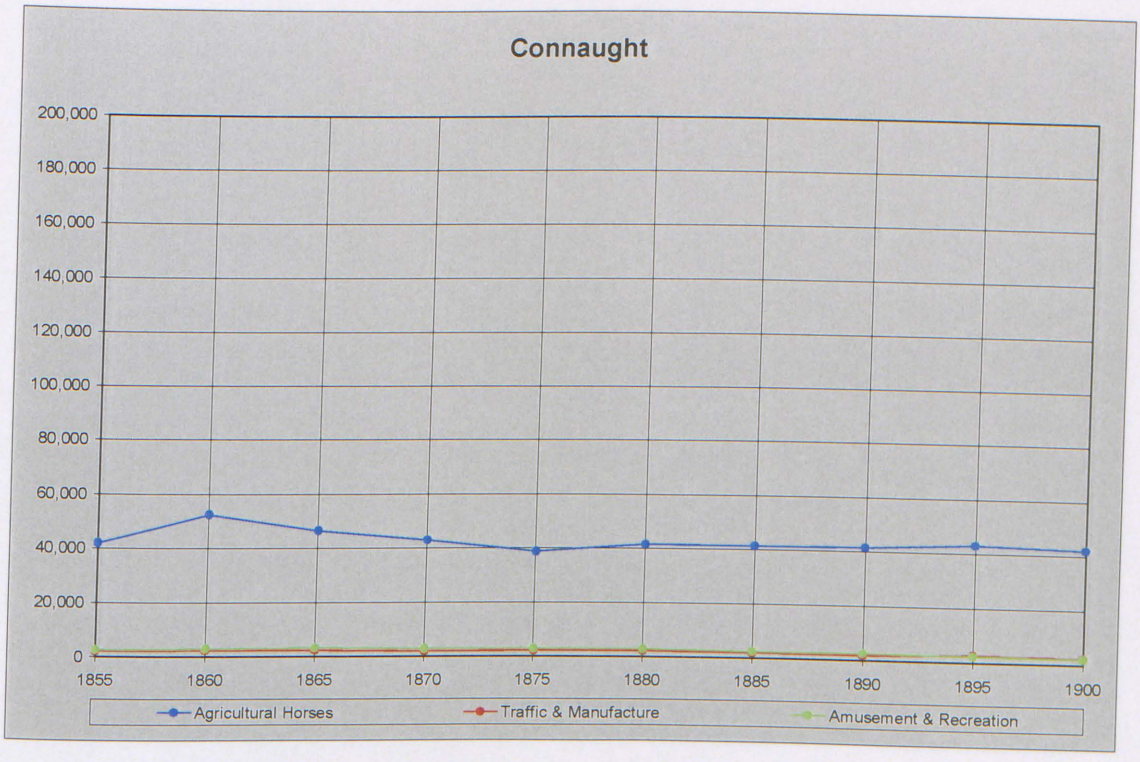
The figures classified as 'traffic and manufacture' rose steadily from 9,600 in 1855 to 18,400 in 1900, reflecting the increased use of horse-power for transport and commerce particularly in the metropolitan area.



The census figures for agricultural horses in Munster followed the national pattern and reached a maximum of 122,000.in 1860. From then there was a steady decline in numbers of horses used in farm work in the province, until a low point of 98,000 in 1875 with the national agricultural depression. From that year onwards the figures fluctuated up and down until the end of the century, but as was the case in the other provinces, never reached the level attained in the post-Famine period.

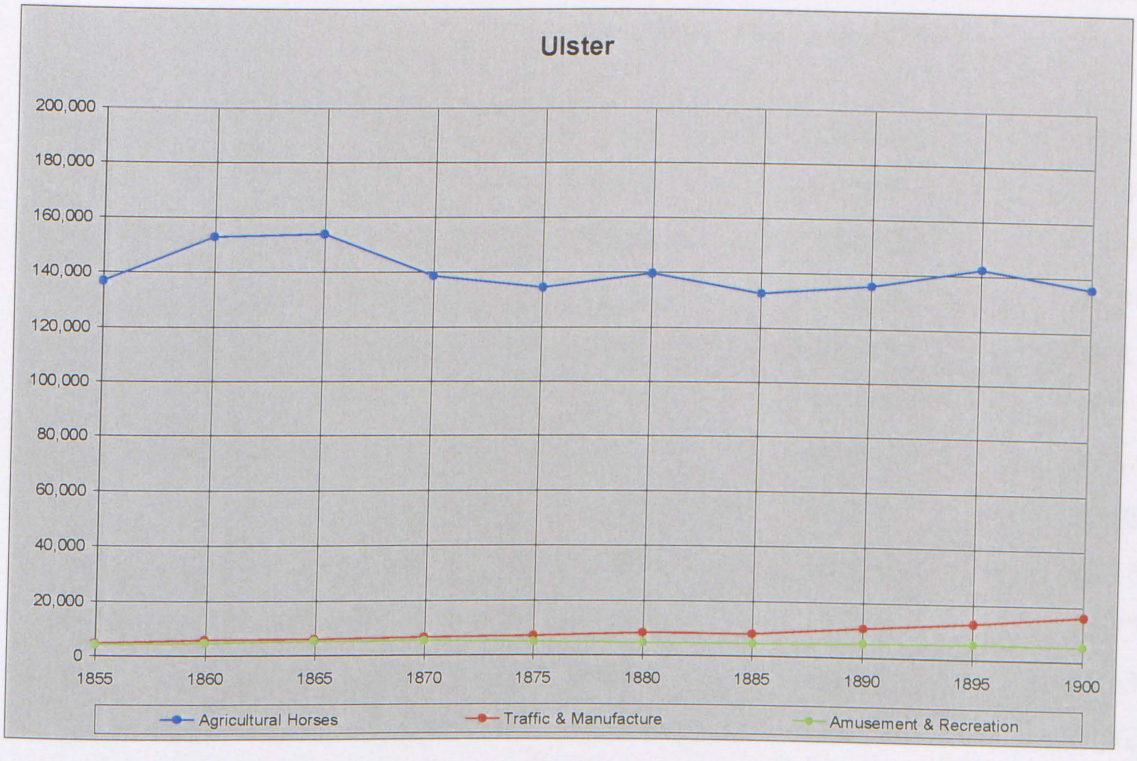
The figures for the classification 'amusement and recreation' reveal that the numbers of horses in this category remained comparatively small. The figures open in 1855 with just under 10,000, and fall to just over 7000 by the end of the century. This decline probably reflects the disruption to hunting caused by the Land War of the early 1880s that appears to have been particularly strong in the province.

It is apparent that 'traffic and manufacture' remained less developed in Munster than in Leinster or Ulster.



It is apparent from the agricultural census figures that horse-centred activities in Connaught were less developed during the second half of the nineteenth century than in the other provinces. Nevertheless, the same all-Ireland patterns are perceptible though at a lower level. The figures indicate that the were 42,000 agricultural horses operating in this region in 1855, and these rose to a high point of 52,400 in 1860 in accordance with the national trend. From thence they dropped to their lowest level of just under 39,000 in 1875. However, they made a slight recovery in 1880 when they reached 41,500, only to decline again until 1895 when they reached over 44,000. The 1900 figure was 42,000.

There number of horses registered for 'amusement and recreation' during this period, show little deviance from 2,200 in 1855 to a similar number in 1900. The figures for the classification 'traffic and manufacture' show a similar pattern, from just over 2,000 in 1855 to 2,500 in 1900.



Although following the same general trends as Leinster, Munster, and Connaught, the figures for Ulster display slight variations from the other regions. For example, like in the other three cases, the recorded numbers of agricultural horses peaked at 153,000 in 1860, but unlike the other three provinces the figures only show an appreciable decline after 1865 (151,000). They then follow the usual pattern of a nadir in 1875 (132,000). However, there was a substantial recovery in 1880 when the figures reached 140,000, only to drop again in 1885 (133,000). After that they rose gradually reaching 143,000 in 1895, but declining to 136,000 in 1900.

It is evident that the proportion of horses used for 'amusement and recreation' was lower in Ulster than in the other regions, with just over 4,000 in 1855, rising to 5,300 in 1900. Conversely, the census returns for 'traffic and manufacture' display a steady rise from 4,600 in 1855 to an impressive 15,600 in 1900.

Horses exported from Ireland to Great Britain each year from 1878 (the first year that figures were available). Note that a percentage of these were probably temporary exports i.e. Horses sent over to Britain for hunting or racing and then returned to Ireland. Information from the Royal Dublin Society's *Horse Show Annual* 1900.

Year	Stallions	Mares	Geldings	Total
1878	67	6,918	10,956	17,941
1879	45	9,569	14,312	23,926
1880	76	13,217	19,008	32,301
1881	45	13,921	19,850	33,816
1882	67	11,711	16,460	28,238
1883	32	10,129	14,801	24,962
1884	74	10,722	16,290	27,086
1885	64	11,603	16,496	28,163
1886	43	11,497	16,239	28,779
1887	68	11,801	15,769	27,638
1888	67	12,388	17,373	29,828
1889	80	13,647	18,097	31,824
1890	105	14,625	19,422	34,152
1891	125	14,055	19,216	33,396
1892	113	14,273	18,095	32,481
1893	151	13,356	16,883	30,390
1894	163	14,484	18,942	33,589
1895	188	15,370	19,002	34,560
1896	191	18,046	21,619	39,856
1897	153	17,590	20,679	38,422
1898	150	18,200	20,454	38,804
1899	122	19,471	22,497	42,087

Numbers of horses imported from Great Britain into Ireland. 1878 – 1899. Some of these were probably temporary imports. From the *Horse Show Annual* 1900.

Year	Stallions	Mares	Geldings	Total
1878	23	826	1,742	2,591
1879	18	535	1,368	1,921
1880	13	742	1,524	2,279
1881	17	794	1,619	2,430
1882	23	761	1,881	2,665
1883	21	588	1,356	1,967
1884	17	651	1,462	2,130
1885	37	942	1,508	2,487
1886	27	1,012	1,427	2,466
1887	56	1,368	1,845	3,269
1888	42	978	1,449	2,469
1889	48	1,181	1,761	2,990

1890	53	1,146	2,006
3,205			
1891	102	1,520	2,501
4,123			
1892	88	1,168	2,153
3,709			
1893	131	1,569	2,169
3,869			
1894	130	1,521	2,305
3,956			
1895	82	1,775	2,690
4,547			
1896	156	2,248	3,142
5,546			
1897	92	2,248	3,023
5,286			
1898	97	2,329	3,367
5,793			
1899	133	2,821	3,641
6,595			

Percentage of Horses exported from Ireland to Great Britain 1878 – 1899. From the *Horse Show Annual* 1900.

Year	Stallions	Mares	Geldings
1878	.38	38.56	61.06
1879	.19	39.99	59.82
1880	.23	40.92	58.85
1881	.13	41.17	58.70
1882	.24	41.47	58.29
1883	.13	40.58	59.29
1884	.27	39.59	60.14
1885	.23	41.20	58.57
1886	.15	43.42	56.43
1887	.25	42.69	57.06
1888	.23	41.53	58.24
1889	.25	42.88	56.87
1890	.31	42.82	56.87
1891	.37	42.09	57.54
1892	.35	43.94	55.71
1893	.50	43.95	55.55
1894	.49	43.12	56.39
1895	.55	44.47	54.98
1896	.48	45.28	54.24
1897	.40	45.78	53.82
1898	.39	46.90	52.71
1899	.29	46.26	53.45

The agrarian troubles resulting from the Land War of 1879 – 81 is reflected in the increased numbers of Irish horses exported to Great Britain during that period. This has been attributed partly to the suspension a number of hunts by the activities of the Land League with the result that their establishments were broken up and their horses sold out of the country, but principally due to the fact that non payment of rents necessitated the

realization of assets in order to avoid seizure, leading in turn, to a depletion in the national stock which was reflected in a noticeable decline of exports during 1882 and 1883. However, a gradual recovery commenced the following year, the general trend of which continued until the end of the century with a record total of 42,000 horses exported to Great Britain in 1899.[15]

Unfortunately the records do not distinguish between hunters and other types of horses, nor do they reveal the production capacity of the various districts. However, it was probable that the majority of the horses exported were of hunter type. Dr. Michael Cox writing in 1897 quotes Lawrence who reports in his *History and Delineation of the Horse* (1809) that 'From Ireland we [Great Britain] import many saddle horses, as many as fifteen hundred in a year ; upwards in some years ... The Irish are the highest and steadiest leapers in the world.'[16] The report of the 1897 Parliamentary Commission into the Horse Breeding Industry in Ireland further states that since 1809 the annual export of Irish horses had steadily increased in number. The report adds however, that the commission had no data to show what proportion of this number were hunters.[17]

Numbers and Breeds of Work-Horse Stallions

A general idea of the genetic make-up of the Irish horse population during the second part of the nineteenth century can be gained from national census figures of the numbers and breeds of stallions of the traditional work-horse breeds available to cover mares. Figures are not available for every year, but the regional figures for the years 1864, 1868, and 1871 are given below.[18]

		Leinster	
	1864	1868	1871
Clydesdale	50	31	38
Suffolk Punch	24	17	19
Draught Horse	61	36	57
		Munster	
Clydesdale	30	25	25
Suffolk Punch	19	9	18

[15] Royal Dublin Society, *Dublin Horse Show Annual 1900*, (Dublin 1900), p. 28.
[16] Michael Cox, *Notes on the history of the Irish horse*, (Dublin 1897), p. 121.
[17] *Report of the commissioners into the horse breeding industry in Ireland*, 1897 pp 6,7,19.
[18] *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, 13 June 1875.

Draught Horse	36	32	50
		Ulster	
Clydesdale	43	97	135
Suffolk Punch	20	8	18
Draught Horse	26	16	16
		Connaught	
Clydesdale	5	5	13
Suffolk Punch	11	8	20
Draught Horse	36	18	4

The present writer has concluded from the available evidence, that prior to the second half of the nineteenth century, a 'type' rather than a specific breed of native draught horse existed in Ireland that was in time, to form the foundation stock of the later Irish Draught breed. It is also apparent that this equine type was of very mixed breeding, and owed much to imported British strains. This state of affairs was considered undesirable by the more nationalist minded lobby, who were in favour of establishing a truly Irish breed, on the same lines as the quintessentially English Shires and Suffolk Punches. Consequently, steps were taken by the Royal Dublin Society and the Department of Agriculture to set up a registration scheme for Irish Draughts, with the establishment of a stud-book and breed society in 1911.[19]

Importance of Hunting to the Economy

The part of the island devoted to the production of hunters, chiefly the progeny of half-bred mares and thoroughbred stallions, was that part 'of the country south of the River Boyne and exclusive of the western sea board'[20], the principal breeders being the stronger farmers who had good class mares and were able to pay for the services of thoroughbred stallions of sufficient quality to produce good, saleable offspring. That is the class of farmers with holdings with a valuation 'of from £100 to £200.'[21]

The best type of hunters would have been sold on their reputation in the hunting field, where breeders and their sons would show off their horses in the hope of attracting potential buyers, the cost of the animal depending very much on the price the interested party was prepared to pay. The value of the sterling pound linked as it was to gold

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[19] Colin Lewis, *Horse breeding in Ireland*, (London, 1980), p. 164.
[20] *Horse breeding commission. Ireland* 1887, p. 8.
[21] ibid., p.18.

remained fairly constant during the period under review, and prices for horses didn't seem to change very much during the entire course of the nineteenth century when a good hunter could fetch from about £60 to several hundred pounds.[22]

Another outlet for selling hunters was one of the numerous horse fairs that were held in various parts of the country. The principal horse fair in Ireland was that held at Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, during the first week of October each year, though three other important horse fairs were held in Co. Cork during the nineteenth century. The first of these was held at Kilmacleenin on 21 June, the next at Cahirmee on 12 July, and the final one at Kildorrey on 3 September.[23] There were others, each county having at least one, but those mentioned above were regarded as the most prominent. However, after the establishment of the Dublin Horse Show in 1868, that venue gradually became the principal market for Irish hunters with a concomitant decline in the importance of the county horse fairs as sales outlets.[24] There were in addition, many leading dealers and auction houses in the capital where hunters could be bought and sold. The most prominent of these was Dycer's Horse Repository with premises at 131 Stephen's Green West.

In addition to breeding horses for sale at home and abroad, the horse industry in generated a large number of ancillary trades to supply its needs, and every village community large enough to support commerce had its harness makers, wheel wrights, cart makers, plough wrights, saddlers etc. which supplied the needs of the local farmers, while local tailors, boot makers, hatters and so on, catered for the hunting fraternity. An admittedly polemic article in the *Irish Times* on the evils of the anti-hunting campaign organized by elements of the Land League pointed out that many towns and villages in Ireland 'existed by hunting', and cited Navan, Dunshaughlin, Naas, Summerhill, and Mallow.[25] Certainly, hunting establishments provided a considerable amount of employment for hunt servants, grooms, stable-boys and the like, and provided local farmers with a useful outlet for selling their hay, oats, and straw. According to the same *Irish Times* article mentioned above :

> During the regular hunting season something like 180 meets of hounds occur each week. The five packs of staghounds meet at least thirteen times each week, and albeit this branch of sport is by no means so

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[22] See reports of fairs in various issues of the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* and other papers.
[23] Patrick Logan, *Fair Day. The story of Irish fairs and markets*, (Belfast, 1986), p. 86.
[24] *Farmer's Gazette* 12 October 1878.
[25] *Irish Times* 15 October 1881.

expensive as foxhunting, still at the lowest computation an outlay of £4,500 a year is required to keep it going. Then, according to the calculation of one of the best authorities, the foxhounds cost something like £39,000, while at least £15,000 is spent on harriers. Here, then, we have a sum of close on £59,000 spent on the simple maintenance of packs of hounds to which must, of course, be added the personal expenses of masters and others who patronise the sport. At the very lowest a stud of horses cannot be maintained under £60 per horse, and the same authority whose figures I have adopted for the expenses of hounds holds that at least £476,000 is spent annually by gentlemen in pursuit of hunting. One way or another, a sum of one million sterling is circulated in Ireland for hunting purposes alone ...[26]

An idea of the importance of the horse industry to the general economy can be obtained by a study of the various trade directories published during the nineteenth century. Every town and village had its blacksmith or farrier, its saddler or harness-maker, its coach builder and wheel-wright. For example, *Thom's Dublin Directory* for 1874 lists the following horse-related trades:

Bit and stirrup makers (2)
Carriage, cab and car proprietors (34)
Carriage, cab and car builders (50)
Carriage lamp maker (1)
Cart, cab and dray makers (8)
Coach harness platers (4)
Coach lace manufacturers (3)
Coach painters (2)
Coach trimmer (1)
Float owners and furniture van proprietors (16)
Fringe and coach lace makers (10)
Girth web manufacturers (2)
Hay, oats and straw factors (8)
Horse trainers (3)
Horse dealers (19)
Horse repositories (6)

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[26] ibid.

Livery stables (25)

Rag and bone dealers (12)

Saddlers and harness makers (48)

Saddle tree makers (2)

Smiths and farriers (9)

Spur maker (1)

Veterinary surgeons (13)

Whip makers (4)



Village coachbuilder and wheelwright. 20th century. Photo Ruth Rodgers.

Chapter Three

The Horse in Agriculture

Sources For This Chapter

The series of surveys covering the state of agriculture in most of the counties of Ireland during the years 1801 to 1832 which was commissioned by the Dublin Society, later the Royal Dublin Society, provided an invaluable source for both agricultural horses and types of horse-drawn farm implements used during the early years of the nineteenth century.[1] This information was supplemented with data obtained from some of the many farming manuals and commentaries which proliferated during the period. Other useful sources were the preface to the agricultural section of the catalogue of the Irish Exhibition of 1853,[2] and advertisements which appeared in the contemporary farming press.

Types and Breeds of Agricultural Horses

By the early years of the nineteenth century, most of the horses used for agricultural purposes in Leinster were descended partially from stock that had been introduced in ancient times, and partially from more recently imported British stock. In spite of its diverse origins the work-horse population had become more or less homogenized by 1800, and had developed characteristics that were distinctly Irish. This mixed breed was described in 1807 in the following terms :

> The native breed of Ireland are about fourteen hands and an inch in height ; thick and round in the carcase ; close in the couples ; short-backed ; haunches well under ; short-legged ; close in the pastern ; shoulders flat, to lie well back ; withers heigh ; neck rising boldly out of the shoulders, tapering upwards to meet a small head ; a light ear , cheerful eye, and pleasant counternance, *without which no animal can be shapely.* For roadsters, and for general use, the world cannot produce better animals ; they are now and then to be met with, and are most highly prized. [3]

The process of bringing in imports to 'improve' the native stock continued during the course of the nineteenth century. Imported English animals included the large black

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[1] Henry F. Berry, *A history of the Royal Dublin Society,* (London, 1915), pp 182-5.
[2] John Sproule (ed.) *The resources and manufacturing industry of Ireland. illustrated by the Exhibition of 1853.* (Dublin 1854). Henceforth cited as Sproule.
[3] T.J. Rawson, *Statistical survey of county Kildare*, (Dublin, 1807), p. 127. Henceforth cited as *Kildare survey.*

Leicestershire Shire horse, a number of which had been imported during the eighteenth century under the premium schemes sponsored by the Dublin Society.[4] However, the use of this breed, which had been developed specifically to work large agricultural units in England, was not generally favoured by knowledgeable Irish agriculturalists for interbreeding with the native horses as they considered the large coarse-boned Shire horses unsuitable for the smaller Irish holdings where lighter, general purpose animals were required. A much more suitable breeding animal was the small version of the clean-legged Suffolk Punch[5] some of which had been imported as early as 1800 under the Dublin Society's premium scheme.[6] The small bay or sorrel Suffolks were at that time, about 15 hands high. They were described in the Co. Dublin *Survey* of 1801 as being 'very broad in the rib, short in the back, well shouldered, deep and wide in the chest, up before, his head well set on, and his legs broad, flat, and free from gum or hair.' The author of the Dublin *Survey* reported that :

Mr. Fortescue of Ravensdale, and Mr. Wynn of Hazelwood, have imported two Sussex stallions and six mares of the very best kind [of Suffolk Punch] that could be procured in England . No horse is better calculated for this country, as he combines strength and activity with hardiness and thrift. The Suffolk Punch with our little Irish mares, will probably renovate the breed of roadsters, for which Ireland was formerly celebrated, but which have been degenerated by the introduction of Flanders waggon-horses, and dwindled racers.[7]

The small type of Suffolk was also recommended by Wakefield in 1812 as suitable for Irish conditions, who also described them as 'characterized by strength of constitution, hardiness, and capacity to sustain great labour with little food.' He further explained that 'on account of these valuable qualities they seem to be well suited to the small Irish farmers.'[8] Likewise, the *Co.* Kilkenny *Survey* reported in 1802, that 'if any English breed are particularly to be sought for [in Ireland], it should seem to be the Suffolk sorrels'.[9]

It is the contention of this thesis, that the modern Irish Draught horse owes much of its characteristics and conformation to an early influx of the genes of the small version

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[4] See Chapter 1.
[5] Ibid.
[6] *Report of the commission into horse breeding in Ireland,* 1897, p. 21
[7] Joseph Archer, *Statistical survey of Co. Dublin,* (Dublin, 1801), p.xv. Henceforth cited as Dublin *survey.*
[8] Edward Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political,* 2 vols.(London,1812), i. pp 350-351.

of the Suffolk Punch. The fact that the Suffolk is clean-legged, in fact the only English clean-legged heavy draught horse breed, is a further indication of its influence on the clean-legged Irish Draught. However, modern Irish Draught enthusiasts in their desire to promote a truly Irish national breed, are either unaware of, or unwilling to admit, the genetic debt that their breed owes to this ancient East Anglian strain.

The draught-horses which were most prized in Meath were those described in 1802 as 'light, active, and stoutly built, such as are bred between the saddle and the waggon kind.' However, it was admitted that 'the generality of work horses, however, stand in great need of improvement, and it is often ridiculous to see the wretched animals employed by many of our farmers in ploughing.' A popular, but not universally held opinion, was that the best way to improve the general standard of the horse population was the introduction of thoroughbred blood :

If draught horses are wished for, breed from the most shapely, light-stepping of the draught kind ; those, who breed cattle [horses] for the turf, take particular care in their selection. To breed horses for the army, carriages, road, or general service, it can best be done by crossing a large, roomy, thoroughbred draft mare with a good thorough-bred horse ; the produce will be excellent for any use. [10]

The Use of Oxen for Ploughing

For many centuries the principal draught animal used for ploughing was the ox.[11] However, from about the sixteenth century onwards he had been gradually replaced by horses Nevertheless, ploughing with oxen experienced a resurgence during the eighteenth particularly century as part of 'improved' agricultural practices on the big estates in Ireland, and the process continued into the early part of the nineteenth.[12] It was considered however, that oxen could only be employed to advantage in flat regions where there were large tillage farms,[13] and were not suitable for use in the smaller land divisions, especially in mountainous regions, where horses were used for all tasks requiring draught or carriage. Nonetheless, in the right conditions, oxen had certain economic advantages over horses. They increased in value after purchase whereas horses

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[9] William Tighe, *Statistical observations relative to the county of Kilkenny.* (Dublin, 1802), p. 308 Henceforth cited as Kilkenny *survey.*

[10] Kildare *survey*, p.126

[11] A.T.Lucas, 'Irish ploughing practices', 4 parts, *Tools and Tillage* vol.2 : 2, (Copenhagen, 1973), pp 52-62.

[12] Bell and Watson, *Irish Farming* p. 231.

normally did not, and unlike the latter, oxen could be fattened up and sold for slaughter if lame or otherwise unfit for draught.

According to the author of the 1807 Kildare *Survey,* plough oxen were common in parts of Leinster even on middle sized farms. ' No man cultivates to any extent without oxen for the principal drudgery of ploughing.' The use of oxen in the plough seems to be rather increasing in the neighbourhood of Kilkenny in 1802; as 'they are used in some degree by different farmers all over the country ; though the proportion is very small in comparison to horses. [14] However, the general use of plough oxen gradually decreased with the decline of tillage during the course of the nineteenth century, and had virtually disappeared by the time of the Famine. Nevertheless, a few were still to be found in use in isolated instances, even into the twentieth century.[15]



Ploughing with oxen. Farming Society of Ireland medal . Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

[13] John M'Evoy, *Statistical survey of the county of Tyrone* (Dublin, 1802), p. 45. Henceforth cited as Tyrone *survey.*
[14] Kilkenny *survey*,p. 305.
[15] Johnathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *Irish farming* 1750 – 1900 (Edinburgh,1986), p. 82.

Ploughing 1800 - 1850

The plough is a relatively complex implement capable of performing several diverse functions essential to the efficient tilling of the soil. The implement has two basic forms, namely, the *turnwrest* plough which is fitted with one or more wheels, and the *swing* plough which is wheel-less. All ploughs whether turnwrest or swing, have certain working parts which consist of (a) The *beam* which was the long part of the plough with the *bridle* or *hake* (to which the source of traction was attached) on the front end, and the steering handles or *stilts* on the other. Below the beam was the *body* or *frame* to which the other parts are attached. The bottom of the frame was variously called the *sole*, *slade*, or *ploughground* to the front of which was fixed the *share*. The back part of the frame was called the *heel*. Slightly in front and above the share was the *coulter* a kind of vertical knife whose function was to slice through the earth, and acted in conjunction with the share which followed it, making an horizontal cut a few inches below the surface of the ground. This loosened the sod, which was then pushed to one side, and turned over by the *turnfurrow* ,*breast*, or *mouldboard*, which was fixed at an angle to the right or *feather* side of the plough, thus making the furrow.[16]

The action of ploughing gets rid of weeds, stubble, and other vegetable matter by burying it under the turned sod which has the effect of accelerating the decay of the organic material, and preparing the land for sowing. It also fosters the growth of a nourishing tilth which is most beneficial to the earth, and encourages the growth of crops as well as maintaining and conditioning agricultural land.. The underlying soil which is turned up is exposed to the weathering action of the frost which causes it to become friable and aerated. In addition, the action of ploughing regulates the amount of water in the earth, draining it when wet, and adding moisture when dry.

Conditions in Ireland have generally been less favourable for tillage than in most parts of Britain and mainland Europe. The moist climate and rich limestone subsoil in Ireland have tended to favour pasture or grassland farming rather than tillage. Generally

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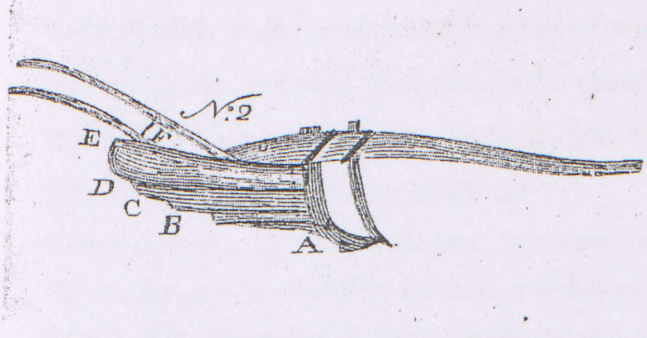
[16] *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, 17 February 1855,

speaking, the further east one travels in the British Isles, the more favourable are the conditions for tillage. They are best of all in mainland Europe.

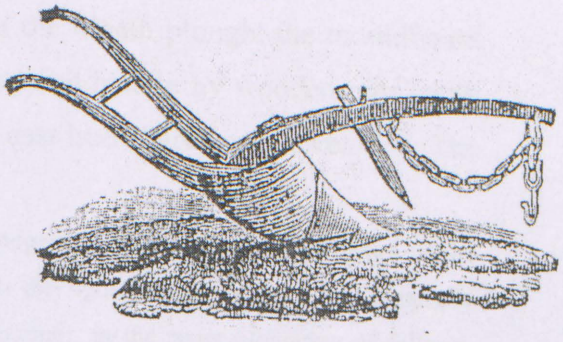
Most parts of Britain had a long tradition of tilling the soil, and scientific farming had made great advances, particularly during the eighteenth century. By 1800, a number of different variations of ploughs had been developed to deal with varying local conditions.[17]

Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, all had their own centuries old varieties of wooden swing ploughs. The various indigenous implements were rather similar to each other, and to some of the wheel-less ploughs which existed in parts of mediaeval England. (Nevertheless, wheeled ploughs were used in those districts of England which were flat and low-lying from very early times).

The old Scots swing plough had only one handle or 'stilt', and a very rudimentary mouldboard, with the coulter and share attached to the wooden frame with iron bands. The method of ploughing was similar to the Irish, with the traction usually provided by four horses yolked abreast.[18] Like the latter, it required three men to operate. These consisted of a driver who walked backwards in front of, or between the draught horses or oxen, sometimes with the reins fastened to a cross-stick. The ploughman walked behind



Meath. Plough 1802. Thompson, *Meath Survey.*



Small's Plough 1804. Coote, *Armagh Survey*

[17] Elwyn Hartley Edwards, *Horses : Their role in the history of Man*, (London, 1987), Chapter 13.
[18] Arthur Young *A tour in Ireland* 1776-1779, 2 vols. (London, 1892), ed. A.W.Hutton (Irish University Press 1970), p. 258.

or to the side of the plough steering it with a single handle. A third man followed behind with a spade, to lay up the furrow slices.[19] The old wheel-less Welsh plough was very similar to the Irish. It was described 'as awkward a furrowing implement as can well be imagined.' The share was reported as being like 'a large wedge' with the coulter sometimes coming before the point of the share, and sometimes above it. The earth-board (i.e the mouldboard), 'was a thing never thought of', but a stick was positioned to turn the furrow. A commentator in 1847 reported that 'a field ploughed with this machine looks as if a drove of swine had been moiling in it.'[20]

The old Irish long-beamed swing plough although lacking the widely differing regional varieties found in England, nevertheless exhibited certain differences which were developed to work different soil conditions in different parts of the country. The Irish plough was described by Wakefield as 'an unwieldy implement made of wood which could be oak, ash, or even alder.' [21] Its main characteristics were its unwieldy nature, its long beam, its flat wooden mouldboard, a long sole plate, the lack of a plate on the plough's land side, and its heavy weight. A type with an especially long beam was developed in Co. Meath in order to cope with the heavy clays that characterized most parts of that county. This variety of plough was unusual insofar as it had a mouldboard made of three strips nailed together, while other traditional Irish ploughs types had their mouldboards made from a single piece of wood. In the Meath plough, the mouldboard was described as being 'fastened to the cross [breast] and handle by wooden pins' with the lowest strip merging with the head onto which a cast iron share was socketed.[22] The entire Meath apparatus was said to be :

A most unwieldy and heavy implement ; yet I must acknowledge it is well adapted to the nature of the soil...In spring it is invariably drawn by four horses, both on the light and heavy soils, and generally ploughs from half an acre to three quarters per day, and in summer, in the cross ploughing of fallows, which is called *gorrowing* [said to be from Ir. *goráil*] it is drawn by six [horses or oxen].[23]

A surviving specimen of an old Irish plough, from an unspecified district, and probably dating from the early nineteenth century, is preserved in the National Museum

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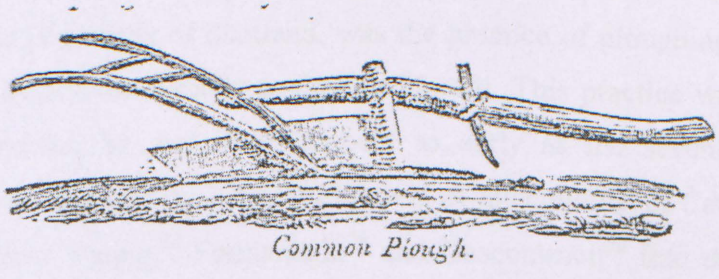
[19] J.M. Wilson, *The Rural Cyclopaedia*, (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 857.
[20] ibid.
[21] E. Wakefield, *An account of Ireland statistical and political*, 2 vols, (London, 1812), i., p. 503
[22] Meath *survey*, p. 109.
[23] ibid., 108.

of Ireland, and has been described by Professor Estyn Evans in his *Irish Heritage*. The coulter and share were made of iron, with the share or *sock* was attached to the point of the *head*, a flat piece of wood which rested on the ground. There were two handles, one the *main handle* was mortised into the head, the other, the *wee handle* was attached to the main handle. An almost vertical piece of wood called the *key* connected the head with the long beam characteristic of the old Irish plough. Thus the end of the beam, the key, the head, and the bottom of the main handle formed a non-rectangular four sided figure. A straight sided wooden mouldboard was attached to the right handed side of the plough. The sole was shod with iron against wear. [24]

Most of the old Irish plough types had many defects as practical implements for tillage. The straight sided mouldboards were reported as tending to have clods adhering to them, and were not very efficient in turning over the sod. This operation had to be assisted by the ploughman's boot to turn over the furrow slice. He also had to lean heavily on the beam to keep the plough in the earth. This was not easy as he had only one leg to hop on as the other was occupied in turning the furrow.[25] Nevertheless, the old Irish plough was said to have certain advantages over newer imported type. For example, in Cork in 1810, 'the old plough is mostly in use, and is still considered as the best for coarse, stony, and furzy ground'[26]



Plough from Co. Kilkenny 1802. Tighe, *Kilkenny Survey*.

[24] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish heritage, the landscape, the people and their work*, (Dundalk, 1967) , p.80.
[25] Wakefield. op. cit.
[26] Horatio Townsend, *Statistical survey of the county of Cork* (Dublin, 1810), p.532.



Ploughing by the tail, 1805. English satirical print.

Ploughing by the tail.

An ancient method of tillage which survived into the nineteenth century in parts of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland, was the practice of ploughing and harrowing by attaching the implement directly to the horse's tail. This practice was in fact illegal, having been forbidden by Act of Parliament as early as the seventeenth century.[27] Nevertheless, it was said to have persisted in parts of the counties of Cavan where it was mentioned by Arthur Young,[28] Fermanagh,[29] and Roscommon[30] into the early years of the nineteenth century. Although generally regarded as cruel and barbarous, this method of ploughing had its supporters who claimed that it was actually easier on the horse than the more usual system , as the horse would automatically stop if the plough share struck a

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[27] 10/11 Chas.II,..c.15. C.S.P.I. 1660-62, pp 387, 481

[28] Arthur Young *A tour in Ireland* 1776-1779 (London, 1892), p.211.

[29] Isaac Weld, *Statistical survey of the county of Roscommon,* (Dublin,1832),'General Observations'

[30] Wakefield, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 380.

rock or some other buried obstacle which could save the plough from damage[31] This was particularly important as the breast or the sole of the old Irish plough was liable to come away from the beam if it came into violent contact with a stone or root. [32] The plough traces, which were often of sugán or fir rope were attached to the animal's tail by a special knot, the knowledge of which is said to be now lost.

. The whole question of ploughing by the tail however, is an emotive one. Nineteenth century English commentators seized upon it as an example of Irish barbarism, while some Irish writers whose patriotic zeal exceeded their objectivity, claimed that such an outrage could never have occurred in the *Insula sanctorum et doctorum*, and the whole story was therefore a wicked lie intended to discredit their country.[33]

A small sidelight might be thrown on the whole question by the present writer who, some years ago, had occasion to ride through the Canadian Rockies on horseback accompanied by a guide and a string of pack-horses These animals had been linked together in a line by ropes directly from their head collars to the tails of the horses in front to which they had been attached by means of a traditional knot which must have been very similar to the lost knot that had once been used in Ireland and Scotland for ploughing by the tail. On one occasion during the Rocky expedition, one of these pack-horses fell down a precipitous place, and was only saved from plunging to his death by the rope attached to his tail. He did not seem unduly distressed by this experience after being hauled up.

Light Plough Types

The massive long beam plough with its team of four horses or oxen which was designed to work those regions of the country with heavy clay soils was often found to be too unwieldy an implement to cope with areas with lighter soils. Consequently, in certain districts a smaller type of two horse plough was used. In parts of Kilkenny, a

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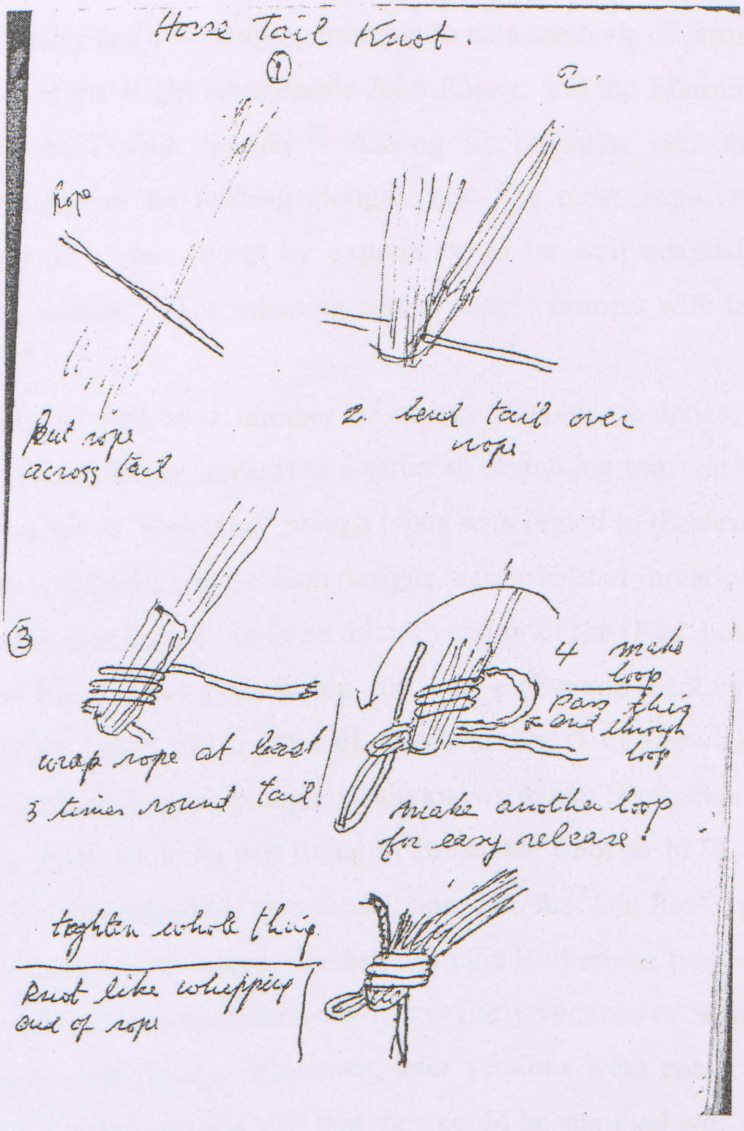
[31] ibid,
[32] Kilkenny *Survey*, p.293.
[33] J.J. McAuliffe,. 'Ploughing by the tail', *The Irish Book Lover*, 29 (1943), pp 1-11.

light plough with a five foot beam was used[34] and similar implements were to be found in parts of the counties of Mayo[35], Armagh[36], and Down.[37]



Page from the writer's notebook showing Canadian horse tail knot that may be similar to the knot used for ploughing by the tail..

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[34] Kilkenny *Survey*, p. 293.
[35] James McParlan, *Statistical survey of the county of Mayo*. 1802, p. 158.
[36] Armagh s*urvey*, p. 146.
[37] Down *survey*, p.48.

The Farming Society of Ireland

In the beginning of 1800, a farming society with the object of improving the standard of husbandry and encouraging more up to date methods of farming, was founded at the suggestion of the Right Honourable John Foster, and the Marquis of Sligo, under the auspices of the Dublin Society.[38] Among its activities was the foundation of manufacturing enterprise for making ploughs, and 'the most improved implements of husbandry, that have been found by experience to be well adapted to the soil and husbandry of this country'. The intention was to supply farmers with farm equipment at moderate prices.[39]

The F.S.I. as well as a number of county farming societies, together with a number of private individuals, organized a series of ploughing trials and competitions, in order to test a number of 'improved' plough types with regard to their suitability for Irish conditions. Various English and Scottish designs were tried out in various locations. The most popular implement turned out to be a later version of the 'East Lothian' type swing plough that had been developed during the late eighteenth century. by a Scottish ploughwright called James Small. Small who was based in Berwickshire, had been influenced by a northern English plough design known as the 'Rotherham', which he had an opportunity to study while he was living in Doncaster prior to 1770. On his return to Scotland, Small had developed his own model, based on the 'Old Scots' plough type used in his own district, but added features derived from the Rotherham type, which included a curved mould-board and a rectangular body form. Early versions of Small's design were made of wood with iron fittings. However, later versions were constructed entirely of iron. A feature of Small's ploughs was that they could be supplied with mould-boards of different degrees of concavity in order to suit different soil conditions. The original model that was fitted with a chain linking the head to the bridle, was also known as Small's 'chain plough'.[40]

Small's plough seems to have been first imported into Ulster not long after its development in Scotland, by John Christy, a substantial farmer from Kircassock, near

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[38] Robert Frazer *Statistical survey of the county of Wexford* (Dublin, 1801) , p.40.
[39] ibid., p. 108.
[40] J.M..Wilson, *The rural cyclopaedia*, (Edinburgh ,1847), p. 858.

Lurgan, Co. Down, for use on his own farm. From there its use spread to the more progressive farms in Ulster, and eventually it became the most popular plough in the whole of Ireland. According to Dubordieu writing in 1802:

> The Scotch plough, invented by Small, and imported by Mr. Christy, seems to be getting into general use amongst gentlemen farmers ; it certainly, when well managed, and in a soil not too much incumbered with stones, does its work in a very masterly manner, from the formation of the mould-board in particular ; it stirs the ground, and reduces it to a degree of fineness more expeditiously than those in common use, while the share is calculated to cut and raise the furrow from the bottom, which by this means; with less toil to the horses, is completely laid in its place.[41]

And in Clare in 1808,

> the Scotch plough, according to the improved principles, seems to be one of the best we have yet adopted ; it turns a sod nine or ten inches broad, and five or six inches deep, in stiff soils, with the assistance of only a pair of horses or oxen without a driver, in a much superior manner. [42]

Small's plough was also adopted with enthusiasm in the counties of Antrim, Dublin, Kilkenny, and Galway surveys. The Wexford survey reported that 'The Scotch plough, as improved by Small, with the bridle invented by the Rev. Mr, Campbell, which is now generally approved of in other parts of Ireland was introduced into the county last year.' Furthermore, 'the introduction of the Scotch Swing plough, now much used in the neighbourhood of Cork and some other places will probably supplant [the old Irish plough].'[43] In addition to the imported implements, copies of Small's plough were reported as having been manufactured from October 1800 onwards, by the firm of Nugent and Orson of Henry Street, Dublin,.[44] Other Scots ploughs of mid-Lothian pattern which was not unlike Small's were also imported:

> The Mid-Lothian plough, drawn by two horses, and entirely managed by the person who holds it, having a rein from the outside of each horse, connected with a bit while the horse's heads are made fast, by a small strap, to each other, was lately introduced at Collon by the Right Honourable John Foster, and thence to the neighbourhood of Navan within the last year... This plough, when brought into more general use, will enable the farmer to plough double the number of acres he was formerly capable of doing, with a given number of horses.[45]

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[41] Down, *survey*, p. 49
[42] Hely Dutton *Statistical survey of the county of Clare* (Dublin ,1808), p. 61
[43] Horatio Townsend, *Statistical* surveys *of the county of Cork,* (Dublin, 1810), p.191. Henceforth cited as Cork *survey.*
[44] Dublin *survey,* p.36
[45] Meath *Survey*, pp 111- 12.

There was however, a considerable degree of reaction against the Scotch interloper and other imported ploughs, on the part of the more conservative farmers, who were firmly wedded to the use of the old long beamed Irish plough in spite of its many disadvantages. According to the author of the Meath survey 'Old ploughmen are very much averse to the Scotch plough, and they therefore throw every obstacle in its way'.[46] However in time, ploughs of 'improved' type gradually replaced the traditional implement, and by the middle years of the nineteenth century, the traditional long beamed wooden plough had been almost totally superceded by the newer imported types. Hely Dutton writing in 1824 reported that 'The increase of ploughs with two horses without a driver has been very rapid ; even the farmers of Fingal, who were as steadfast in the use of four beasts as those of any other part of Ireland, now begin, thanks to the Farming Society of Ireland, to see the superiority of the new method'[47]

Another advantage of the improved ploughs over the traditional pattern was that the traditional implements were made by individual ploughwrights, usually village carpenters or wheelwrights, using iron work obtained from local blacksmiths, and consequently no two implements were exactly alike, whereas the improved ploughs were factory made using standard components, and damaged or worn parts could easily be replaced.

Other Imported Ploughs

The old Irish wooden plough and Small's 'improved' Scottish plough were both 'swing', i.e. implements without wheels, a pattern that was regarded as being generally the best for most areas in Ireland. Nevertheless, in some soil conditions, the 'turnwrest' or wheeled plough had the advantage, and some English turnwrests had been tried out in various counties. One of these was Kildare, and Rawson writing in 1807, reported that 'some few spirited gentlemen have introduced the...Leicester [wheel] ploughs; they are gaining ground'[48], while the author of the Kilkenny survey written five years earlier, commented that 'the Leicestershire wheel ploughs are well calculated for good tillage, but more difficult to procured [than the Scotch] or repaired by common farmers.[49] A test

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[46] ibid. p. 114
[47] Hely Dutton, *A statistical and agricultural survey of the county of Galway* (Dublin,1824),,p. 88.
[48] Kildare *Survey*, pp 7-8.
[49] Kilkenny *Survey*, p. 298.

to establish the respective merits of the Irish and several imported plough types, was organised by a leading Co. Kilkenny agriculturist, Robert St. George, in September 1802. The report on the several varieties of the Leicester plough was as follows :

The Leicestershire single-wheeled plough, drawn by two horses in reins, and one man, took the earth at a depth of four and five eight inches, made an even and equal furrow, the weight of draft was 1¼ cwt.; at a depth of 5½ inches, the weight was 2¼ cwt. The two-wheeled Leicestershire plough turned a sod 10½ inches broad, and made a furrow 5½ deep, with two horses in reins, with an even draft of 2½ cwt. The double furrow Leicestershire plough, with two horses, ploughed at four inches deep with a draft of 2¾ cwt. [50]

Comparative Merits of the Swing and Turnwrest Ploughs

The successful operation of the swing plough required a lot of practice, but when the ploughman had acquired a sufficient degree of expertise, he could usually do his work, better with a swing than with a wheel plough, as the handling of the former could be performed with more finesse in skilled hands, than was possible with the wheeled or turnwrest implement . Another advantage of the swing plough was that it was cheaper to make, and its construction was more simple than the more complicated wheel plough, and was therefore less likely to go wrong The latter however, had the advantage of being capable of being set to work at a specified depth by an adjustment of the draft iron at the point of traction, or by increasing or decreasing the distance at which the power was applied or simply by effecting manual pressure on the handles. Once the turnwrest had been set to its designated specifications it could perform its work more uniformly and neatly than the swing plough did due to the fact that the wheels kept the implement reasonably straight in the furrow. It was also able to operate more effectively than the swing plough under certain conditions, particularly where shallow ploughing was required where the land was thin, very dry, or very stony, even on occasions when a swing plough could not be held in the ground at all. However, the turnwrest had the disadvantage of being much more expensive and complicated than the swing plough, and its effective operation depended on the correct adjustment of its various parts, and was really beyond the abilities of many conventional ploughmen who had been brought up with the traditional Irish long-beamed wooden implement.[51]

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[50] ibid.
[51] *Irish Farmer's Gazette,* 17 February 1855.

Other horse-drawn farm machinery

During the period under discussion, the majority of agricultural units in Ireland were too small to justify the ownership or use of more than a minimum of horse drawn equipment, and for the greater part of the century, most of the work on small holdings was done manually with spades. Nevertheless, in many parts of the country the ownership of a horse by small landholders was regarded as an asset of more social than commercial significance. Generally speaking, the extensive use of horse drawn farm machinery was confined to the larger farms and gentlemen's estates although its use became more widespread as the century progressed.

Horse operated farm machinery can be conveniently divided into several categories namely (a) implements of tillage which include ploughs, digging machines, harrows, rollers and clod crushers, and cultivators ; (b) drilling, hoeing, and sowing machines ; (c) harvesting machines such as reapers, rakes, and tedders ; and (d) barn and yard machinery which would include threshing and winnowing machines, etc.

Harrows

Like ploughing, the process of harrowing the ground was a of great antiquity. Its purpose was to further condition the land after ploughing, by breaking up the larger clods in order to form a seedbed, as well as covering the seed after sowing. In Meath, they were also used for cross harrowing fallows (O.E.D. 'arable' or 'plough land') in summer.[52] Harrows were traditionally pulled by one or more horses rather than oxen as the process required a more rapid, skimming action than the slow, plodding oxen were able to provide. Most of the harrows used in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century were extremely primitive, of a centuries old design which consisted of a crude wooden frames fitted with cross battens called 'bulls' in Leinster, and 'bills' in Ulster. Into these were set a series of iron spikes or wooden pegs which were designed to reduce the clods further after ploughing by being dragged across the surface of the ground. Similar implements of different weights and sizes were in use all over the country. Tighe provides an interesting description of the traditional type used in county Kilkenny survey in 1802:

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[52] Meath *Survey*, p. 116.

The common harrow consists of five bulls, about three and a half inches square, and almost four feet long, with five tines or pins in each ; at the fore part they are about ten inches asunder, and in the hinder about a foot ; the draft is from the second bull ; the heavy breaking harrows differ only in weight, and the greater distance of the bulls ; these are connected by three cross bars, one between the two first rows of pins, and two between the three hinder : the heavy harrow is generally drawn by four horses, and sometimes loaded with stones to increase the weight. The tines being put in without system often follow each other in the same track, leaving intervals of six or seven inches unstirred.[53]

It should be pointed out however, that the disadvantage of having the tines in a straight line was often obviated in practice by the fact the animals that provided the traction seldom proceeded in an totally straight line, and that, together with the fact as the ground was seldom entirely even, the implement had a natural tendency to swing from side to side, thus increasing the lateral action of the tines. In addition, it was always possible to draw the implement at an angle.[54] Sometimes two, or even three harrows were fastened together, especially in dry weather, and at the time of seed-sowing ; in that case, they were drawn by two or more horses, usually yolked abreast. The single harrow was commonly drawn by one animal.[55] Various types of 'improved' harrows were also tried out after 1800. One of these was developed in Dublin at the Implement Society's works on the North Wall, and was considered to be a great improvement on the old Irish device. It was described as consisting 'of two small harrows joined in the middle, by which means it has not only the longitudinal motion of the old form, but has that hustling latitudinal one so desirable in rough ground.[56]

In some of the more deprived areas of the country, small holders had to make do with what they could knock up themselves. For example, in Derry 'the poor farmer has only a machine, whose bills are of alder or birch; these are tied together by rungs of the same. Such an implement was considered as being only fit to scratch a surface that had been rendered friable by frequent ploughing.[57]

But there was however, an even more primitive device in use in many parts of Ireland. According to the editor of the catalogue of the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853. 'Many persons alive can recall thorn bushes being used for the purpose in different parts of Ireland, being dragged by horses, and loaded with stones or other heavy

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[53] Kilkenny *survey* pp 300-01.
[54] Tyrone s*urvey*, p. 47.
[55] ibid., Antrim s*urvey*, p. 170.
[56] Hely Dutton, *Statistical surveyof the county of Clare.*(Dublin, 1808), p. 63.
[57] Derry *survey*, pp 189-90.

substances, so as to insure the surface of the ground on which they were being drawn being acted upon'.[58] Such an expedient would have had even less effect on a ploughed surface, than the crude instrument mentioned above.

Cultivators.

Implements of this type which included the cultivator proper, the scuffler, and the grubber were an adaption of the harrow modified by mounting the tines on an adjustable frame and curving the tines forward making them better for deeper penetration and finer rendering of the soil than was possible with the harrow. [59] The scuffler was an early type of cultivator mounted on wheels, intended to serve as a kind of intermediate between plough and harrow. According to Coote (1804), this implement rendered the tilth finer than any single or double harrow 'better than any other machine I have seen'.[60] The author of the Kilkenny survey described it as :

one of the best implements of modern invention for some purposes...as no instrument can prepare and clean fallows in the same manner, or prepare ground so effectually and quickly for wheat : with four horses, it can go over near six acres of fallow in a day, and with two horses, from two to three, leaving no part of the soil unstirred, and dragging out all the roots and weeds : it has seven pins, and when they were set at the depth of nine inches the weight of draft was 3 ¾ cwt.[61]

During the 1820s, a Scottish farmer named Finlayson developed an improved type of cultivator for which he rather confusingly, adopted the name of 'scuffler', a term which had also been used for the earlier machine mentioned above. However, Finlayson's machine was more like the later 'grubber' than the original cultivator. It was an extremely successful implement, and continued to be used in Ireland with some modifications, at least until the later years of the nineteenth century.[62]

The true grubber which was introduced a few years later[63] was designed to be pulled by two horses, and was sometimes called the 'Scotch' grubber from its superficial resemblance to Finlayson's scuffler The apparatus was mounted on a triangular frame equipped with two large rear wheels and a small one in the front, and was provided with

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[58] Sproule, p. 210.
[59] ibid.
[60] Armagh *survey*, p. 170.
[61] Kilkenny *survey*, p.302.
[62] Sproule, op. cit. p. 211

three rows of curved tines which could be adjusted for depth and soil condition. The great advantage claimed for the grubber was a better distribution of weight than with normal cultivators. However, it was not capable of being used in ground that contained large stones, and was less versatile than some other types of cultivators, and could not be adapted for use as a drill machine or horse hoe.

Rollers

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the use of rollers was almost entirely confined to the larger farms and gentlemen's estates.[64] Their function was to complete the work of harrowing by further processing the earth, and compressing seeds into the ground.[65] They were also used to make the surface smooth so that growing crops could be easily maintained, and to prepare for harvesting. These implements were heavy revolving cylinders of various sizes and complexity, and usually pulled by one horse. They were commonly made of wood, usually a tree trunk, but were also found in stone, or metal.[66] Some were divided into two parts which made them easier to turn at headlands,[67] and others were spiked in order to increase their effectiveness on certain ground conditions. Implements of this type were being manufactured in Celbridge, Co. Kildare as early as 1767.[68]

Rollers however, were often not available to smaller farmers, who made use of various other methods of clod breaking using implements which had been devised to carry out this work. One of the most primitive of these was a simple club or mallet of a type in common use among small holders at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Wakefield, writing in 1812 reported that, 'the want of a roller obliges the Irish farmer to break the clods by manual labour which is employed throughout every part of the Kingdom. For this purpose a stick, somewhat like a hurling bat is used.'[69] Another expedient were 'drags' i.e. heavy blocks of stone or baulks of wood harnessed to a horse and used after ploughing, to further reduce the remaining lumps of earth after ploughing.

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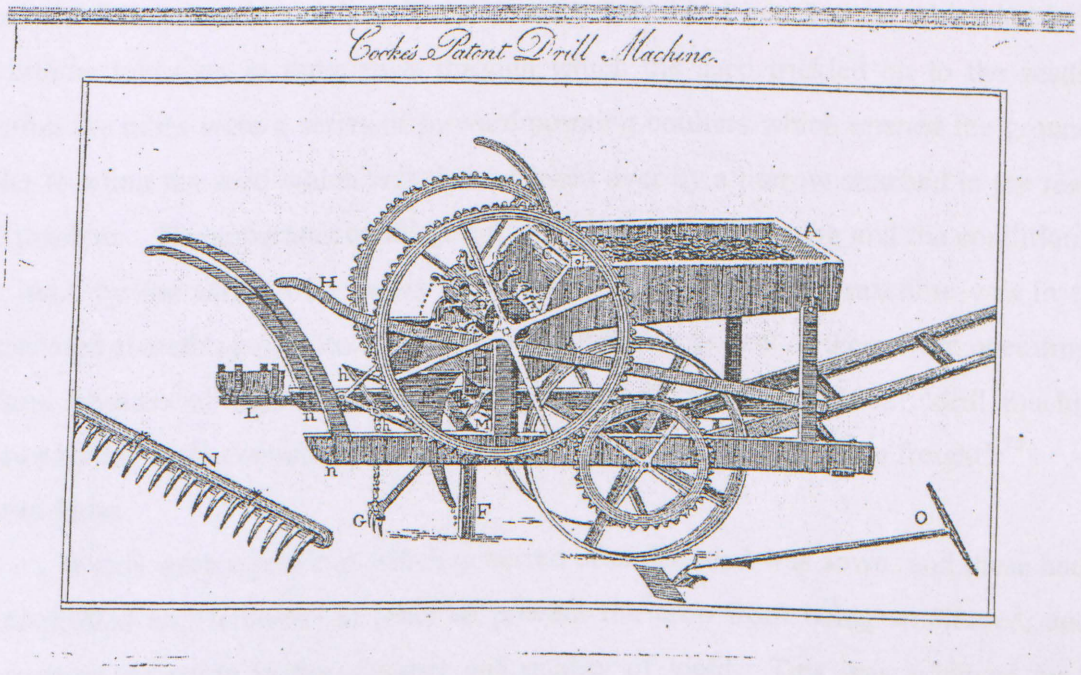
[63] See advertisements in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* 1854 – 1880.
[64] Kilkenny *survey*, p. 302, Antrim *survey*, p. 155, Cork *survey* p. 195.
[65] Co.Down *survey*, p. 55.
[66] Charles Coote *Statistical survey of the Queen's County* (Dublin, 1801), p. 40. Henceforth cited as Queen's *survey*.
[67] Meath *survey*, p. 120.
[68] ibid. p. 101.
[69] Wakefield, op. cit., p. 432.

The effectiveness of a drag in pulverizing the ground could be further increased by the simple expedient of the farmer standing on it during traction. A collection of these crude devices have been preserved in the Irish Agricultural Museum at Johnstown Castle, Johnstown, Co. Wexford.

Horse Drawn Machines for Sowing Seed

For many centuries, the usual way of sowing seed in Ireland was by hand, using the 'broadcast' system. This consisted of the sower walking across the seed bed with the seed in a container, and throwing handfuls to the left and right. However, a number of types of horse-drawn machines for mechanising this process, had been developed as early as the eighteenth century. These machines, also known as 'horse drills', were in fact,



Cooke's drill machine, 1801. *King's County Survey* 1801

something of an expensive rarity in Ireland[70], and their use was confined to a few of the more progressive progressive gentlemen's estates. A 'drill plough' which combined the actions of ploughing and sowing was reported as having been used for several years on the estate of Mr. Crawford of Crawford's-burn, Co. Down. This implement was said to

[70] Meath *survey*, p. 115.

have distributed the seed with great accuracy, but, as it did not function well in stony ground, Mr. Crawford had found it impractical to use.[71]

Mechanised sowing machines were usually fitted with a seed box from which the seed trickled onto the seedbed either through hollow pipes or tines, or via a revolving cylinder which distributed the seed as the apparatus progressed across the ground. The few horse drills which were reported as operating in Ireland during the early years of the nineteenth century, were mostly of a type known as Cooke's patent drill,[72] a machine which had been invented as early as 1788 by a Manchester clergyman, and was in fact, the prototype of all modern drilling machines. A characteristic of Cooke's drill was that it had had a partitioned seed box with the rear end lower than the front. This allowed the seed to be fed by gravity from the seed box onto a rotating cylinder which contained a number of concave receptacles. These conveyed the seed into funnels which led in turn to hollow tubes set in three rows through which the seed trickled on to the seedbed. Behind the tubes were a series of forward pointing coulters which opened the ground in order to admit the seed which was then covered over by a harrow attached to the rear of the machine. The apparatus could be adjusted for depth of sowing and the conditions of the land, by the action of a series of levers.[73] Cooke's drilling machine was in fact, considered something of a luxury with the result that very few of them were operating in Ireland because of their expense. According to Thompson in 1802, 'drill machines cannot be had in this country for less than twenty guineas, including the freight' [74]

Horse-Hoes

Weeds were a problem which occurred after the seed was sown, and these had to be controlled and removed in order to prevent the crop from being smothered, and a consequent reduction in the quantity and quality of yield. This was achieved by the process of weeding or hoeing which brought the roots of the weeds to the surface where they then died after being exposed. Hoeing could be done either by hand or by the use of horse-drawn machinery. However, the latter was really only feasible if the seed had been sown in evenly spaced drills by machines rather than having been scattered by

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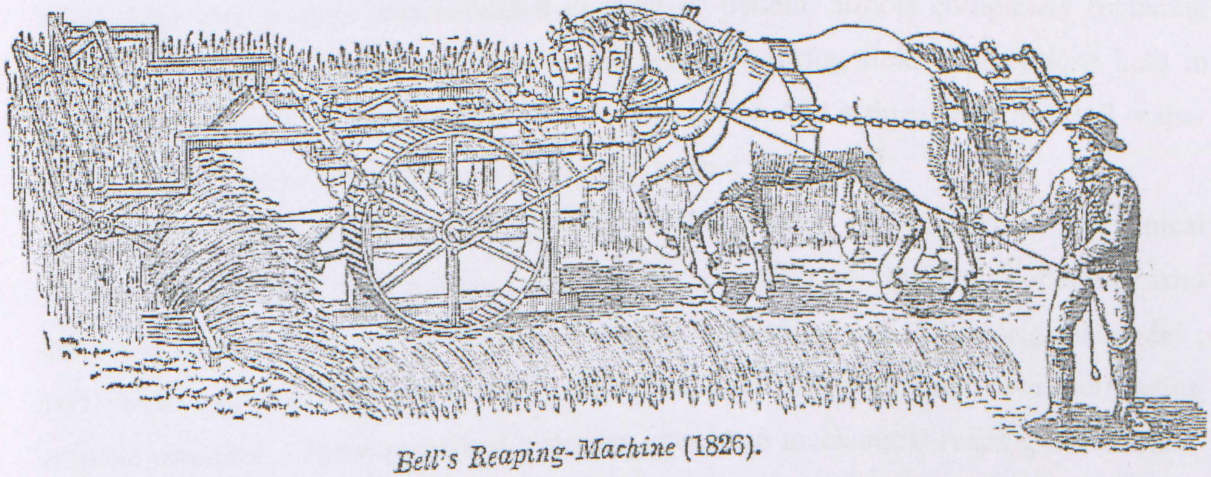
[71] Down *survey*, p. 50.
[72] Meath *survey*, p. 115, Kilkenny *survey*, p.340, King's *Survey*, p.70, Cavan *Survey*, p.224.
[73] Wilson, *Rural Cyclopaedia*, pp 281-82.
[74] Meath *Survey*, p. 115.

hand. Different types of horse drawn implements had been developed for weeding drills during the course of the eighteenth century. These included specialist types of harrows, horse-hoes, and grubbers, some of which were adjustable in order to cope with drills of different width.[75] However, most of the early horse-hoes were simple implements drawn by a single horse, the co-operative product of village carpenters and blacksmiths. They usually consisted of a stout wooden frame of wedge shaped or triangular shape with a pair of handles like a plough and a small adjustable wheel supporting the fore end of the frame. Horse-hoes were fitted with splayed tines which were extremely efficient for rooting up the weeds. Later horse-hoes were made entirely of iron by the numerous small implement makers which were found all over the country.

Horse–drawn reaping machines

From time immemorial until the latter part of the nineteenth century virtually all reaping corn and mowing hay in all parts of these Islands, was done by hand. In earlier times reaping hooks or sickles were used until they were later replaced by scythes. Nevertheless, even as far back as Roman times various attempts had been made to mechanize the process though with limited success. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a number of patents for mechanical reapers were taken out in various parts of the British Isles including Ireland, where a Rev. MacMullan, Curate of Moira, Co



Bell's Reaping-Machine (1826).

From Edward Knight, *A practical dictionary of mechanics,* (Boston, c. 1875)

[75] Johnathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *Irish Farming 1750 – 1900*, (Edinburgh 1986), p.129. Henceforth cited as Bell and Watson.

Down, exhibited a mechanical reaping machine of his own invention in 1806. Sadly, no details of the Rev. MacMullan's invention have survived to this day. [76] The first really successful mechanical reaper had been developed in Scotland in 1827 by the Rev. Patrick Bell of Carmyllie, Forfarshire.[77] This machine, although pushed by the horse from behind unlike later models, which were drawn from the front, introduced a number of features still used on modern tractor drawn reapers. For some unknown reason, the concept of reaping by machine in spite of its obvious advantages, didn't really catch on at that time anywhere in the British Isles. Nevertheless, a small number of Bell's models had been produced by an implement manufacturer in Dundee, and at least four of these had been exported to the United States where the idea of mechanical reaping was better appreciated, and Bell's machine probably influenced a number of American designs which were being developed at that time. Two of the most successful American machines, those of Cyrus McCormick of Chicago, and Hussey and Company, were exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London. The appearance of these two American machines at that venue attracted great excitement among British agriculturalists, and resulted in a fundamental change in British attitudes to mechanical as opposed to hand reaping. A large number of these machines were sold to British farmers the result of which was that, by the 1860s, reaping with American style horse-drawn machinery had become commonplace in most of Britain, almost completely replacing reaping by hand. This was in spite of the fact that during field competitions held in England between McCormick's and Hussey's machine, and a thirty year old Bell reaper owned by the inventor's brother, the latter was judged superior.[78]

Two exhibitors at the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853 displayed mechanical reaping machines on their stands ; namely, W. Crosskill of Beverly, Yorkshire, who exhibited both their improved version of Hussey's machine and Bell's original model ; and Smith and Ashby of Stamford, Lincolnshire who displayed their own 'self-acting reaping machine'. These provoked a similar interest in mechanical reaping in Ireland.[79]

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[76] Bell and Watson, p. 192. .
[77] Wilson, *The Rural Cyclopaedia*, p. 28.
[78] Sproule, p. 216.
[79] ibid., pp. 223-224.

as the American machines had done in London. Again, in field trials between the various models, Bell's was deemed to be the best for Irish conditions. [80]



Barn Threshing Machine. Print from the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University

Binding Machines

Having cut the corn, early reaping machines such as Bell's left it in neat rows to be bound into sheaves by hand. A further refinement of the harvesting procedure was to include this process in the operational cycle of the machine, and various machines were developed for this purpose from the late 1850s onwards, particularly in America. However, it was not until the very end of the nineteenth century that 'self-binders' appear to have been available in Ireland, and it was even later when they came into general use on farms in this country.

Threshing

The grain harvest, having been brought in, had to be threshed. In Ireland and elsewhere during the early part of the period under review, this was done manually by the process of spreading the sheaves on a threshing floor, and laboriously separating the grain from the straw by beating the cut corn with hand flails. As there was obvious scope for

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[80] Bell and Watson, p.193.

improvement with this process, a number of attempts had been made to mechanise it particularly during the eighteenth century, when a number of experimental threshing machines had been constructed. They were ponderous, static machines, housed in special constructed buildings, and known as 'barn' machines, and could be operated either by horse or water-power. It was not until much later that portable horse-drawn threshers were introduced.

The first practical mechanical thresher was a horse powered barn machine invented in 1786.by a Scot named Andrew Meikle of Tyningham, East Lothian which introduced many features still found on modern threshers. It required a number of men to operate it; the procedure consisting of opening up the sheaves and placing the corn stalks ears first on to a feeding board from which they were conveyed to be crushed between two fluted cylinders, before being sent through a further series of beaters and sieves until the grain was dislodged from the straw. The loose grain was then directed down a shoot to a threshing floor or granary where it required to be winnowed or separated from its chaff. The separated straw was often stored in an adjacent barn to be used for animal feed or bedding. In 1800, a winnowing device or 'fanning-mill' was added to the operative cycle of Meikle's threshing system.[81]

The first person to introduce a barn-type threshing machine appears to have been John Christy of Kircassock, near Lurgan, Co. Down, the same enterprising gentleman farmer who had also been responsible for the introduction of Small's Scotch plough into this country. Dubordieu, the author of the Co. Down survey, quotes Christy's explanation of the circumstances :

In the year 1796, I was at great pains in inspecting many of the best machines in Scotland, making draughts of them, and a model to erect one on my farm, on the best principles. I employed a good workman, who had done something in that way before...and put me in possession of a machine which although not so elegant in the workmanship as some others he has since made, yet does the business as effectually and expeditiously as I have seen in my late journey through some of the most improved parts of Scotland.

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[81] John Thompson, *Horse drawn farm implements* Part IV, Harvesting,(Fleet 1979) p. 60, reproducing a section of Edward Knight, *A practical dictionary of mechanics*, c.1875. p.2556

Dubordieu further explains that 'Mr. Christy has adapted to this machine one for rolling and scotching flax, likewise a steel mill for flour; and he also adds millstones for grinding oats, etc.[82]

It was not long before similar machines were installed in a number of the other large estates in Ireland and costing from about £60 to £100.[83] Some of these have been described in the various county surveys. A good description of one in Co. Sligo is given of the estate of a Mr. Wynne in 1802:

A threshing mill, consisting of the threshing apparatus ; two shakers ; a fan ; a second winnower; a pair of bruising cylinders ; a steel flour-mill, and a straw cutter. The building consists of three floors, in the upper story of which the threshing and shaking are performed ; the second story contains the fan, winnower, cylinders, and wheat-mill, and has beside a granary. The lowest walk contains the horse-walk, and a room where the straw cutter is placed and where the clean grain is delivered from a shoot. At right angles with the barn is a straw house, thirty-six by eighteen, and thirteen high, with a granary over it, thirty-six by eighteen. The mill threshes, with three horses from three to four barrels of oats, according to the quality and length of the straw, per hour, and about two barrels of wheat.[84]



Portable Threshing Machine from the *Irish Farmers Gazette* 12 August 1871

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[82] Co. Down *survey*, pp 52-54.
[83] Charles Coote, *Statistical survey of the county of Cavan*,(Dublin 1802) p.63, King's *Survey* p.70, Meath *survey* p.119, Queen's *survey*, p.93, Cork *survey* p.564.
[84] Sligo *survey* p.21.

Portable threshing machines based on Meikle's mechanism were available in Ireland by the 1850s. These were mounted in four-wheeled horse-drawn box wagons, and could be set up in haggards or stack yards for the duration of the threshing process, after which they could be moved on, thus avoiding the necessity of an expensive static system which was only used for a short period during the year. Such machines enabled mechanical threshing to be carried out by smaller farmers who would otherwise have to do it by hand. Portable threshers were a recent innovation in Ireland by the time of the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853, at which several of them were exhibited. According to Sproule, 'no small service would be rendered by proprietors in keeping portable threshers for the use of their tenantry', and he suggested that they could also be profitably employed by contractors servicing farmers at harvest time, a practice which was common in England, but apparently was not yet usual in Ireland.[85]

The final stage of mechanising the harvesting of grain, i.e. combining the processes of reaping, binding, and threshing by one machine did not reach Ireland until the adoption of the combine harvester from America in the twentieth century.

Irish Horse-Drawn Farm Vehicles

The vernacular farm vehicle of Ireland has traditionally been the two wheeled cart, as opposed to the larger four wheeled wagons characteristic of the English Midlands and South Eastern counties. The geographical distribution of carts and wagons respectively, throughout the British Isles and further afield, was related to the type of terrain in which they were used. Generally speaking, two-wheeled carts were used in the more upland areas of the British Isles and Europe, while the larger four-wheeled farm vehicles were mostly restricted to lowland areas containing large agricultural units. The use of two wheeled vehicles was culturally entrenched in Ireland, and English type four wheeled wagons were almost unknown in rural Ireland. It was not until the very end of the nineteenth century that even four-wheeled drays and delivery vehicles came into common use in the larger towns and cities, though four-wheeled farm vehicles never became established in the countryside.

There were three basic types of farm vehicles used in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century namely, the traditional block-wheeled 'low-backed car', the

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[85] Sproule, p. 219.

spoked-wheel Scotch cart, and the wheel-less slide car. Similar vehicles were also found in Scotland and Wales.[86]

The first of these, the low-backed car, was a primitive wooden vehicle with solid disc wheels two or so feet in diameter, attached to a thick wooden axle which rotated with them. These vehicles usually had a rectangular box type body, sometimes with baskets or 'kishes' to contain turf or manure. Block-wheel cars came in two varieties, the Munster car with its wheels under the body [87], and which could only be emptied by



Block wheeled car. Glens of Antrim c. 1890. From a postcard in private possession.

shovelling out the load, and secondly, the Leinster car which had its wheels outside the body [88], and which could be unloaded by tipping the car. The use of block-wheel cars increased among small farmers after the Act of Union. The author of the Derry *Survey* wrote in 1802, 'thirty years ago, wheel-cars were not as common in this county as chaises and coaches are now.'[89] In Tyrone (1802), 'about twenty years ago, very few wheel-cars were to be met with except in the neighbourhoods of principal towns, such as

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[86] Anthony Dent and Daphne Machin Goodall, , *A history of British native ponies* (London 1962), pp 179-181.
[87] Clare *survey*, p. 64.
[88] Galway *survey*, p.92.
[89] Derry *survey*, p.190.

Dungannon, Omagh, and Strabane ; now every farmer, of any note is possessed of one or more.'[90]

The Slide-Car

The slide car, a vehicle of great antiquity and ethnological interest, was not unlike the low backed car without its wheels. It occurred in a number of regional varieties, but the basic design was much the same, and consisting of a pair of poles or shafts with some sort of a platform between, and the ends of which trailed on the ground. They were used particularly in upland areas, to transport such items as manure, turf, potatoes, etc. Slide cars, once universal in Ireland, particularly, were to be found until recently in the Glens



Slide Car (wrongly described as low back car) c. 1890 Location unknown. Lawrence Collection.

of Antrim, had a much wider geographical distribution than in Ireland. A similar vehicle was once found in the Highlands of Scotland where it was known as a *car-slaoid* , and until very recently in Wales,[91] as well as the mountainous regions of Europe, and the Baltic countries.[92] It also occurred among the North American Indians where its use preceded the introduction of the horse,[93] as well as among the nomads of the Siberian tundra. Scandinavian ethnologists have demonstrated that the areas where the slide car was traditionally used, later adopted the two-wheeled cart rather than the four wheeled

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[90] Tyrone *survey*, p.48.
[91] Dent and Machin Goodall, op. cit. p. 180.
[92] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Heritage*, (Dundalk,1967), p. 109.

wagon.[94] This was particularly applicable to Ireland where the wheel car existed alongside the slide car from which it had developed in remote antiquity. It was particularly adapted to bog land where wheels would sink in the mire, as well as the more mountainous parts 'as it does not run on the horse's heels like the wheel car',[95] or even in a situation where 'wheels would precipitate the horse down the hill and destroy him.'[96]

The author of the Cork survey reporting on the Barony of Ibawne and Barryroe, wrote in 1810 writes: 'I myself recollect, when hardly anything but slide cars were used, even by the gentlemen in this quarter of the country.'[97] The author of the Tyrone *Survey* explains:

I am thoroughly convinced of their [slide-cars] great utility in mountainy situations. Even in counties not over mountainous, I am not altogether clear, but the slide-car should have the preference. It is amazing to find with what celerity a small horse, worth about forty shillings, with one of those simple vehicles, will get through so much business in a season, in drawing manure, turf, limestone, &c. In steep hills, rough, uneven, and swampy situations, the slide-car may be used, where the other could have no chance to succeed. The average expense of a wheel-car, with wear and tear, may be about a guinea a year, whereas that of the other may not exceed half a crown.[98]

Spoke-Wheel Carts

A natural development in the evolution of agricultural transport in Ireland was fitting the 'common car' with spoke wheels instead of the earlier 'block' variety, and replacing the old wooden a axle which turned rotated with the block wheels, with a fixed iron fitting on which the wheels turned. It is interesting to note that when the vehicle acquired its spoke-wheels and fixed axle, it became known as a 'cart' rather than a 'car'. However, these vehicles frequently retained the box-type body of the older type which had earned it its name of 'low-back' car. The transition from block to spoke wheels in fact, represented a considerable technological advance, and not all Irish vehicle makers managed it successfully. Hely Dutton, the author of the Clare *Survey* writes in 1808, 'Carts are used only by a few gentlemen ; those made in the country are sometimes called Scotch carts, but the principles on which they are made, are little understood by carpenters.[99] Although the term 'Scotch cart' became a popular generic name for a

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[93] Roe, Frank Gilbert, *The Indian and the Horse* (Norman, Okla.,1955), p. 17.
[94] Evans, op. cit.
[95] Clare *survey*, p.65.
[96] Galway *survey*, p. 93.
[97] Cork *survey*, pp 249-50
[98] Tyrone *survey* p.48.
[99] Clare *survey*, p. 64.

variety of spoke-wheel farm vehicle, it properly referred to a design of platform top cart which had been introduced into Ulster from Scotland from which they spread rapidly into the rest of the country.



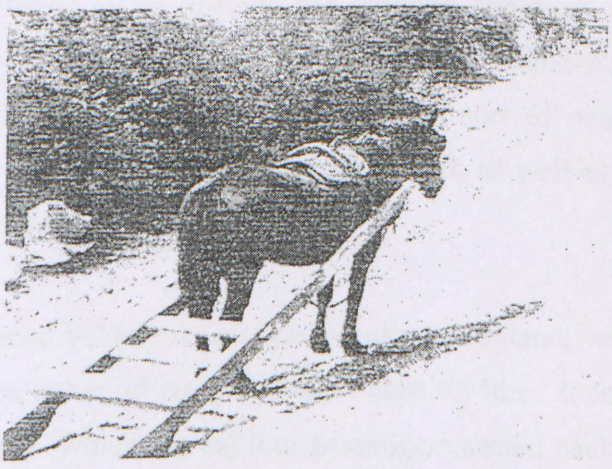
Spoke-wheel or 'Scotch' cart. 20th century. Location unknown. Postcard in private possession.

Scotch carts were are described in the Antrim *Survey* in 1812:

Carts but of a different description, called Scotch carts, are used by the public carriers, to the total exclusion of the common car. Those have not a box ; they have flat backs, made of cross boards for tying on the loading, and with a good horse, will draw from fifteen hundred weight to a ton ; the usual load about eighteen hundred. It is to the diameter of the wheels they are indebted for their powers ; but in ascending hills they are very severe, and in descending not easy ; their proper place is on a level.[100]

In Down: 'In the hands of gentlemen and of some first rate farmers...carts are often preferred to cars ... with small farmers they must hold their place, the expense of the former being above the reach of their finance.'[101]

It will have become apparent from a reading of this chapter, that the use of horse-drawn farm implements and machinery by Irish farmers, especially the smaller ones, had increased dramatically as the nineteenth century progressed. This was due to a number of factors, particularly the effects of the post-war depression in the early part of the century, as well as the ensuing series of famines, together with the effects of these events on patterns of demography and land tenure, and with the co-related processes by which horse power tended to replace spade husbandry, reflecting the numerical decline of the available work force after the Famine of the 1840s, and its effect on general agricultural practices.



Slide-car, Glenlark, Co. Tyrone, early 20th century. National Museum of Ireland.

[100] Antrim *survey*, p. 153.
[101] Down *survey*, p.48.

Chapter Four

The Horse in Urban Life – Public and Private Transport

Prior to the advent of the internal combustion engine, all commerce, industry, and general endeavour in the towns and cities which required any form of draught, traction, or transport, depended on natural horse-power. Though conditions were broadly the same in all of the urban areas of the country, it is propose in the present chapter to concentrate principally, but not exclusively, on Dublin. The horse was omnipresent in the capital as it was everywhere else, and the homely odours of mingled horse sweat, urine and manure would have been all pervasive throughout the entire urban area, not only from the many small yards and stables situated in the back alleys and lanes of the working districts, but evident even in the bustling thoroughfares of the city centre where early photographs show lively street scenes dominated by horse-drawn traffic, and street surfaces littered with horse droppings. The very ubiquity of the horse in so many aspects of city life, requires the present study with its constraints of space and content to be selective to a degree. Accordingly, it is proposed to concentrate on what seems to the writer to be the principal categories of urban horse usage namely, (1) private carriages, (2) hackney cabs, (3) omnibuses, (4) horse-trams, (5) commercial and delivery vehicles, and (6) miscellaneous service vehicles. Furthermore, the question of what sort of people made use of these horses, and for what purpose, will have to be addressed, as well as the role of the horse in the economic and social life of the city.

Jaunting Car

This two-wheeled vehicle which was peculiar to Ireland, was found everywhere in the country. It could be either privately owned or used for hire. It occurred in two varieties, the 'outside jaunting car' which carried four passengers seated back to back with their feet in 'foot-boards' each side, and the 'inside jaunting car' which was a sort of box on wheels entered from the rear. In the latter, the passengers sat facing each other on interior seats, with an extra seat in front for the driver. These vehicles seemed to have originated about 1800 as a development from the 'low-backed' car of the rural peasantry.



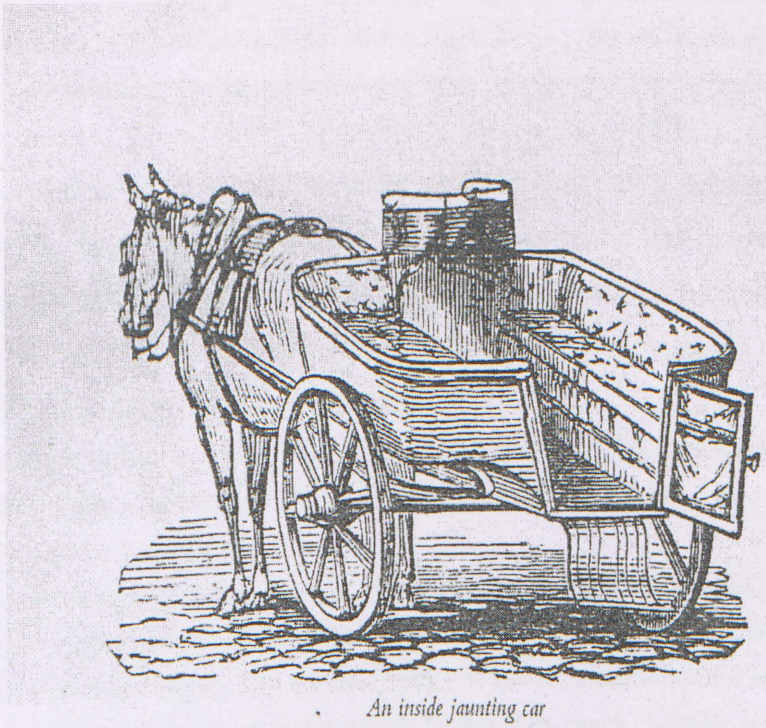
Outside Jaunting Car. Photograph from Lawrence Collection.

In 1805 jaunting cars were seldom offered for sale in the columns of the *Freeman's Journal*, whereas other types of vehicles appear frequently. This would appear to suggest that jaunting cars as a recent innovation, had yet to acquire the popularity that they enjoyed in later years. This view is supported by the fact that in a list of duties and taxes levied on horse-drawn carriages which came into effect on 25 May 1805, jaunting cars were listed as incurring an annual duty of five shillings. As the previous duties were also listed .for each category which didn't contain any reference to jaunting cars, this would seem to suggest that jaunting cars didn't yet exist at the time of the imposition of the previous duty.[1]

In September of the same year, a purchase tax of ten shillings was levied on all two-wheeled carriages, to which category jaunting cars belonged.[2] By 1809, jaunting cars, both new and second hand, were being regularly advertised for sale in the Dublin

[1] *Freeman's Journal*, 5 March 1805.
[2] ibid., 3 September, 1805.

newspapers, and continued to be offered in the columns of the press for the remainder of the nineteenth century.[3]



An inside jaunting car

Inside Jaunting Car. From Hall, *A week in Killarney,* 1843.

Interestingly enough, the outside jaunting car is with us to this day, and still plies for hire among the tourists of Killarney, two hundred years after its genesis in the first years of the nineteenth century. This must make it one of the oldest form of horse drawn transport still in use in this country. From the time of their introduction, jaunting cars aroused the interest of English visitors in particular who were not slow in commenting on what they regarded as quaint Irish vehicles. The English travel writers, Mr. and Mrs. Hall described both the inside and outside varieties of the Irish jaunting car in their account of a visit to Ireland in 1843:

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[3] Newspapers consulted were the *Freeman's Journal* for 1804-5, 1809-10, 1821, 1834, *Irish Times* 1871.

The inside jaunting-car is not often to be hired ; it is usually private property, and is, perhaps, the most comfortable, as well as elegant, of the vehicles of the country. The outside jaunting-car is that to which especial reference is made when speaking of the "Irish" car. It is exceedingly light, presses very little upon the horse, and is safe as well as convenient ; so easy is it to get on and off, that both are frequently done while the machine is in motion. It is always driven with a single horse ; the driver occupies a small seat in front, and the travelers sit back to back, the space between them being occupied by 'the well' – a sort of boot for luggage.[4]

Private versions of the jaunting car, or 'side car' as it was more properly called, were normally better made than those offered for public hire which were 'in general, badly built and uncomfortable.'[5] Other commentators listed what they regarded as the good and bad points of the Irish national vehicle. For example, John Thompson quotes an unacknowledged contemporary source as follows :

The seats are somewhat narrow, a fact which makes this vehicle rather uncomfortable when more than one passenger occupies each side, and renders the position of the unexperienced [sic.] occupant insecure when the car is driven fast round corners.

The 'well' sometimes found between the seats is useful for small packages, but heavier baggage must be roped firmly on the movable lid of the well. The advantages of the "outside car" are that it is cheap ; it is light enough to be drawn easily by a 14-hand pony ; it is well balanced, is not easily upset, and is easy to enter and leave ; altogether it is a very useful vehicle for travel on rough and hilly roads. [6]

However, many inexperienced drivers had difficulty with the vehicle. For example, its width often caused novices who drove it for the first time to collide with gate posts and other vehicles. But its main disadvantage was that the both the driver and passengers were at the mercy of the wind and rain of the unpredictable Irish climate.[7]

For some reason, the 'inside' jaunting car fell out of favour as the century progressed, and it was the 'outside' version of the vehicle which survived into modern times. The catalogue the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853 included a category for carriages. Sixteen Irish coach builders and manufacturers were listed as displaying their products, and of these firms, ten included outside jaunting cars on their stands. One of these establishments, Killinger of Westland Row, exhibited what was described as a new

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[4] Samuel Carter Hall and Anna Maria Hall, *A week in Killarney*, (London, 1843), pp 30-1.

[5] ibid.,

[6] John Thompson, *Horse drawn carriages,* (Fleet,1980), p. 89.Henceforth cited as Thompson, *Carriages.*

[7] Salli Walrond, *Looking at carriages,* (London ,1992), pp 124-26 Henceforth cited as Walrond, *Carriages.*

and revolutionary version of the jaunting car, It had the driver's seat positioned at the back of the vehicle on the style of a London Hansom cab. Another firm, Quan and Sons of Talbot Street, displayed an outside jaunting car of the same model as one ordered by Albert the Prince Consort. In addition, Carlo Bianconi who had revolutionized road travel in Ireland, exhibited one of his 'long cars' which was in effect, an extended development of the traditional Irish outside car[8]. What must have been the ultimate of the jaunting car was exhibited by Patrick Dunne, coach builder, of Kilcock, Co. Kildare, at the Dublin Horse Show of 1881. It was described as 'an improved outside car with a sliding body and shafts divided into parts, so as to suit by means of screws any horse from 12 to 16 hands high'[9]

Private Carriages

Coach building had been a thriving trade in Dublin during the late eighteenth century with forty separate carriage manufacturers carrying on business in the city.[10] An indication of the flourishing state of the industry at that time was the Lord Mayor of Dublin's state coach. This vehicle which was described as being decorated with elaborate carvings and richly gilded made its appearance for the first time drawn by six black horses on the anniversary of King William III's birthday on 4 November 1791. Fifty years or so later, *The Dublin Almanac* lists 84 coach, gig, and car makers actively involved in the trade.[11]

Only a very small percentage of nineteenth century Dubliners could afford to own a private carriage, and that even after the introduction of omnibuses in 1848, the overwhelming majority of city people regularly walked to work, or perhaps took the occasional cab. Carriage ownership was a symbol of high social status restricted largely to the gentry and the well-to-do professional classes, and only the most affluent private houses had stabling attached. Even today, Dublin shopkeepers refer to the top end of the market as the 'carriage trade' However, for aspirants to gentility, carriages could be rented, and many Dublin carriage builders and dealers operated hire-purchase schemes. In addition, the numerous 'job-masters' in the city leased out horses and carriages out in the same way as

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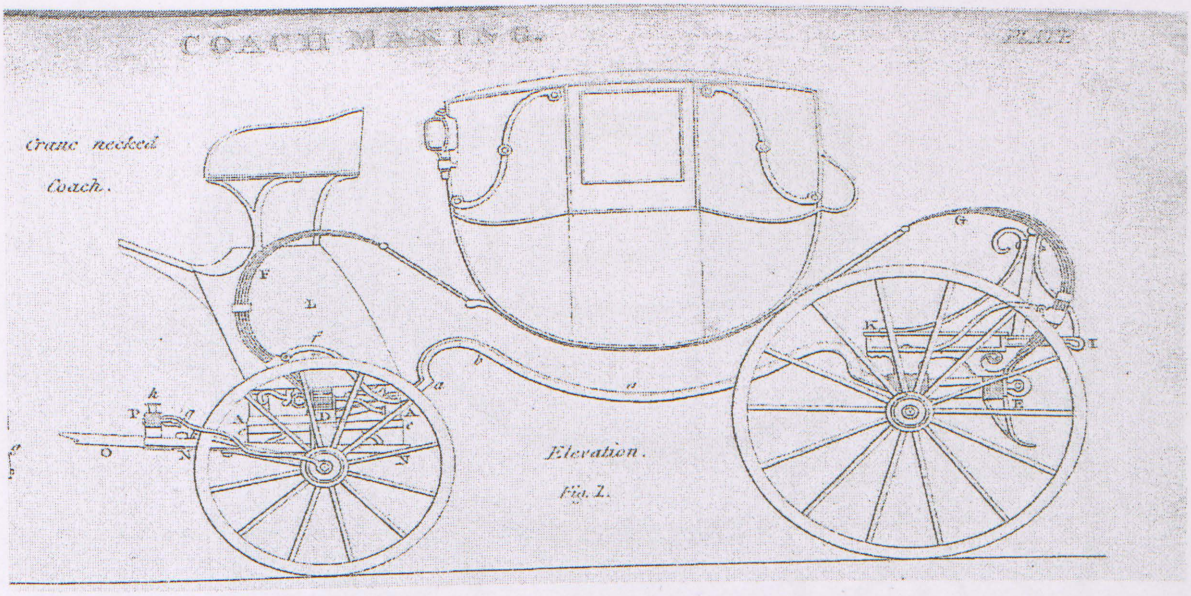
[8] John Sproule (ed.) *The resources and manufacturing industry of Ireland. Illustrated by the Exhibition of 1853*. (Dublin, 1853). Henceforth cited as Sproule.

[9] *Freeman's.Journal,* 31 August 1881.

[10] Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges*, (London, 1946) p. 262.



Town Coach, from Martin, *The circle of the mechanical arts*, 1813

same way as modern car rental firms such as Hertz or Avis do today. There were also a number of livery stables in the city where privately owned horses and carriages could be stabled, and carriages rented. Some Dublin hotels provided similar facilities that were no doubt useful for out of town visitors to the city. For example, Home's Hotel which advertised frequently in the *Freeman's Journal* during the 1830s offered 'Extensive Livery Stables &c. &c.' for the accommodation of its client's horses, as well as 'coaches to every part of the Kingdom.'[12]

Unfortunately, reliable information regarding the number of private vehicles in Dublin at any particular time in the nineteenth century is totally lacking. On the other hand, some broad indication of the types of carriages in use during any particular decade can be inferred by referring to advertisements offering vehicles for sale in newspapers, as well as contemporary prints of street scenes, and during the later years of the century, photographs.

Malton's prints of Dublin published before the end of the eighteenth century, depict a number of four seater 'town coaches' and two seater 'chariots.' In addition, what appears to be a phaeton is shown in the Kilmainham Hospital plate. While these scenes probably

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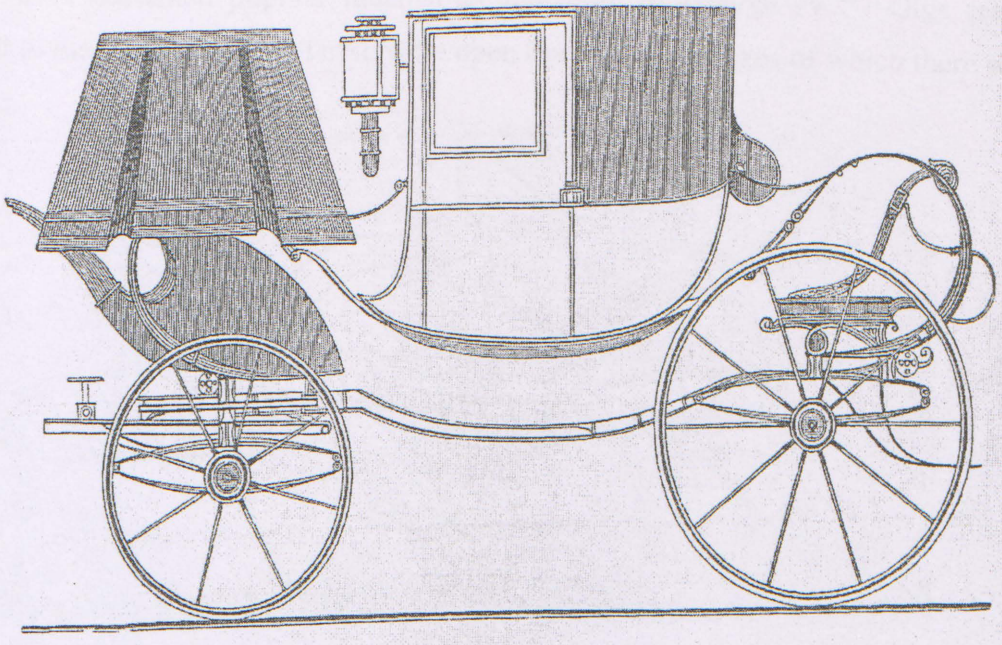
[11] *The Dublin Almanac* 1844.
[12] For example, *Freeman's Journal*, 25 March 1834.



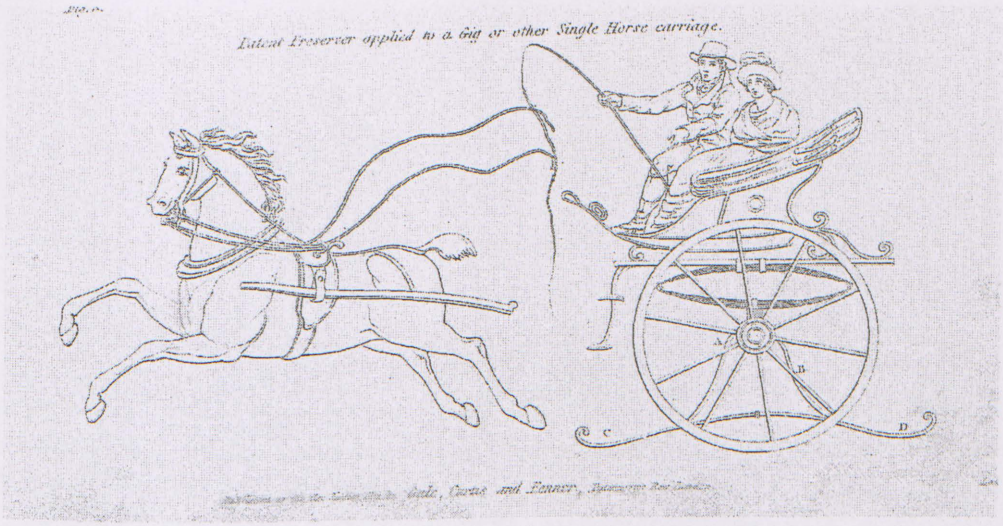
TOWN CHARIOT.

Town Chariot. From Adams, *English pleasure carriages,* 1837.

give some idea of the type of vehicles to be found in the Dublin streets about 1800, the details of these scenes should not be taken too literally, as the human figures and carriages shown in the streets may have been intended by the artist merely to provide scale to the buildings which were the real objects of his interest.

A review of the advertising columns of the *Freeman's Journal* for 1805 reveals that the curricle was widely used in Dublin at that time. This was a type of two wheeled carriage which had originated in Italy during the second half of the eighteenth century, and had become popular in early nineteenth England after 1800 due to its patronage by the Prince Regent. The curricle was drawn by a pair of horses, and was low slung. It was equipped with a folding hood, and had a rear seat for a groom or 'tiger'. This type of vehicle had a reputation for being smart and fast, yet easy to control. However, it does not

appear to have remained popular much after the reign of George IV.[13] Gigs are also mentioned in the Dublin papers. These were open one-horse carriages of which there were



Phaeton with patent safety release mechanism. From Martin, *The circle of the mechanical arts*, 1813

many designs They were regarded as being rather 'sporty'.[14] The ideal horse for gig-work was described as 'good trappers' standing from fifteen to fifteen three hands, and be 'free and fast'.[15]

The cabriolet which was an open carriage equipped with a fold-down hood, and drawn by a single horse, was introduced during the second decade of the nineteenth century. Lord Onslow writing in 1889, reported that :

Very few gentlemen now drive a cabriolet, and of those who do fewer still have a really perfect 'cab' horse, an animal which was once eagerly sought for. In shape he was supposed to be nearly faultless, to stand not less than sixteen hands high, and to have action which could hardly be too extravagant. It was a purely ornamental possession, usefulness being left out of the question. A man who desired such a luxury did not care much what price he paid, It is the most extravagant of single-harness horses. The chariot horse often stands sixteen and a half or seventeen hands high, and for colour bay or brown is usually preferred.[16]

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[13] George Mossman, 'Horse-drawn carriages in the 20th. Century', Dorien Williams (ed.), *The horseman's year*, 1964 (London, 1964), p. 72..
[14] Walrond, *Carriages,* pp 66 – 105.
[15] Lord Onslow, 'The carriage horse', Duke of Beaufort.(ed..), *Driving*, (London,1889), p. 58.
[16] ibid. p. 55.

The postchaise which originated in the eighteenth century was best known as a public transport vehicle, but some were privately owned. It was a four wheeled covered carriage with a front that could be opened, and held two passengers facing forward. It was drawn by a team of horses usually four, and driven traditionally by postillions riding on the near side (left hand side) horses. The chariot or 'town chariot' was rather like a coach with the front cut off leaving a single seat facing forward, hence its French name of the *Coupé* .It was capable of being modified for the purposes of travelling when it became a private post chaise.[17]

Dog-carts which were introduced about 1800 could be either two or four wheeled carriages, the former driven by a single horse, the latter by a pair. The dog-cart was originally designed as a sporting vehicle with a compartment under the seat with slatted vents to accommodate gun-dogs on shooting expeditions. It later became popular with the smart town set. The sociable was a four wheeled open carriage so called because it had two seats facing each other so the occupants could easily converse. It was an old design having originated in the early eighteenth century. It was described by Thompson in the following terms. 'The sociable of a later period, about a century ago was made in the shape of a double-cab body, with and without doors and with or without a driving seat' A feature of this vehicle was that It often had a detachable undercarriage which could also be used with a closed 'chariot' body according to the season.[18]

By 1821 inside and outside jaunting cars were being advertised widely, as well as the occasional chariot. New on the market were dennet and tilbury gigs. Gigs from this period were better designed and better sprung than their earlier predecessors. Dennet gigs, usually drawn by a single horse, had been introduced in about 1816. They were of this improved pattern, and were suitable for both town and country. Designed by an English coach-builder called Bennett, the vehicle which had an improved triple suspension system was believed to have been named appropriately after three fashionable actress sisters called Dennet. The tilbury, called after a well known firm of London coach builders of that name, was introduced in 1820. It was hung at the back with an elbow spring passing from each

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[17] Thompson, op. cit. p. 24, quoting Adams, *English pleasure carriages,* 1837.
[18] ibid. p. 35., quoting Gilbey, *Modern carriages*, 1905.

side of the seat to the ends of a cross spring, supported by iron stays from the hind cross bar. In front there were elbow springs passing from the body to the shafts. Springs were also used between the shafts and the axle. [19] The *Freeman's Journal* ran a front page advertisement for 'Second-Hand carriages for sale at Stephen's Green Coach Factory, 40 Bishop's Street.' These included :

A light barouche, with perch on 'C' Springs, a Swiss carriage having pole and shafts, an outside car with cane panels, a family phaeton with a head, a cab phaeton for one or two horses, a transposing phaeton ; together with a new britzke barouche, having pole and shafts.[20]

The carriages exhibited at the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853, and which presumably formed a representative sample of vehicles then in use, included the products of both British and Irish coach-builders. In addition to the ubiquitous outside jaunting cars, exhibits included barouches, landaus, pony phaetons, different types of dog-cart, broughams, clarences, a hansom cab 'the first built in Ireland', a dress coach, a town chariot, and a Glasgow omnibus[21].

The barouche had originated in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and had been introduced to Great Britain in 1767.[22] It could be drawn by two or four horses. A semi-open carriage, its hood could be raised from the rear half only. Two passengers normally faced a windscreen directly behind the driver's box seat, when the hood was raised. There was frequently a rear seat or rumble for two or more attendants.[23] From 1808, it was the vehicle popularised by the fashionable Four-in-Hand club of London.[24]

The landau, drawn by one or more horses, was an open carriage with a folding hood that had originated in the German town of that name during the later years of the eighteenth century, and had become popular in the United Kingdom after 1800. The earlier versions of the vehicle were built on a substantial perch undercarriage and suspended by oiled leather braces on whip or 'c'-springs. These early vehicles were rather heavy and box-like.

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[19] Walrond *Carriages*, p. 74, Thompson, *Carriages* p. 11.
[20] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 July 1834.
[21] Sproule. pp 179-80.
[22] Walrond,*Carriages.*, p. 206
[23] Smith's *Carriages*, pp 21-2.
[24] Walrond, *Carriages*, p. 206.

However, in 1838, a London coach builder, Luke Hopkins, developed a lighter and more elegant version of the design which he called a brizka landau which was well suited to the variable climate of the British Isles. By the 1850s the new variety of the landau had became the most fashionable English carriage type, tending to replace the old family coach in popularity.[25]

The phaeton which was a light open four wheeled carriage with large wheels, was developed during the eighteenth century. It was favoured by dashing young men and women known as 'high-flyers' on account of their furious driving and the height of the vehicle above the ground. Because of its association with impetuous speed, the carriage was named after the mythical charioteer of the sun god Helios, who apparently had a devil-may-care attitude to his driving. This type of conveyance continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century though later types were much modified and improved.[26] The phaeton required a light harness horse not more than fifteen three hands with a lot of breeding and a good forward action when trotting. Owners of phaetons usually wanted to show off the quality of their horses by using a minimum of light harness in order to display the finer points of their animals.[27] In Ireland the phaeton was often known as the carrick.[28]

The brougham was introduced in 1838-9 by a firm of English carriage-makers Robinson and Cook to the design of Lord Brougham the celebrated Whig statesman. It was intended as a 'refined and glorified street cab that would make a convenient carriage for a gentleman and especially for a man of such independence as one who carried his own carpet bag on occasions when time was important and his own servants otherwise employed'.

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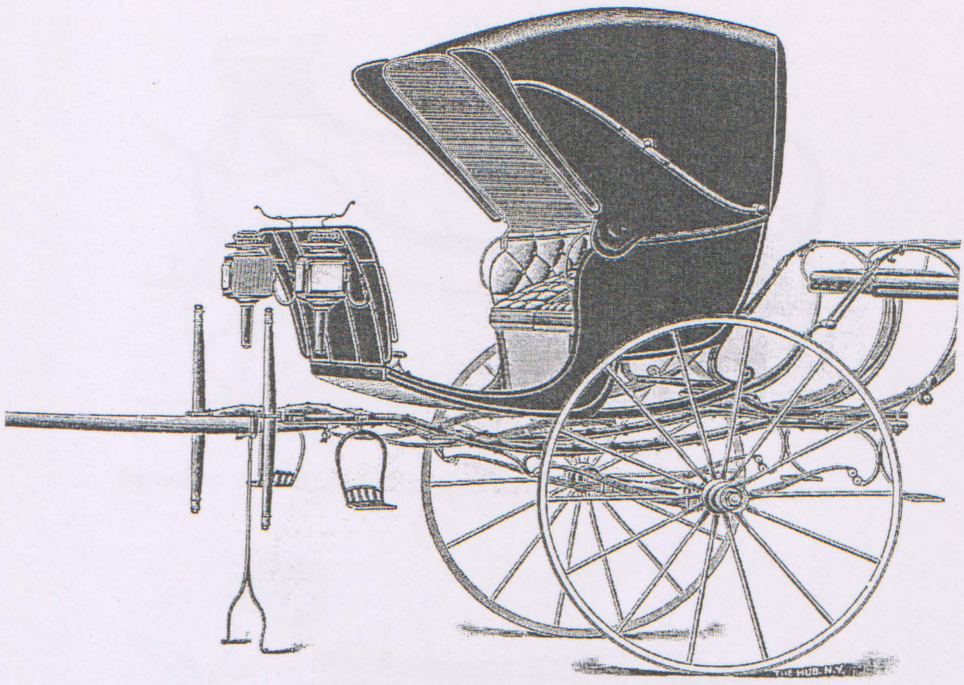
[25] Thompson *Carriages,* p. 35, and Smith's *Discovering horse-drawn carriages*, pp 20-1.
[26] Smith, op. cit., pp 54-5.
[27] Lord Onslow, 'The carriage horse', p. 58.
[28] Jaques Damase (trans. William Mitchell), *Carriages*, (London, 1968), p.83.



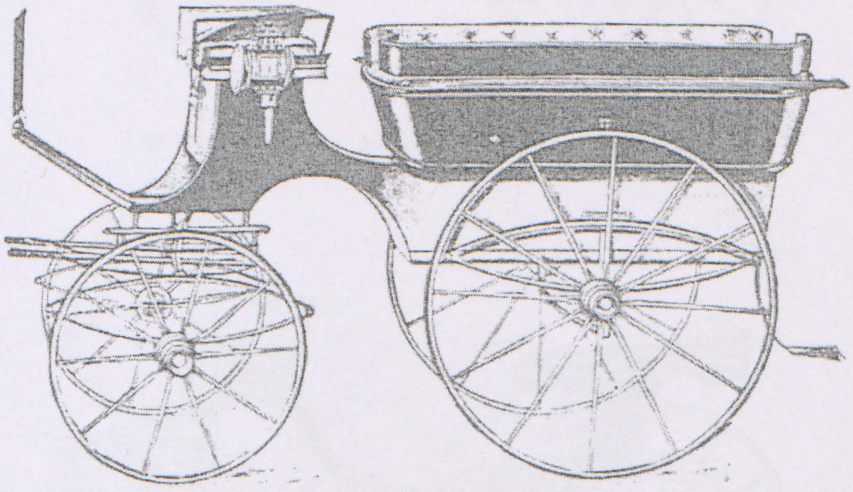
Gig from a photograph in private possession.



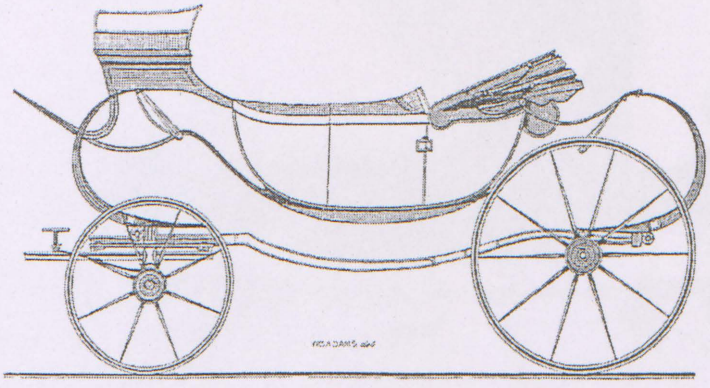
Clarence in an Irish private collection. Photograph by writer.



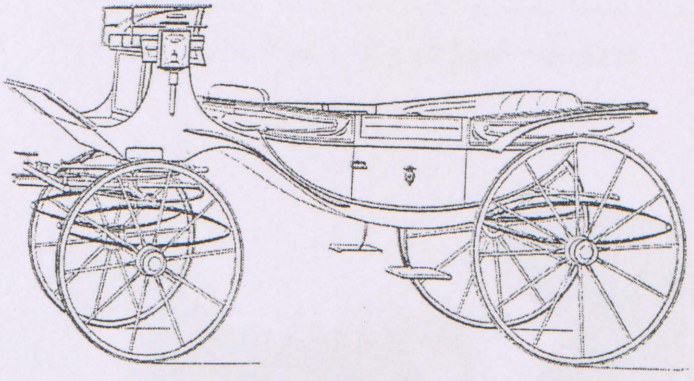
Curricle from Gilbey, *Modern carriages*, 1905.



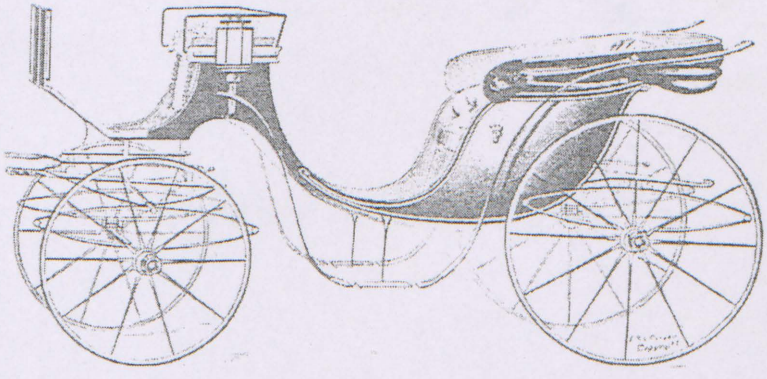
Waggonette from Gilbey, *Modern Carriages.*



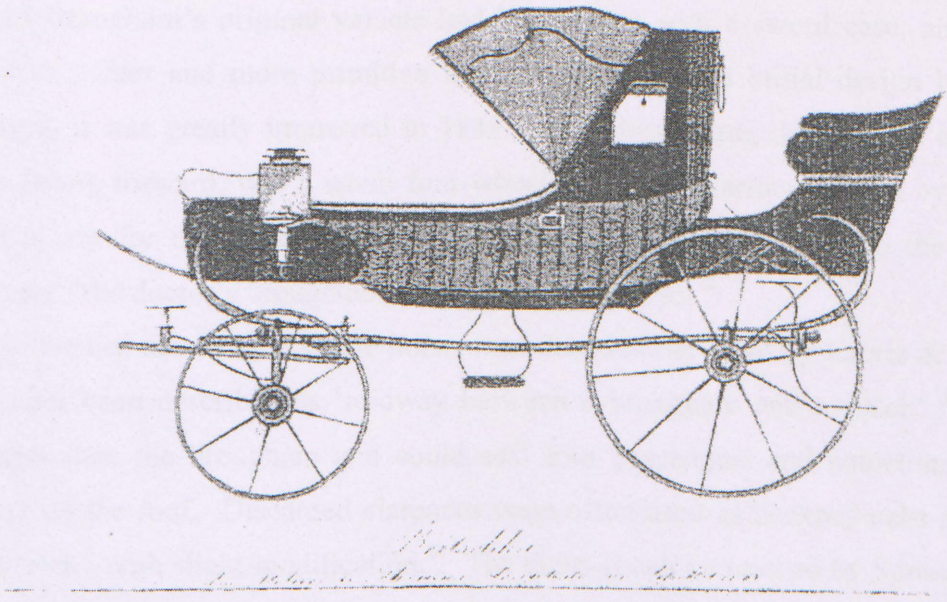
Barouche from Adams, *English pleasure carriages*, London 1837.



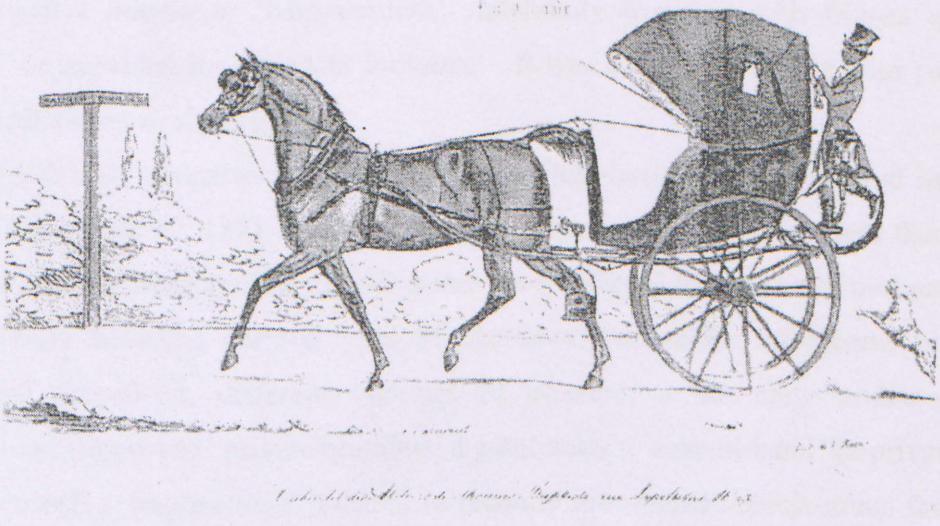
Landau from Gilbey, *Modern Carriages,* London 1905.



Park Victoria from Gilbey, *Modern Carriages.*



Britschka from *Revue du Monde Élégant*, Paris 1829.



Cabriolet from *Revue du Monde Élégant.*

Lord Brougham's original vehicle had been fitted with a sword case, an unusual throw-back to wilder and more primitive times.[29] Although the initial design had some disadvantages, it was greatly improved in 1845.[30] The brougham, designed to carry two passengers facing forward, was a small four-wheeled covered carriage drawn by a single horse with a seat for the driver in front, [31] It was especially popular with the medical profession and 'the doctor's brougham' became a stock phrase.[32]

The clarence drawn by a single horse, introduced about 1842 by Laurie & Marner, of London, has been described as 'midway between a brougham and a coach' [33] It was slightly larger than the brougham and could seat four passengers and sometimes had a luggage rack on the roof. Discarded clarences were often used as hackney-cabs and later designed as such , with slight modification.[34] The dress-coach mentioned by Sproule was a four-wheeled closed carriage of archaic design, drawn by a team of horses. This type of vehicle which was intended for use on ceremonial occasions, was often elaborately decorated and gilded. There was room for four passengers. The box-seat for the driver was covered with a mantle or 'hammercloth' elaborately trimmed with fringes and a rear platform was provided for attendant footmen. It was customary for the door panels to be painted with a crest or monogram.

A series of advertisements by Dublin carriage-builders that appeared in the *Irish Times* of September 12, 1871 indicate some of the types of private carriages that might be encountered on the streets of the capital at that time. Offered for sale were new and second-hand vehicles, including various types of clarences, barouches, broughams including a 'regimental' brougham, different varieties of phaeton, a tax cart, landau sociables, stanhopes, .an 'improved' private omnibus, a gentleman's 'four-in-hand' (a private version of a stage coach), wagonettes, 'T-carts' (a recently introduced vehicle much favoured by military officers) , dog-carts, 'game-carts'(for shooting parties), etc, etc. It is interesting to note that a number of the firms provided easy payment schemes and carriage rental. Robert

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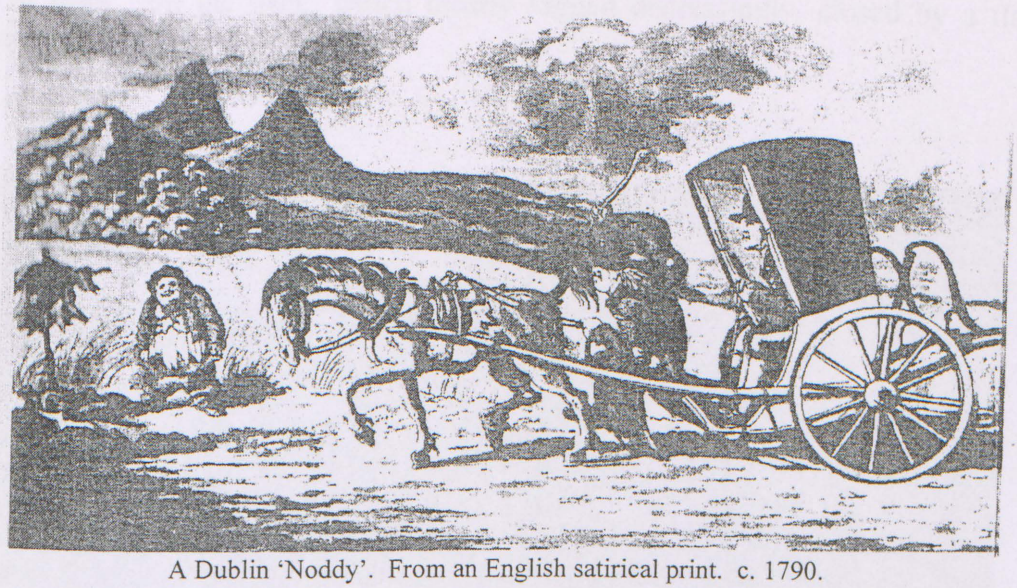
[29] Walrond,*Carriages.*, p. 200.
[30] Smith, op. cit,. p. 14.
[31] ibid., p. 26.
[32] Thompson, op. cit,. p. 54.
[33] Ibid.,. p. 55.
[34] Smith, op. cit., pp 26-7.

O'Grady of 36 Dawson Sreeet offered 'Carriages of every description to be let with option of purchase'. H. E. Brown & Co. of Redmond's Hill could provide 'Carriages on the Three Years' System.' According to Brown's advertisement, carriages were 'also taken in Exchange, or purchased for Cash Estimates given for Repairs, and Competant Men sent to all parts of the Kingdom, to take instruction'. John Colclough and Sons, of 22 and 23 Duke Street, offered carriages 'for sale on the most reasonable terms, or on Hire with option of Purchase'. Anthony O'Neill and Sons, (coach and omnibus builders) of 7 North Strand, could provide 'Carriages to Hire by the Month or Year', while John Hutton and Sons, Dublin, (Coach builders to Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales), offered 'carriages of every description' for immediate sale, or by hire purchase by which carriages could be hired either for one year with the option of purchase at the end of that period, or for a longer period of three or four years after which the carriage becomes the property of the hirer, without any further payment.

It is evident that, with the notable exception of the inside and outside jaunting cars, the carriages used by the well-to-do classes in Dublin during the nineteenth century, were of the same types as those popular with groups of similar social standing in England, and that the carriages used in Ireland were often of the latest and most fashionable designs. The longevity of some of these basic designs is also interesting , as a number of types including the coach, the chariot, the landau, the barouche, and the phaeton had originated in the eighteenth century. And of course, the inside and outside jaunting-cars had also an impressive innings having come into being about 1800. However, many improvements and modifications were made to these older designs during the course of the century, particularly with regard to springing and suspension, in order to bring them up to the requirements of a more technologically sophisticated age. That having been said, one witness interviewed by the 1885 Government Commission on Irish Industry, 'spoke of the decline of coach-building owing to the fact that the gentry no longer ordered their carriages in Dublin, but imported them from London'.[35] In spite of this comment, even if it is accurate, the coach and carriage building trade in Dublin appeared to be a substantial

[35] Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges.*(London, 1946), p. 286.

industry during the late nineteenth century. Its extent and ramifications are revealed by reference to the trade directories of the period.



A Dublin 'Noddy'. From an English satirical print. c. 1790.

Hackney Carriages

There were various types of street vehicles plying for hire in Dublin prior to the end of the eighteenth century. These appear to have been mostly a ramshackle collection of discarded private carriages patched up for the job. A typical one was the 'noddy', a re-cycled private *chaise* which had been converted to a public conveyance by affixing a board to the shafts as a driver's seat.[36] The name was a reference to the bobbing movement of the rig while in motion.[37] The noddy had become obsolete in Dublin around the turn of the century, but was succeeded by the intriguingly named 'jingle', a purpose-built vehicle, so named on account of the tinkling sound it made as it progressed. This contraption was a version of the inside jaunting car equipped with a canvas cover over an iron frame, hence its alternative name of 'covered car'. It was described by Praeger as 'a two-wheeled four-passenger covered affair entered from behind with seats facing each other, the driver

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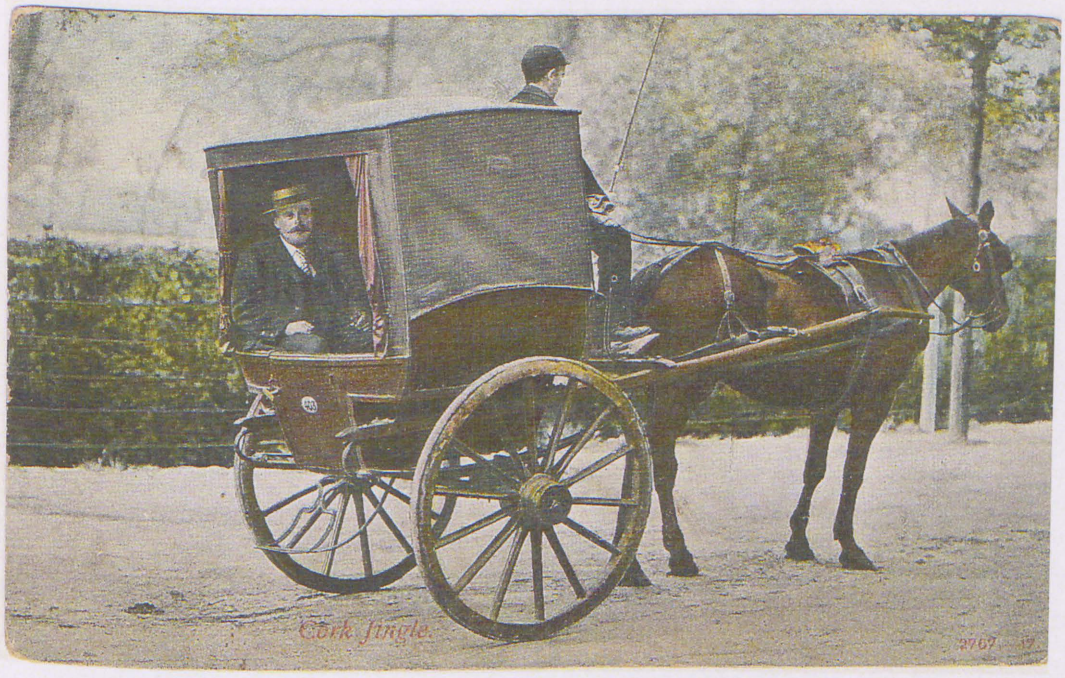
[36] A light two wheeled open fronted private carriage designed to be driven by the single occupant.

[37] R. L. Praeger, *The way that I went ; an Irishman in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1980), pp 18-19, quoting Bush's *Hibernia curiosa*, 1767.

outside in front, and the back, which mostly sagged distressingly, closed by a flapping curtain.[38]

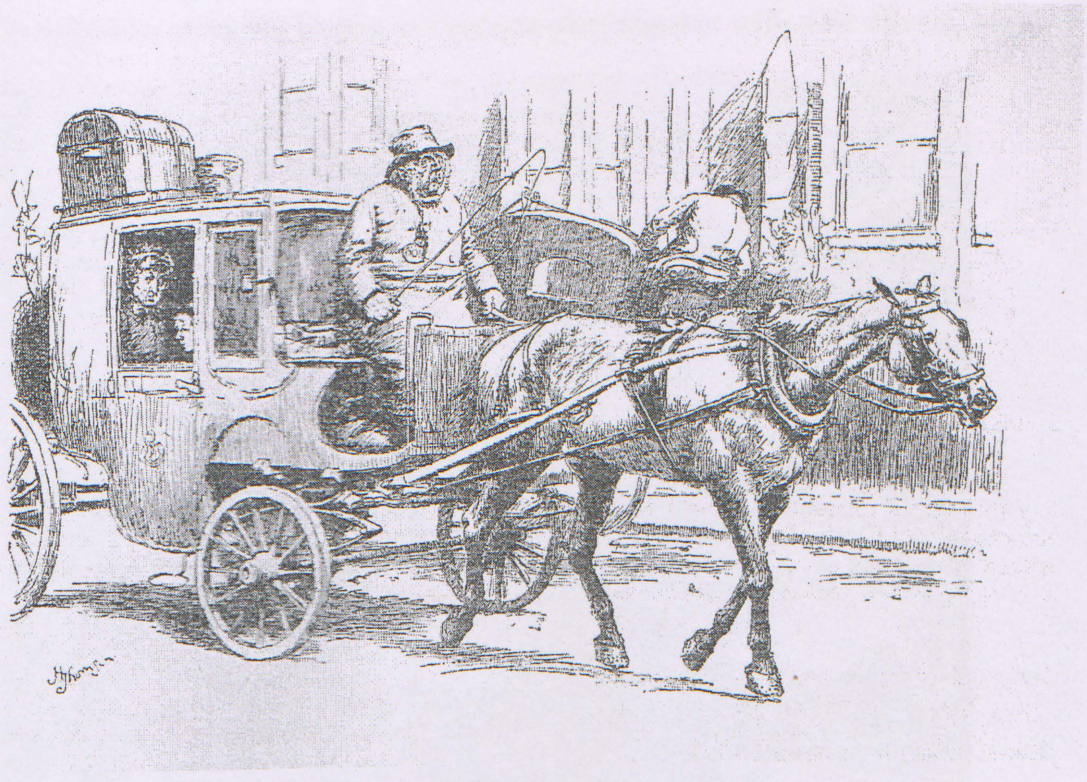


Jingle. Cork, c. 1900. From a postcard. in private possession.

An illustration of this type of vehicle is shown in Mr. and Mrs. Hall's account of their visit to Ireland.[39] Although the later jingles, like the vast majority of Irish horse-drawn vehicles were two-wheelers, the accounts of two English visitors – Sir John Carr (1805) and Mrs. Anne Plumptre (1817) both describe the ones that they encountered as four-wheelers.[40] The principal stand or 'hazard' for these cars in Dublin was at the end of Baggot Street 'where they plied mainly to the Pigeon House and Blackrock at the rate of six pence a person, provided they had a full complement of six passengers'.[41] The jingle, together with the outside jaunting, car served most of the capital's public transport needs

[38] ibid . p. 19.
[39] S.C. and A. M. Hall, *A week in Killarney,* (London, 1843), p. 30.
[40] Anne Plumptre, *Narrative of a residence in Ireland,* (London, 1817), p.55. Also Sir John Carr, *The stranger in Ireland,* (London, 1805), p. 36.
[41] K. B.Nowlan (ed.) *Travel and transport in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), p.52.

during the early years of the nineteenth century when it was described, rather unflatteringly, by J. Coad (pseud, 'Gregory Greendrake') in 1832 as follows :



A London 'Growler'. c. 1890. From Thompson, *Horse-drawn carriages*.

At the Pigeon House were collected a number of vehicles, of which you can form no idea, they are called *gingles* from the gingling or rumbling noise produced by their motion, consequent of their crazy and wretched condition ... The gingle has four wheels, the body like a sociable or berlin, it is drawn by one miserable half starved spectre of a horse, and the driver or *gingleman,* seated in front, exhibits in his person, a most disgusting combination of nudity, dirt, and rags.[42]

On the other hand, the Halls were more positive regarding the jingle which they called 'the covered car' : Our longer journeys in Ireland have been made in this machine; it preserved us from many a wetting, and we endeavoured to remedy the evil of confinement by stopping at every promising spot, and either getting out or making the driver turn his vehicle round, so that from the back, we might command the prospect we desired.'[43]

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[42] Gregory Greendrake (J. Coad) *The angling adventures of Gregory Greendrake*, (Dublin, 1832), p.11
[43] Hall, *A week in Killarney*, p. 30.

Perhaps Mr. 'Greendrake' who also described the jingle as a four-wheeler, was indulging in the then fashionable sport of 'Paddy-bashing' as all public conveyances operating in Dublin including jingles and outside cars, together with their drivers, were



'Growlers' in Rathmines, c. 1895. Photograph from Gorham, *Dublin yesterday*.

strictly regulated by a series of Police Acts [44] and subject to regular inspections in order to

[44] Listed in the introduction to the Dublin Carriage Act of 1853.: 'A Bill to Consolidate and Amend the Laws relating to Hackney and Stage Carriages, etc. 7 July 1853, 16 & 17 Victoria'.

maintain acceptable standards. The Dublin Carriage Act of 1853[45] and its predecessors required all cabs and hackney cars in Dublin to be registered, and all vehicles operating for hire to display an official plate. Drivers were required to wear an official badge, and over-charging as well as the operation of unlicensed vehicles was subject to severe penalties.

Hackney fares operated by zones. In 1844 the regulation charge for four adults within [Zone] A (the area 'within the public lights', i.e. inside the Circular Roads), was ten pence during the day and 1/3d. at night for a 'set-down', and 1/- and 1/6d. respectively in [Zone] B. (the area 'beyond the Circular-Road and within the Royal and Grand Canals').[46] Fares were somewhat cheaper in 1880.[47] Those who wanted to travel further afield naturally incurred extra expense. Overcharging on the part of cab drivers or owners was a punishable offense.[48]

The introduction about 1851 of the more comfortable London-type 'four-wheeler' or 'growler'[49] provided a vehicle better designed to cope with the vagaries of the Irish climate than the jingle , and with a useful luggage rack on the roof, it soon superceded the older type of vehicle in popularity in the capital. Growlers continued to operate for hire in the capital until the end of the century alongside the ubiquitous outside jaunting cars. Although it disappeared in Dublin around the middle years of the century, the jingle continued in favour in other parts of the country, especially the South, into the early years of the twentieth century. Tourist postcards depict them as vehicles typical of Cork. Praeger could 'remember one at Holywood near Belfast with a driver as ancient as itself.'[50] The hansom cab, at that time so popular in London, never caught on in Dublin, though according to the catalogue of the *Irish Industrial Exhibition of* 1853 'some of which may occasionally be seen in this city'.[51]

According to a report in the *Irish Times,* In 1871 there were 1,750 licensed cabs in the Dublin area 'on each of which a tax of £2 was annually paid. There were 1,171 cabs in

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[45] For full title see note on previous page.
[46] *The Dublin Almanac* 1844, p. 45 'Fares of Carriages'.
[47] *Thom's Directory* for that year.
[48] Dublin Carriage Act 1853.
[49] So called because of the rumbling noise made by its wheels.
[50] Praeger, op. cit. p. 20
[51] Sproule, pp 177/8.

the city, on each of which the sum of £1. 4s. was paid annually, producing a yearly rental to Government of £5,000. There were 5,000 licensed drivers in the city each of which paid one shilling, representing an annual sum of £250.[52]

The performance of the horses used in Dublin cabs was described by Lord Onslow in 1889 in his chapter on 'The Carriage Horse' published that year :

The horses in the hack cars in the streets of Dublin are usually 18 hours 5 or 6 days running in the shafts. They get 28 lbs. of oats a day, and think nothing of running you down to Newbridge, over 20 Irish miles (about twenty-five English measure)[53]

An oral history account by John Rearden, a Dublin cabman born in 1906, provides interesting sidelights on the life and work of three generations Dublin 'jarveys' during the era of the horse. It is worth quoting in full :

My father was a jarvey, too, and back to me grandfather. I lived in Railway Street and we kept pigs and a cow with six horses. A jarvey was sort of a handed-down job if your father was in it. I started me apprenticeship driving an ass and cart lugging feed for the pigs. I was in school at the time. They allowed you to get a licence at seventeen. There was no test in regards to driving the horse but you had to go to Pearse Street Police Station to have a test to know the city. We didn't really have to study up because Dublin was a small place at that time. Oh, they'd only ask you about a half dozen places off the main streets. You had a licence for yourself and a licence for the vehicle. It cost a shilling for your driver's badge and a pound a year for the vehicle licence. The badge was a sort of aluminium and some were brass and had the crest of the British Crown on it. A man was supposed to wear that on his breast. The Carriage Office inspected jarvey's on the hazard. They'd check the condition of the vehicle - see that it was clean and safe – and even the horse and harness. You wouldn't know they were coming. And if you weren't wearing your badge that was an offence. You'd be summoned and brought to court and it was a fine.

The horse, he was *one of the family!* He was the main ingredient in the game and you had to look after him. And you'd talk to him. I think that's what made a good horseman, talking to the horse. Oh, there was a real relationship there. He'd be well fed and there were water troughs around the city then for horse cab drivers ... and any horses in the city. And the horses would smell them too! And you'd have to look after his feet in the summertime. You'd put manure on his feet for to cool the hoof. And brush him, keep him clean and healthy. You could get eight or ten years out of a horse in the city. Some men got their horses from Cooper's of Queen Street but my father believed in going to the fairs in the country and buying his own horses. If the horse was unbroken, wasn't used to the harness, you had to break him yourself and get him used to all the things ...

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[52] *Irish.Times,* 10 February 1871.
[53] The Duke of Beaufort, *Driving*, (London, 1889), p. 74 n.

Men took pride in their vehicles. Oh, some of them were able to buy a better horse and rig. Oh, there were some fine vehicles. And you had silver-mounted harness and brass-mounted harness. At that time there was a hackney car, but they called it a side-car. And there were cabs like a carriage, a four-seater, and completely covered over. It was a four-wheeled vehicle with four passengers inside and the driver outside and carried heavy luggage on the roof. They were made by firms here in Dublin like Sanderson's of Dominick Street. I think they cost around one hundred pounds. In the early years men liked the outside and preferred the hackney car but the ladies would sooner have the carriage. And horse vehicles had special candles - carriage candles – in a lamp. They were short but very thick. You just put your candle in the lamp and lit it and it wouldn't go out.

It was up to yourself what you wore. Most wore a soft hat or a bowler hat and a tie. The tie wasn't compulsory but you had to keep yourself reasonably well dressed ... like the jacket I have on now. Out in the weather they nearly all wore a blue menton [sic.] [54] coat over their jacket and some had real oilskins. Side cars were open and we always carried rugs, heavy blankets. So passengers would be covered with a rug, but nothing overhead. And everybody had a whip. Most of the harness makers made whips. Just a piece of cane, a cane handle, with a piece of lash on it composed of leather strips. But there were was some steel-lined whips. Whips was part of the equipment whether you used them or not. It was mostly for show.

We had a hazard at the North Wall where the Holyhead boat come in and the Scotch boat. And you had the Northern Railway and all of O'Connell Street. The docks was busy in the mornings with the arrival of the cross-channel steamers. But there was enough jarveys ... And we'd go to Donnybrook Fair or Strawberry Beds or Lucan. There was the Phoenix Park races and races at Baldoyle, Leopardstown. You might get twenty or thirty going out (together) and it was sort of agreement that you wouldn't be passing one another ... but you'd see some of them doing it. I did trips twelve and thirteen miles out to the mountains up around Enniskerry. And I done the racing at Punchestown and that's about twenty-three miles out with the horse. It was good work for a horseman. [55]

Horse-Omnibuses

The study of Dublin's horse omnibus services which had a comparatively brief existence of only a quarter of a century or so, lasting from their introduction in 1849 until their replacement by horse trams shortly after 1873, has been surprisingly neglected by both modern and contemporary commentators. Like so many transient features of the city, the buses soon became familiar and taken for granted by Dubliners, and after a few brief years vanished into oblivion leaving few traces of their passing. So much so, that references concerning them are surprisingly sparse and hard to find. Accordingly, the present study

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[54] Melton ?

[55] Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin street life and lore – an oral history*, (Dublin, 1991), pp 147-9.

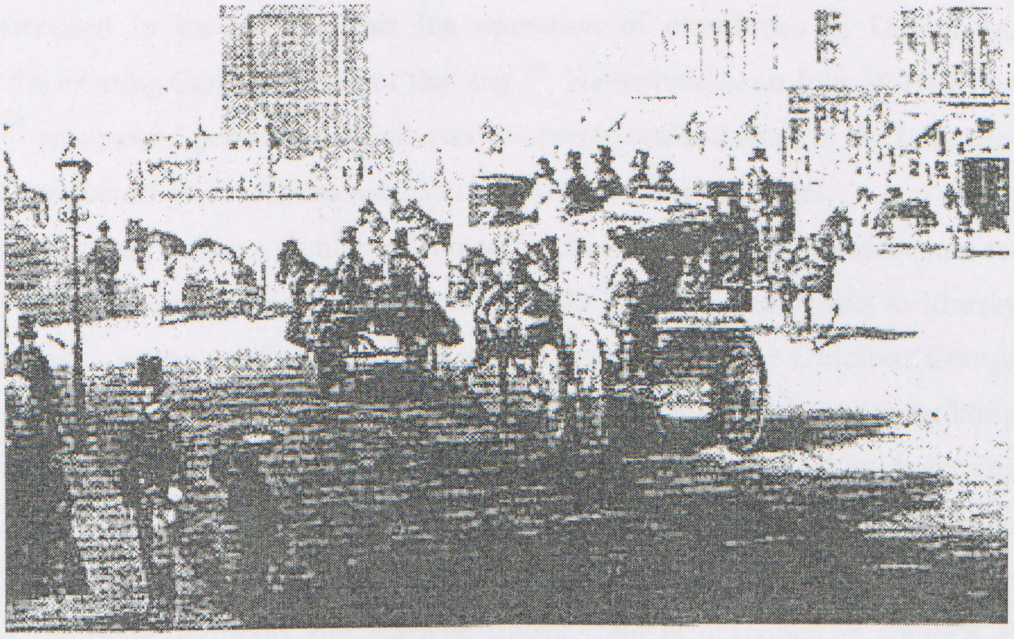


Replica of Shillibeer's 1828 London Omnibus. London Transport Museum, Covent Garden.

has to rely largely on general works on transport in Victorian Dublin as well as the texts of the relevant police and carriage acts, together with a few references in newspapers and some early photographs.

Street vehicles of omnibus type had been operating in Paris during the later years of the seventeenth century under the name of *carrosses à cinq sous*. A hundred years later, a limited service of a similar type using conveyances known as 'stage carriages' was operating in London. These stage carriages ran between one inn and another, and were not permitted to pick up passengers in the street. In Dublin during the early years of the nineteenth century, a vehicle drawn by four horses, known as the 'Long Coach', was used to collect travelers from the packets landing at the Pigeon House.[56] It held sixteen inside passengers and as many outside, and is depicted in a print from Dubois's *My Pocket Book.*

[56] Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges*, op. cit. p. 295. The description was taken from Jeffery's *Account of Dublin.*



Omnibus in Sackville Street, Dublin. Painting by Michael Angelo Hayes 1850. National Gallery.

It looks very similar to Shillibeer's later omnibus.[57] Shillibeer was an English entrepreneur who in 1828 returned to London from France, where he was working as a coachbuilder. He established a stage carriage line which operated from Paddington to the Bank., and called his service *omnibus* (Latin 'for all'), a name which quickly became generic for similar types of public conveyance. Shillibeer's vehicles were drawn by three horses and provided seating for twenty two passengers who paid their fares to a conductor. Passengers were able to board the omnibuses anywhere along the route, however, the legality of this practice was questionable[58]. The original London omnibuses which appeared on 4 July 1829, were in fact, found to be too large for London's narrow streets, and had to be replaced by smaller vehicles which carried twelve inside passengers, and a few more on the roof. The practice of passengers boarding the bus in the street was regularized by the 1832 Stage Carriage Act. From that time forwards, the operation of bus services was legal in Great Britain but not in Ireland.

In 1834 an attempt was made to introduce omnibuses to Dublin, but the scheme was thwarted by a consortium of hackney cab proprietors who, with the aid of an eminent legal

[57] Print reproduced in Constantia Maxwell, *The stranger in Ireland*, (London, 1954).

counsil, succeeded in establishing that the operation of omnibuses in Dublin would contravene the existing Carriage Laws of that city.[59] Nevertheless, on July 28 1848 a new Police Act [60] was passed permitting omnibuses to operate under license in the Irish capital. Drivers and conductors were also licensed and had to wear official badges.

It was not long before a number of competing Irish and English entrepreneurs set up various bus routes operating from the city centre to the suburbs. According to Murray, [61] 'The Rathmines Conveyance Company, and the Inchicore Enterprise Omnibus Company, were joint ventures, but others were set up by individuals already in coach-building or horse- trading businesses.' Some of these individuals are listed in the Dublin directories of the period. One of these was Anthony O'Neill with a business address at 7 Flood's building, North Strand. This individual had business interests in a surprising number of branches of the horse transport and carriage trades. He is described in *Thom's* 1870 directory as a 'coach, gig, car, and omnibus builder and proprietor'. He was also described as a 'Post Office contractor.' It is interesting to note that he built omnibuses in his own carriage works. These were presumably intended for his own business, and perhaps also for sale to other bus companies. In his capacity of coach-builder and dealer, O'Neill advertised frequently in the *Irish Times* offering new and second hand carriages for sale. He also provided a carriage hire service. Anthony O'Neill is also listed under a different address (3 Sackville Place), in the same edition of *Thom's,* as the proprietor of the Dublin and Baltinglass mail coach. It is probable that this is the same person in view of the fact that one of O'Neill's declared functions was that of post office contractor.

Another well known Dublin omnibus proprietor was John Wilson who had operated a similar business in London. He came to Dublin, and established a bus service under the name of the 'Favourite' which ran from the city centre to Terenure, Rathfarnham, Sandymount, and Palmerstown Park. [62] An advertisement which appeared in the *Irish Times* of 13 August 1868 offering building sites in Brighton Square and Garville Avenue in

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[58] Information from the London Transport Museum,
[59] Kevin Murray 'Transport', in Tom Kennedy (ed), *Victorian Dublin*, (Dublin 1980), p. 98. Henceforth cited as Murray.
[60] An Bill for the further Amendment of the Act relating to the Dublin Police. 28 July 1848 -12 Vict. c. 113.
[61] Murray, op. cit. p. 93.
[62] ibid.

Rathgar, listed as an advantage of the area that 'Mr. Wilson's omnibuses pass hourly south of Brighton Square.' Wilson's entry in the 1865 edition of *Thom's* describes him as an 'omnibus proprietor' and lists his business address as 6 Nelson Lane [63], and his private residence as Islington House, Roundtown Road, Rathgar. No doubt he was able to travel to work in one of his own buses.

Mention is also made of a 'Flood's 'Shamrock Line' which served Clontarf.[64] The proprietor may have been Thomas Flood car owner and provision dealer of Coolock whose name appears in the 1870 edition of *Thom's*. An address in that area would be appropriate for a bus line serving the northern suburbs. According to a letter in the *Irish Times* bus fares were fourpence per journey in 1868 which seems rather expensive for the time, though a lot cheaper than a hackney car. [65]

During the 1870s, Dublin bus services seem to have been rather sporadic, with services better to some suburbs than others. An indignant letter signed 'One of the Disappointed' writing to the Editor of the *Irish Times* of 12 September 1871 laments:

Sir – Will you allow me to appeal to you to raise your powerful voice to remedy a grievance under which the inhabitants of Sandford and Ranelagh labour with regard to the bus hours. While Rathmines is favoured with one about every ten minutes, the poor Sandford folk must wait three quarters of an hour, and unless they go down to the Pillar (from perhaps, Stephen's Green) , to secure a seat, may see the Clonskea bus arrive chock full, and must either hire a cab or wait another 45 minutes and arrive late for dinner. Donnybrook, a less populous neighbourhood, enjoys a half hourly bus, and I feel sure that if the Clonskea bus made the journey every half hour or twenty minutes, it would pay well, as many persons have assured me they take the Rathmines bus to Richmond Hill or Castlewood rather than wait the chance of the Clonskea. Excuse my trespassing, but our only hope of redress is the *Irish Times*.

The truth of the matter is of course that, at that time, omnibus services in Dublin were operated by a disparate and unregulated assortment of entrepreneurs motivated solely by profit and totally lacking in any altruistic notion of providing a public service if it didn't pay them well to do so.

The late arrival of omnibuses on the Dublin scene in comparison to other cities in the United Kingdom ensured that when they did arrive they were of the most advanced

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[63] Nelson Lane ran from Earl Street North, to Sackville Place.
[64] Murray, p. 93.
[65] *Irish Times*, 13 August 1868.

type. Bus design had evolved considerably in England since Shillibeer's original model of 1829 for their time The earliest London buses had been single deckers, However, by the 1840s it was realised that if a ladder was provided, the more adventurous passengers could clamber onto the roof when the inside cabin was full. Later models were provided with a spiral staircase and a two-sided bench seat known as a 'knifeboard' along the length of the roof where passengers could sit back to back, in contrast to lower deck passengers who sat on benches along the sides of the cabin. In addition, 'decency boards' were provided to prevent upper-deck lady passenger's underwear being exposed to the lewd gaze of passers-by in the street, and to form a safely barrier to prevent 'upstairs' passengers falling off in the case of a sudden stop or jolt. These boards carried advertising slogans on the outside which earned useful extra revenue for the bus companies. The few early photographs in existence that show Dublin omnibuses crossing Carlisle Bridge before it was widened and re-named O'Connell Bridge in 1880, reveal that they were of 'knife-board' design.

While the number of horses employed by the Dublin omnibus services during the period in which they flourished, is, and probably shall remain unknown, a useful sidelight is provided by F.M.L. Thompson in a pioneering article. Referring to the operation of London buses during the reign of Victoria, he states that it required an average of eleven horses to keep each bus in service. It would therefore seem reasonable to assume that much the same conditions applied to Dublin where the vehicles were very similar in design to those in the British capital. [66]

Photographs in the National Archives occasionally show private omnibuses maintained by establishments such as hotels and large estates for the use of guests etc. These vehicles were frequently used for such duties as picking people up from stations, hence their alternative name of station bus or opera bus. They were also used to provide an extra amenity for parties on sporting occasions such as the races where they were frequently used as private grandstands for the proprietor's friends.[67]

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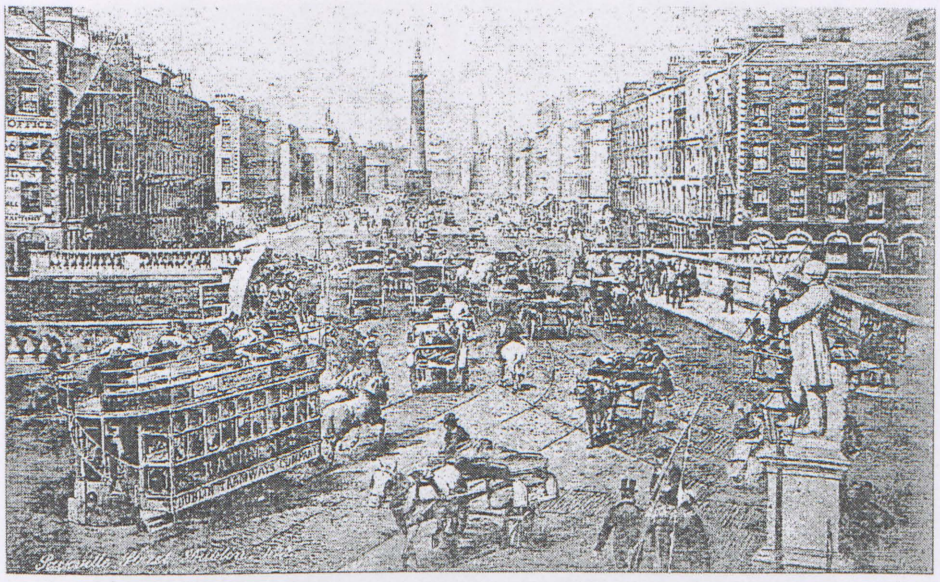
[66] F. M. L. Thompson, 'Nineteenth century horse sense', *Economic History Review,* XXIX , 1976, p. 65.
[67] Walrond,, *Carriages*, p. 168.



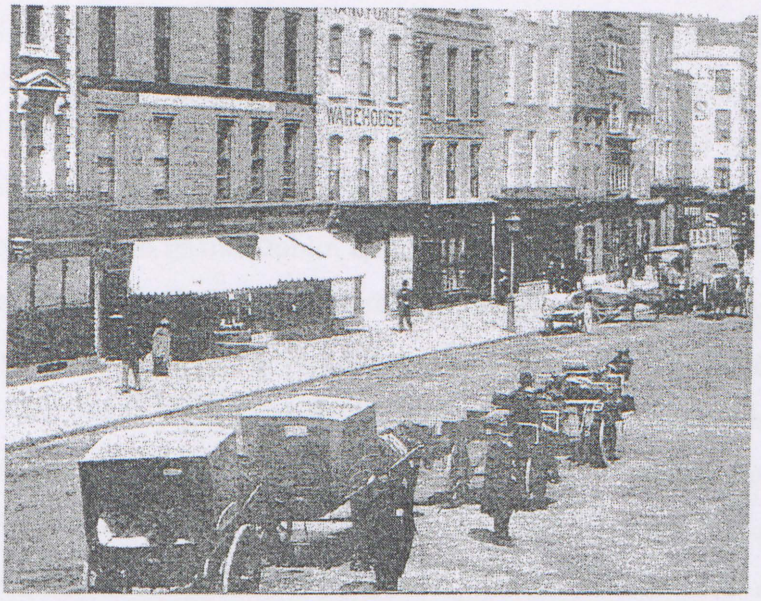
Horse tram crossing Carlisle Bridge (later O'Connell Bridge) 1872. Retouched photograph from Corcoran, *Through streets broad and narrow.*

Horse Trams

Unlike the case of the Dublin omnibuses which attracted little attention either from contemporary commentators or from the present generation of transport historians, Dublin horse trams have been reasonably well documented largely by a group of modern tramway enthusiasts mostly centred round the National Transport Museum at Howth Castle. This group though interested principally in the nostalgic appeal of the later electric tramways, have nonetheless given a good deal of attention to the earlier horse drawn conveyances from which the later electrified cars evolved. Indeed, some of the earliest Dublin electric trams were the older horse drawn vehicles converted for the new power source. Much research on this subject has been published in an excellent book by the president of the society which runs the National Transport Museum. [68]

An additional source of information are the contemporary newspapers which provide a considerable amount of data and comment on the operation of the Dublin

[68] Michael Corcoran, *Through streets broad & narrow*, (Leicester, 2000). Henceforth cited as Corcoran.



Jingles in Patrick St.,Cork, c. 1895, *Sights and Sounds in Scotland & Ireland*



'Knife-board' horse tram , O'Connell Bridge, Dublin, c. 1895. *Sights and Sounds in Scotland & Ireland.*

tramways during the period covered by this study. Also, during the last quarter or so of the nineteenth century, the art and techniques of photography had been greatly improved since the early days of Fox-Talbot. Dublin, during the years 1875 – 1897 is well documented in photographic archives such as the Lawrence collection. This quarter century coincided with the high period of operation of the Dublin horse trams, and photographs of the city centre taken at that time commonly show these interesting vehicles plying the city streets.

Horse trams were in fact more technologically advanced than the horse omnibuses as it had been proved by early mining practices, later adapted to railway technology, that a vehicle running on tracks required less effort to pull than one mounted on wheels in contact with the ground. And when rails were used the burden on draught horses was reduced considerably. A pioneer of urban rail systems was an Irish-American coach builder named John Stephenson, who in 1832, designed and built a horse drawn street car which ran on rails in New York. By 1859 his idea had spread to Europe, and was taken up in Britain and other countries. These vehicles became known as trams, taking their name from a Low German word for the wooden beam or baulk used to run trolleys on during mining operations. [69]

Legal provision for the operation of tramways in Ireland had been laid down by the Tramways (Ireland) Acts of 1860 and 1861 and a scheme for their introduction to Dublin was proposed by an American entrepreneur, George Francis Train in 1861.[70] This individual had been operating a tram service in Birkenhead, Cheshire, since the previous year, using vehicles capable of carrying twenty passengers.[71] Under the name of The City of Dublin Tramways Company, Train proposed the construction of two tramway systems for Dublin which would link Rathmines and Clontarf with the city centre. The Rathmines commissioners were enthusiastic about the scheme, but it was never implemented as an experimental track laid in 1861 from Kingsbridge station to the exhibition hall at Earlsfort Terrace proved to be unsuccessful and had to be removed. The reason given was that the

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[69] Corcoran, p. 8

[70] Mary E. Daly, *Dublin the deposed capital, A social and economic history*, (Cork, 1981), p. 171. Henceforth cited as Daly.

[71] David Kaye, *Old buses*, (Aylesbury 1982), p. 4.

rails were raised too high above the surface of the street, and constituted a potential obstruction for other vehicles.[72]

In 1870 a new scheme for a tramway system in Dublin was submitted by a consortium of Dublin and London businessmen operating under the name of The Dublin Tramways Company. Their proposal was accepted, and the rights of the old City of Dublin Tramways Company together with those of the Rathmines omnibuses were bought out. Rail systems were laid down to provide tram services from the city centre to Rathmines, Donnybrook, Sandymount and Clontarf, as well as a line from Kingsbridge Station to the North Wall.[73] On February 1, 1872, the first trams ran from College Green to Rathmines. Four cars were used, and the fare was 3d. [74] In retaliation the omnibus company reduced their fare to 1d. However, they were unable to compete, and by August it had been bought out by the tramway company.[75]

Notwithstanding considerable publicity and the very considerable financial investment on the part of the tramway company, substantial numbers of the Dublin citizenry had yet to be convinced of the benefit of urban rail travel. Of the four lines in operation in 1874, only the Rathmines route was 'highly successful', the Sandymount and Donny-brook routes were described as 'fairly successful' while the Clontarf route was 'a disappointment'[76] These disappointing results resulted in resignations from the board of the Dublin Tramways Company. However, one of the retired directors William Barrington, lost no time in forming a new company the North Dublin Street Tramways Company to provide a transport service to those northern suburbs not yet linked to the existing tramway system.[77] The proposed routes of the new enterprise included services to Drumcondra, Glasnevin and the Phoenix Park. In 1876 this company extended their plans to include 'lines through much of the central city reaching Kilmainham.'[78] As a cost saving measure, the N.D.S.T.C. proposed the introduction of American-style one horse single-deck vehicles

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[72] Daley, p. 171.
[73] Corcoran, . p. 10.
[74] Daley,. p.172.
[75] *Irish Times.* 12, August 1872.
[76] *Irish.Times.* 14 August 1874.
[77] Corcoran, . p. 16
[78] Daley, p.172

operating without conductors.[79] In 1878 a completely new tramway company entered the arena. This was the Dublin Central Tramways Company. It seemed to have co-operated to a large extent with the N.D.S.T.C.. and shared some of its central city trackways as well as its terminus at College Green. On July 13, 1880, the three Dublin tramway companies merged to form the Dublin United Tramway Company. The new enterprise which had its head-quarters at 31 Lower Sackville Street, inherited 32 miles of track and 137 tramcars from its constituent predecessors. The D.U.T.C. was reported to have carried four and three quarter million passengers during the first six months of its existence, and on December 31 1882, was reported to have 136 trams, three omnibuses[80] and 936 horses.[81] This would indicate that at this stage of Dublin tram operations, an average of about six horses was required to keep one vehicle in operation.

To complicate the situation further, two additional tramway companies not at that time associated with the D.U.T.C, had earlier entered the scene, The Dublin Southern District Tramways Company which had opened on March 19, 1879 to service Blackrock, Kingstown and Dalkey. The second concern, rather confusingly named The Blackrock and Kingstown Tramways Company, had been formed in 1883 to service those parts of the above-mentioned southern suburbs which were not served by the D.S.D.T.C. [82]

As regards the type of people that used the trams, fares in Dublin were in fact, generally higher than those in London [83], and the Dublin tramways were mainly utilised by the more affluent rather than the poorer and labouring classes. An report in the *Freeman's Journal* summarizes the position:

The Dublin Tram Company has turned out very remunerative and in some respects a useful institution, excellent returns to its proprietors, and proving of great convenience to passengers of the genteel and well to do class. The company has however failed to confer

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[79] Corcoran, ibid.
[80] Omnibuses were used by the D.U.T.C. for a summer service between Rathmines and Merrion. Corcoran, p.21
[81] Corcoran, p. 18.
[82] Ibid,. p. 22.
[83] Daley, . p. 174.

equal advantages on the working or labouring class. There is a sole provision of one car each way before 7 a.m. and one after 6 p.m. at 1d per mile. [84]

Commercial and Service Vehicles 1800 - 1850

While early horse drawn farm vehicles and private carriages have attracted the attention of specialist historians and collectors, and a substantial number of specimens have been preserved in museums and private collections, the humbler commercial and trade vehicles, which were once an everyday sight in Irish towns and cities, appeared to have received little or no attention from historians, though several studies have been made of similar vehicles in England. The probable reason for this is that while private carriages which were often fine examples of the coach-builder's art, were frequently regarded as being worthy of recording and preservation, and a renewed interest in agricultural history has resulted in the preservation and study of Irish agricultural vehicles by several academic institutions and specialist collections such as those in the Irish Agricultural Museum at Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Co. Down, as well as some private collections.

The humble and unpretentious trader's carts and drays, which were once a common sight in the streets of nineteenth century Dublin, were almost invariably discarded and broken up when they had come to the end of their useful life. The result is that few if any, have survived to this day and information concerning them is hard to come by. Consequently, the researcher is compelled to rely on such data that can be obtained from non-Irish sources, as well as contemporary photographs, trade catalogues and directories, newspaper advertisements and the like.

The evidence is, that for the first half of the nineteenth century at least, the majority of horse drawn commercial vehicles operating in the capital were two wheeled carts, and that four-wheeled wagons were rarely used in the city [85] To judge from early prints of Dublin such as Malton's, apart from private and public transport, the majority of vehicles plying the streets of the capital during the first decade or so, were the ordinary block-

[84] *Freeman's Journal* 11 March 1878.

wheeled carts used by the peasantry no doubt contracted for haulage and other commercial requirements. They are frequently shown carrying water barrels indicating that they were employed in street cleaning. As the century progressed these traditional carts would have been gradually replaced by the 'scotch' carts which succeeded them. Another class of vehicles plying the streets of Dublin were the brewer's drays. While those used in England could either have two or four wheels, the drays used in Dublin at least during the first half of the century, were usually the two-wheeled variety, conforming with the national predilection for two-wheeled vehicles which were also, of course, easier to manouvre in narrow city streets.[86] Four wheeled brewery vehicles drawn by heavy draught horses such as Clydesdales came more into use as the century progressed.[87]

Other common vehicles in early nineteenth century Dublin were builder's carts. While they no doubt, used ordinary farm-type carts for some purposes, the haulage of heavy stone building blocks and similar material to building sites required specially designed vehicles. These consisted of a type of sturdy, panel sided, carts with straight shafts which required two or more horses to draw. They had typically large wheels and a cranked axle enabling it to be low-slung for easy loading.

Hearses and funerals would have been a familiar sight in the city. And although the standard box-shaped hearse, with glass paneled sides, drawn by a pair of black horses with sombre black plumes, was not developed until about 1850.[88] However, similar vehicles would have been available to undertakers before that date, and the degree of pomp and elaboration of the funeral cortège would have reflected the status of the family of the deceased. The poorer classes would probably have to make do with the coffin on a flat cart.

Commercial and Services V ehicles 1850 – 1900

A greater diversity of commercial vehicles appeared on the streets of towns and cities of Ireland during the second part of the century. This phenomenon reflected the growth of an urban middle class with money to spend. The great majority of urban trade

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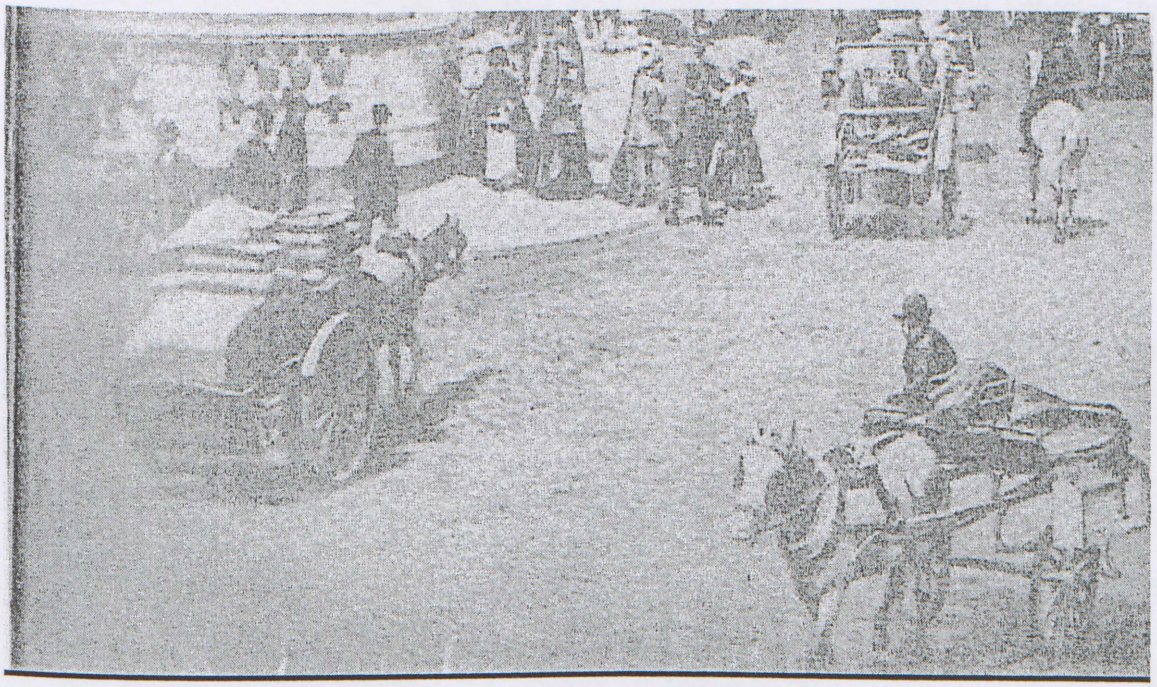
[85] This is in accordance with a well established national preference for two-wheeled carts over four-wheeled wagons which is further explored in chapter 3.
[86] One loaded with three barrels is shown in Malton's print of St. Catherine's Church, Thomas Street.
[87] See photographs in the Guiness archives.

vehicles were still two-wheeled carts of various types.[89] Many of those appearing in early photographs were two-wheeled, general purpose floats. These were low-loading, carts with characteristically large wheels used for a variety of tasks [90]. The earliest reference the present writer could find to one of these vehicles was an 1834 advertisement for 'A new float to be sold. Built by a first-rate hand' [91] Contemporary photographs also show what were known as 'spring carts'. One of these vehicles appears in an undated photograph of



A builders cart and a jaunting car crossing Carlisle Bridge c. 1870. Note the man on the horse on the top right corner. Detail from photograph. Gorham, *Dublin yesterday*.

Grafton Street by an unknown photographer. [92] A painted name can be made out – J. Henderson and Son. An entry in the 1870 edition of *Thom's Directory* lists J. Henderson as the proprietor of a 'wholesale and retail trimming warehouse' with an address at 36 New Row, West. The design of the vehicle is very similar to a 'tradesman's spring cart' which appeared in the 1894 catalogue of The Bristol Wagon and Carriage Works Company

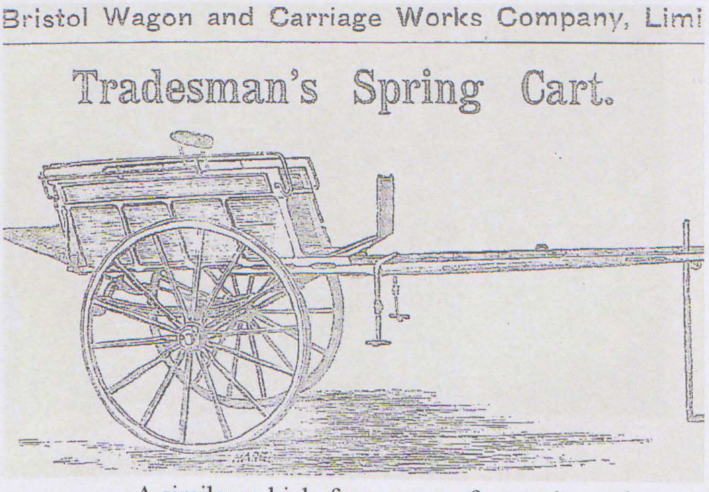
[88] D. J. Smith, *Discovering horse-drawn commercial vehicles* (Aylesbury, 1977), p. 56.
[89] Four wheeled vehicles only appear in any numbers at the very end of our period.
[90] Smith, op. cit. p. 18.
[91] *Freeman's Journa.* 5 February, 1834.
[92] This photograph appears on the cover of Maurice Gorham, *Dublin Yesterday.*

Limited.[93] Locally built vehicles of very similar design continued to be produced until well into the twentieth century, and almost identical examples dating from the 1920s are preserved in the National Transport Museum, Howth.

Brewery drays are perhaps the best documented of the commercial vehicles that plied the Dublin streets prior to 1900. Reference to photographs in the Guiness archives reveal that, at least in the case of that particular firm, both two-wheeled and four-wheeled drays were employed. The majority of the photographs are undated. However, such dating information that can be inferred by details of the draymen's costume etc., would suggest that the two-wheeled vehicles tended to be earlier in date than the four-wheeled.



Cart,c. 1890. Photograph from Gorham.



A similar vehicle from a manufacturer's catalogue.

Coal carts were another feature of the Dublin streets. Even the late ones seemed to be mostly two wheelers. A photograph from circa 1880 in the National Archives shows coal being unloaded from a sailing collier onto Custom House Quay. It is being collected by a number of two-wheeled drays. [94] A photograph of about the same date shows one of these vehicles in College Green.[95] The name of the coal merchant is discernable on the cart. It is S. N. Robinson of 21 City Quay, and 2 Ely Place, and the 1880 *Thom's* lists this business at the given addresses.

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[93] Parts of this catalogue are reproduced in Thompson's *Horse-drawn trade vehicles.*
[94] Gorham, op. cit,. plate 47.
[95] ibid., plate 14.

Another of Gorham's plates (13) of approximately the same date, shows a two-wheeled laundry van parked outside the Bank of Ireland in College Green. The name 'St. Mary Magdelen Asylem , Donnybrook' is clearly visible on the side. Reference to *Thom's* (1880) reveals that this was an institution for 'female penitents', offering 'washing and all kinds of needlework executed.' Contemporary laundry vans in England appear to have all been four-wheeled vehicles.[96]

A piano van is shown in Westmorland Street near the Bank of Ireland, in one of Lawrence's photographs dated 1887. The name Cramer, Wood and Co. is clearly visible on the side. The vehicle appears to be very similar to one in a water colour painted



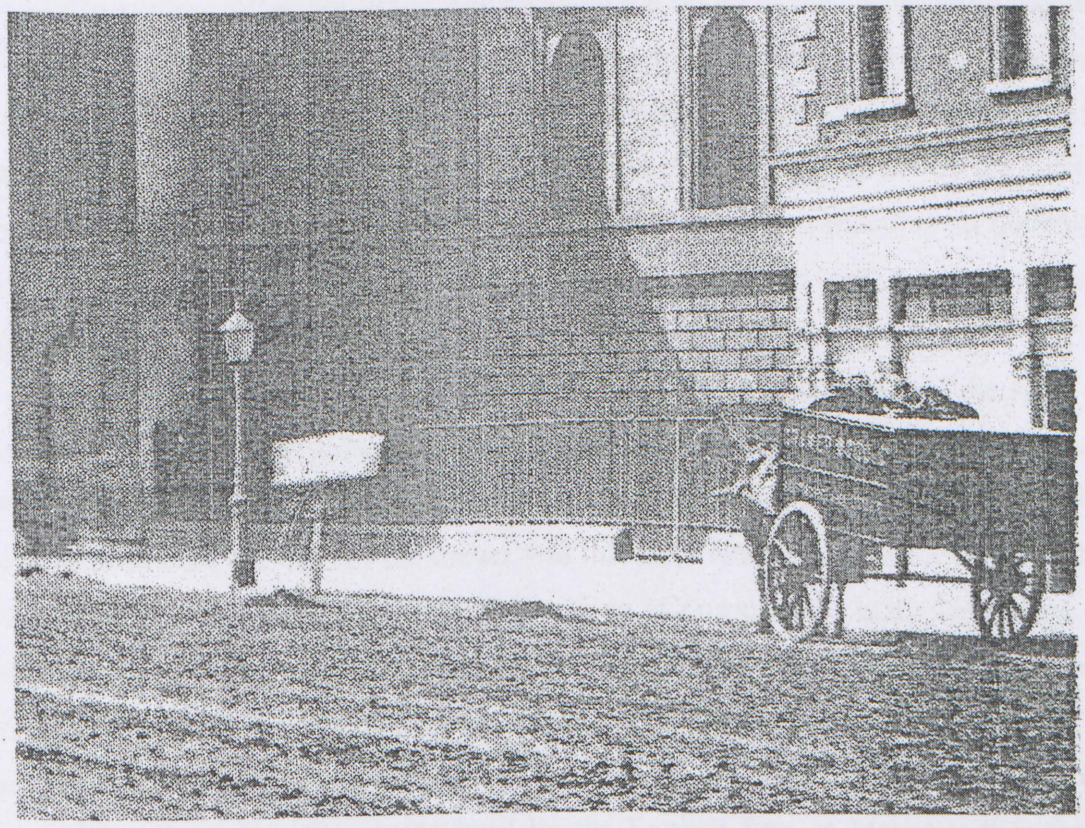
Brewer's dray, c. 1890. Photograph from the Guinness archives.

in London *circa* 1873.[97] Cramer Wood is listed in *Thom's* as a 'pianoforte gallery and music warehouse' with an address at 4 and 5 Westmorland Street. The firm advertised extensively in the newspapers, claiming to be 'the oldest established music warehouse in Ireland'.

As mentioned above, the type of horses used to pull commercial vehicles in the cities were mostly similar to those used for agricultural purposes in the country. Many of

[96] See Smith, *Discovering horse-drawn vehicles,* p. 25, and Thompson, *Horse-drawn trade vehicles.*

these were supplied by contractors and jobmasters who were the equivalent to modern car hire firms. For slow work such as that of commercial travelers, which many stops over short distances, the quality of the horses required was not so important, even though they were expected to spend a full working day of eight hours in the shafts. For quicker work such as butcher's and newspaper delivery vehicles, smart fifteen hand cobs were ideal, as some of them were required to average over twenty miles a day rapid work, though with many stops The contemporary working week was six-days, with Sunday off. However, it was the custom for businesses to keep spare horses, so that each horse got two days rest a week.[98]



Piano Van outside Cramer, Ward & Co., Piano Warehouse 4 and 5 Westmoreland Street, Dublin. Lawrence Collection, 1887. Note the road surface strewn with mud and manure.

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[97] From an nineteenth century collection of paintings by William Francis Freelove, published only in 1971 by Jennifer Lang (ed.) *An assemblage of 19th. century horses & carriages.* (London 1971).
[98] Lord Onslow, 'The carriage horse', op. cit. p.71.

The Dublin Fire Brigade

Before the establishment of the municipal Fire Brigade in 1862, the responsibility for fire control in the city and elsewhere was largely the business of individual establishments, and firms like insurance companies which maintained their own fire fighting teams for the protection of their own clients.

The Dublin Fire Brigade had its headquarters at the White Horse Yard off Winetavern Street together with a second premises at Coppinger Row off South William Street. In 1872 the Fire Service had state-of-the-art equipment for the time including two Shand Mason horse-drawn steam pumps.[99] Each fire-fighting team had two vehicles, the steam pump and the tender. When the alarm was received the boiler of the steam pump would be lit as the horses were being harnessed, and steam pressure would mount while the apparatus was galloping to the fire. The captain and one or two men would go with the pump while the second vehicle, the tender, conveyed the rest of the fire fighting team. By the time the unit at arrived at the fire, the steam pressure would hopefully have mounted sufficiently to operate the pump. Fire fighting ladders were already positioned at strategic points throughout the city to be easily accessible for the rescue of fire victims.

The fire brigade had a romantic appeal for the citizens of Dublin, and the sight of a horse-drawn fire engine galloping through the streets with its brass-helmeted crew, and its boiler dramatically belching sparks and flame, was sure to raise cheers from assembled bystanders. However, the truth of the matter was that fires tended to spread quickly and the fire brigade often arrived too late to save the building. Consequently, many large firms and establishments including large estates, maintained their own fire-fighting equipment including horse-drawn fire engines, even after the establishment of the municipal fire service. One of these fire engines together with its tender, is preserved in the National Transport Museum at Howth. It was built by the English firm of Merryweather for the Great Northern Railway in 1889, and served the company's works at Dundalk for many years. A photograph of a very similar if not identical Merryweather fire engine, together

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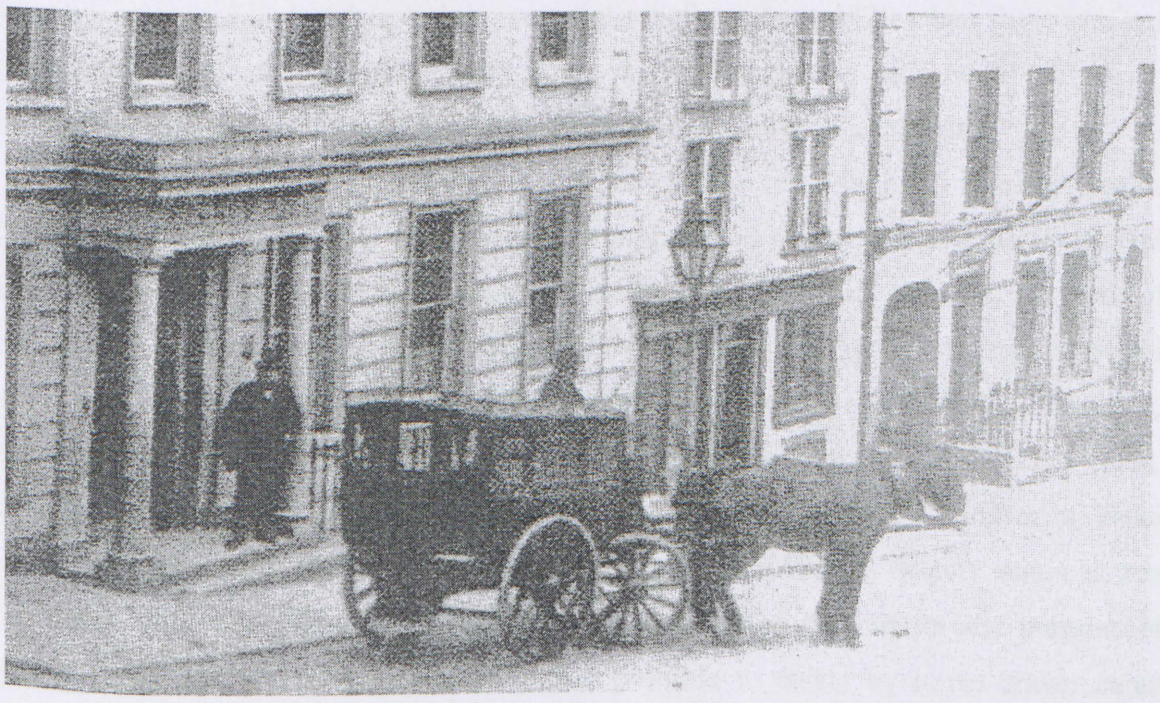
[99] Corcoran, p. 7.

with its crew in an unidentified rural setting, is shown in one of the plates in Smith, *The Horse in Ireland.* [100]

Looking back on the examination of the urban horse scene presented in this chapter, it should be noted that with a few notable exceptions, such as the 'dress' coaches or chariots used for social purposes by the upper classes, and some commercial vehicles, the type of horses and vehicles operating in the towns and cities of Ireland, were largely the same as those used in the rural areas. A more general review of the situation in the whole of the country will be presented in the next chapter.



Private omnibus, Omagh, Co. Tyrone, c. 1890. Photograph from O'Connor, *Lost Ireland.*

[100] Brian Smith, *The horse in Ireland,* (Dublin, 1991), p.173.

Chapter Five

Horse-Drawn Transport in Rural Ireland

For the greater part of the nineteenth century, commercial and industrial road traffic tended to be light in Ireland, as the country was almost entirely agricultural and experienced little of the industrial development that was such a feature of nineteenth century England. Visitors intending to journey to destinations in rural and provincial Ireland during the pre-railway age had the choice of several methods of travel at their disposal, though getting about for the independent traveller was neither cheap nor easy. Journeys were not undertaken lightly, especially before about 1820 when there was a considerable risk of highway robbery. Only the comparatively rich could afford a private carriage, and the poorer classes simply walked or rode on a farm cart.

In the early part of the period, public post-chaises could be hired in many places, but the use of these gradually died out due to competition by cheaper and more efficient forms of public transport. There were also public stage and mail coaches, but both of these were relatively expensive, especially the mail coaches. For those who did not own a private carriage and were unwilling to experience the discomfort of a stage or mail coach, a number of individual travellers often clubbed together to hire a coach between them. There were certain inns in Dublin such as The Ram in Aungier Street, The Brazen Head in Bridge Street, and The White Cross in Pill Lane (now Church Street) where it was customary for intending travellers to leave their names at the bar for the purpose of finding travelling companions.[1] It was also possible to travel by horse drawn canal barges or 'fly boats' to certain destinations. After 1815, the introduction of Bianconi's 'long cars' provided reasonably priced travel in provincial Ireland which persisted long after the advent of the railways.

Accounts of overseas travellers visiting Ireland before the end of the eighteenth century reveal that travel through the interior of the country generally required a degree of intrepidity. Public inns and lodgings were usually very basic, and prices higher than those in England. However, strange to say, the quality of wine served in them was often very



An Irish roadster, c. 1895. Photograph from O'Connell, *Shadows.* Note that the male rider is carrying a stick of the same form as the *echlasc* of the horseman on the Banagher High Cross illustrated in chapter 1.

good.[2] The same could not be say of the roads which were invariably described as rough tracks in which carriages frequently became bogged down in muddy sloughs after rain. To make matters worse, these roads were frequented by footpads and highwaymen and the risk of highway robbery was so great that travellers often carried weapons to defend

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[1] 'Rory Oge', 'Getting On in Ireland', *Dublin University Magazine*, April, 1853, p.476.
[2] Constantia Maxwell, *Country and town in Ireland under the Georges*, (London, 1940) p. 305. Henceforth cited as Maxwell, *Country and town.*

themselves against attack, and parties journeying in carriages sometimes travelled in convoy with a military escort.[3]

It was commonly asserted that, because of the bad roads, riding on horseback was one of the best and most convenient ways of travelling in Ireland. The ability to ride a horse was as common a skill in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as it is to be able to ride a bicycle today and most men and women, except perhaps those in the lowest station of life, were used to riding and handling horses. When a horse was used principally as a means of travel it was often known as a 'roadster'. The roadster though once common, has been largely unheeded by history. It was not of any specific breed, but was rather a 'type' of any equine that provided a comfortable long distance ride. By the nineteenth century an average specimen would probably have been up to about 15 hands high, had good sloping shoulders, plenty of 'bone' below the knee, good girth, a broad and open chest, and a good forward action for a comfortable ride. It was quite usual for a woman to ride on a pillion behind her husband, while smaller children were often carried on the horse's withers in front of the saddle.

An interesting though retrospective, account of travel on horseback is found in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1853 with regard to a then ancient and ruined inn at New Inn, Queen's Co. (now Co. Laois) :

Many a vigorous traveller would ride up to the door upon a strong-limbed, round-carcassed Irish roadster – a breed now almost extinct, owing to an indiscriminate rage for thoroughbred cattle, which has possessed the later generations of inconsiderate men. Each stout horseman carried pistols in his holsters, and, in fair weather, his top-coat rolled up and strapped *en croupe* behind him like a trooper's cloak ; while his servant, also armed, and as well mounted as himself, had charge of the wardrobe in a compact valise, or if the gentleman was very sumptuous and capacious in his attire, a pair of capacious saddle-bags.[4]

The Rev. James Hall who visited Ireland in 1813, and intending to travel through 'the interior and least known parts' of the country bought a twelve hand pony for sixteen guineas and hired a boy to accompany him. They set off together with a young gentleman who was travelling in a like manner to Cork accompanied by a mounted servant.

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[3] Ibid,. p. 295.
[4] 'Rory Oge', 'Getting on in Ireland',,op. cit. p. 475.

After travelling extensively through the country, Hall sold his pony for fifteen guineas and returned to England. [5]

In 1760, a new system of road making had been introduced into the country by Act of Parliament that gave the Grand Juries responsibility for their construction and maintenance through taxes levied on the counties.[6] This circumstance succeeded in improving the general quality of most of the roads, making it more practical to travel by carriage[7]. On of the reasons for this was the lack of heavy traffic such as the ponderous wagons and other heavy vehicles that were found in England, which were very wearing on the surfacing. The heaviest vehicles using the Irish roads at this period were the stage and mail coaches which were few in number, and the bulk of road traffic consisted of the small block-wheel cars of the peasantry which were 'alone used for the conveyance of articles' and did little damage to road surfaces.[8] Other factors contributing to the comparatively high standard of the Irish roads at this period included the large amounts of money spent annually on their repair and maintenance, as well as the abundance and quality of the materials from which they were made.[9]

Arthur Young described the method of road making used by the Irish engineers, at the time of his visit in the late 1770s as follows:

> They throw up a foundation of earth in the middle of the space from the outsides, on that they immediately form a layer of limestone, broken to the size of a turkey's egg; on this a thin scattering of earth to bind the stones together, and over that a coat of gravel where it is to be had...[10]

This type of road building would not have been suitable for England, where the wear and tear on the road surfaces caused by the heavy four wheeled wagons drawn by teams of horses was considerable, and a road of the Irish type of construction would not have stood up to the deterioration caused by that sort of traffic for very long. Whereas the construction of the Irish roads were quite adequate for the light two-wheeled, peasant carts which made up the bulk of the local usage. An additional advantage of

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[5] James Hall, *Tour through Ireland, particularly the interior and least known parts,* 2 vols. (London, 1813), i. pp 47-8.
[6] Act of 17 May (13 Geo. 11, c.16) regulating use and maintenance of roads and abolishing compulsory road labour.
[7] Maxwell, *Country and town..,* p.288.
[8] John Carr, *The stranger in Ireland,* (London, 1805), p. 211.
[9] Maxwell, *Country and town.,* p. 290.
[10] Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland 1776 – 1779,* 2 vols. (London, 1892), i . p. 82.

the Irish roads was said to be that comparatively few of them were bordered with hedgerows and trees, so their surfaces dried very quickly after rain.[11]

In 1784, a separate Post Office was established for Ireland, and the Post Master General was empowered to improve and reinforce the existing roads and build new ones for the use of the newly introduced mail coaches drawn by teams of horses which were heavier and caused more damage to road surfaces. This operation was financed by a tax imposed on the county. In addition, a number of military roads were built by the army after the Rebellion of 1798 in order to facilitate the transit of troops through the mountains of Wicklow and Waterford.[12]

Private Carriages 1800 – 1850

The type of private carriages used in the country were similar to those used in the cities except that more robust vehicles were usually required. However, it is often difficult to identify individual types, as the exact naming of individual designs of horse-drawn carriages during the period under review was not always precise. Some types were known under several different names, and again, the same names were used for various types of vehicles. Nonetheless, it is possible to establish some definitions. The word 'carriage' for example, technically refers only to the under frame and wheels of the vehicle[13], but had nevertheless, come to refer to a whole vehicle, and became a generic term for all types of horse-drawn vehicles both two-wheeled and four-wheeled. The coach was a specified type of four-wheeled closed carriage that could carry up to four passengers on interior seats facing each other. It was equipped with a sprung undercarriage, and was drawn by a team of horses. During the pre-railway era, the 'family' coach was the most popular form of private transport for those few who could afford it. Private coaches were designed to be used either as 'travelling' vehicles designed for long distance work, or 'town' coaches which were again subdivided into those intended for regular use, and those for special or 'dress' occasions.

Adams' *English Pleasure Carriages* of 1837, described the town coach built 'after the best models' as constructed with C springs and under-springs, hammer-cloth

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[11] Maxwell,.,ibid,.
[12] ibid.



Dormeuse from Hooper, 'Modern Carriages' in Duke of Beaufort (ed.), *Driving,* 1889.

seat, Salisbury boot (a roomy luggage container in the rear of the coach)[14], and hind standards'.[15] 'If it be intended to use the coach for the purpose of travelling, the Salisbury boot and hammer-cloth are removed, and a platform substituted in its place, which carries a trunk inside, and an imperial[16] on the top of it. [17] The standard behind is also removed, and a boot on two light springs is substituted for it, capable of carrying two persons and a small box beneath their seat. At the back of the body is placed a cap-case, and on the roof either one or two imperials.'[18] According to Gilbey's *Modern Carriages,* 1905 [19] pre-railway travelling carriages were 'generally used without driving seats, the part that would have been occupied by a driver being appropriated to a travelling case for baggage ; it was, however, very usual to construct the carriage in

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[13] Thomas Martin, *Circle of the mechanical arts*, (London, 1813), p. 220.
[14] JohnThompson, *Horse-drawn carriages*, (Fleet 1980), p.8. reproducing Philipson, *Technicalities of the art of coach building.* (n.d.). Thompson will be henceforth cited as Thompson, *Carriages.*
[15] Text reproduced in Thompson,*Carriages.* p. 13.
[16] An 'imperial' was a case or trunk for luggage fitted on or adapted to the roof of a carriage, O.E.D.
[17] Thompson, *Carriages* ibid.
[18] ibid.
[19] Also reproduced in Thompson, *Carriages,* p.14.

such a manner that a moveable driving seat could be used. The body was raised high on a perch under-carriage with C springs and drawn by two or four horses ridden by postillions.

The town chariot was a smaller version of the town coach that was much used for formal occasions mainly between the years from c.1795 to c.1825. Like its larger cousin, it was fitted with a hammer-cloth covered driving seat for a coachman, but was of smaller capacity, carrying only two passengers facing a forward window which, in its 'town' form was partially obscured by the driving seat. The chariot too, could be easily converted to a 'travelling' vehicle in the same way as the coach, by the removal of the hammer-cloth and driving seat in which case it was driven by postillions or outriders, instead of by a coachman. Travelling space for servants was provided in a hooded dickey at the back of the vehicle. When adapted in this way, the chariot was known as a private posting chariot or post-chaise.[20] It was also possible to provide sleeping accommodation for night travel in the vehicle by removing the front panel and replacing it with a boot called a *dormeuse* which enabled passengers to lie down with their feet forward.[21] A mattress that was carried in the front boot, could be taken out and a practical bed made from it together with the cushions from the front seats. Luggage was usually carried in imperials, or other types of travelling boxes that could either be stowed on the roof, or in a space provided behind the rear seat. Additional luggage could be stowed on top of the front boot.[22] As the period during which the travelling chariot was fashionable, was also a time when highway robbery was rampant in Ireland, a sword case for protection was a standard fitting in the vehicle.

There were many other types of private carriages available in Ireland at this time for those who could afford them. Some were designed specifically for town use while others could be used equally well in both town and country. Generally speaking, those intended for the country were more robustly built than the town vehicles. Gigs and dog carts, which could be found in a variety of types, were popular for out of town use. The tilbury gig , introduced in 1820, was considered to be especially popular for country

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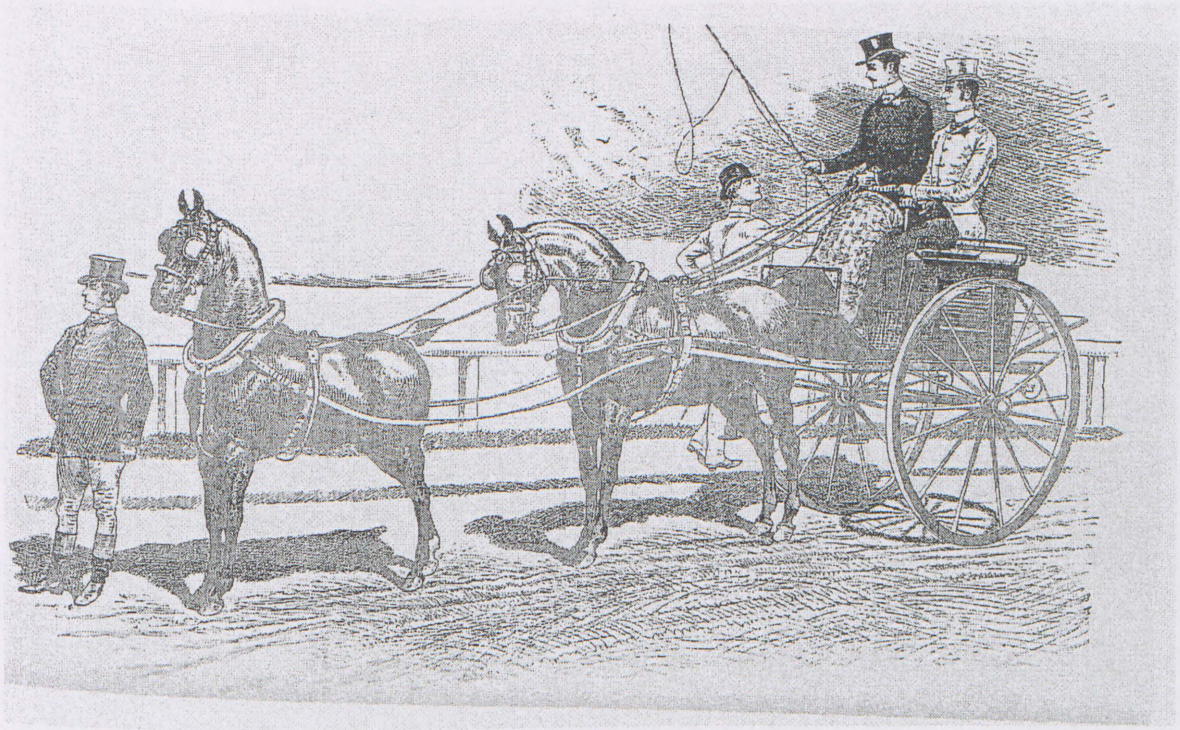
[20] ibid, p. 24, reproducing section of Adams op. cit.
[21] ibid.
[22] Sallie Walrond, *Looking at carriages*, (London, 1980), pp 194-5. Henceforth cited as Walrond, *Carriages*.



Dog Cart, 1885. Plate from *The Hub*, February 1885. Reproduced in Thompson, *Horse-drawn carriages.*

use. It was provided with an elaborate suspension system which contained seven under springs, and had an ample rib backed seat, but no hood or boot. After the cabriolet, it was the heaviest two wheeled vehicle of the time on account of the large amount of iron work used in its suspension. This gave it a reputation for sturdiness and reliability, and many were exported owing to their ability to cope with bad roads and rough terrain. The tilbury gig went out of fashion in Britain and Ireland in about 1850, but the design continued to be used in America until the end of the century.[23]

Stage Coaches

As mentioned above, travel in Ireland during most of the of the eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, was considered to be both uncomfortable and inconvenient. It could, in fact, be downright dangerous as before the extensive road improvements of the late eighteenth century, many of the Irish roads were in appalling condition, and haunted by gangs of highway robbers and other criminals. A regular public transport system had been set up as early as 1718 that took the form of a twice-weekly stage coach service running between Dublin and Kinnegad. Within twenty years, stage-

coach lines had been extended from the capital to Drogheda and Kilkenny, as well as a weekly service to Athlone. However, travel by this means was considered



Cork – Limerick stage coach, 1820 Oil painting by William Turner.

to be slow, expensive and dangerous. So much so, that prospective travellers frequently made their wills and took leave of their friends before undertaking the journey[24]. In 1740, an attempt was made to establish a public coach service between Dublin and Belfast, and a number of coaches were put on the road to make the journey, which at that time, took two days in summer and three in winter. This service was discontinued after a short time due to difficulties on the route.[25] Another attempt to link the two cities by coach was made on August 13, 1752. This time the journey, which was made by a coach drawn by six horses, took three days. There were still difficulties with the route and the service north of Newry was again discontinued after couple of years, and it was not until 1788 that a regular coach link between the capital and Belfast was finally established. By that time coaches were leaving Dublin two or three days a week for twelve different destinations.[26]

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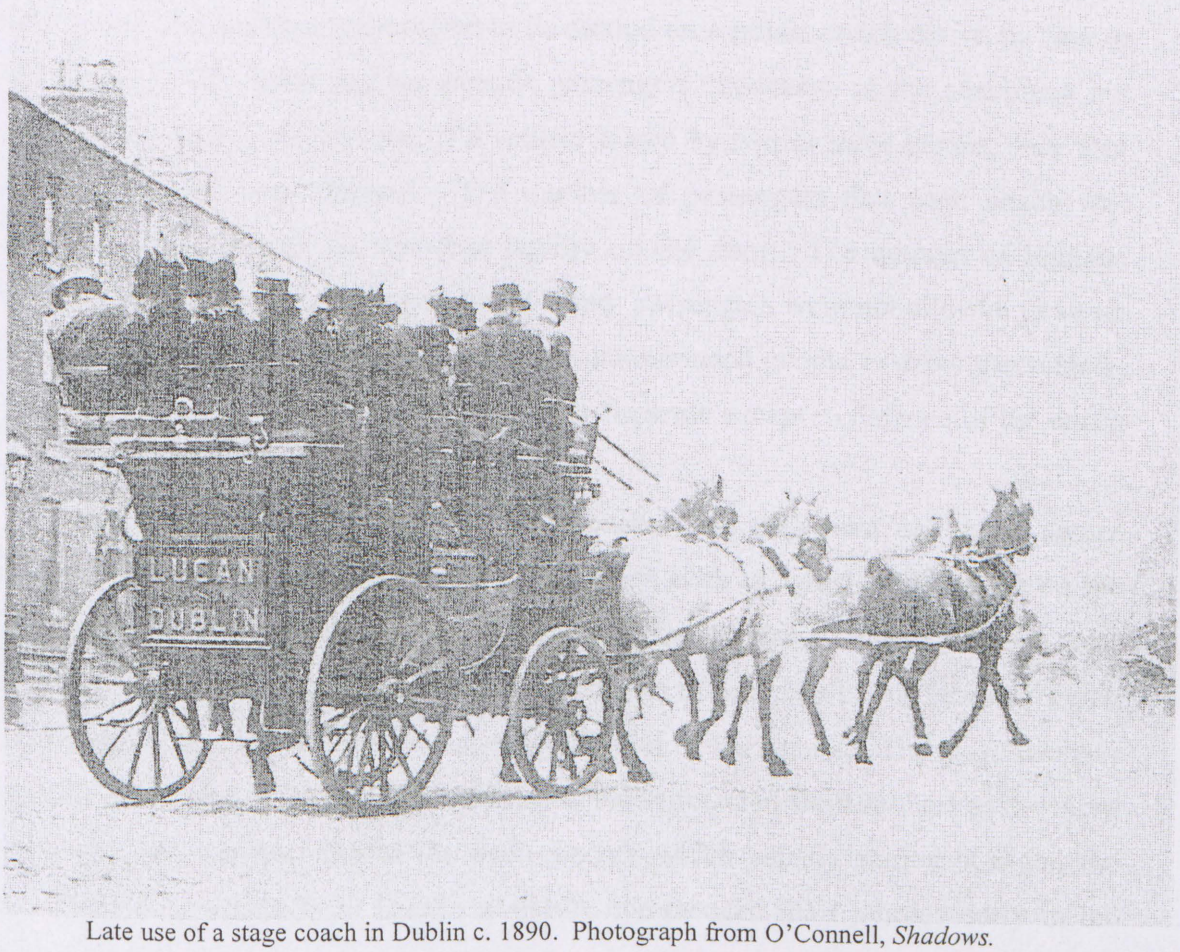
[23] ibid., pp 73-74.
[24] J. L. McCraken,'The age of the stage coach' in Kevin B. Nowlan (ed.) *Travel and transport in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1973), p.54. Henceforth cited as McCracken.
[25] ibid., p.59.
[26] ibid., p.53

The public stage coaches of the time were of similar design to private vehicles but more strongly constructed in order to cope with the wear and tear of long mileage on rough country roads. They could weigh over a ton and were usually drawn by a



Late use of a stage coach in Dublin c. 1890. Photograph from O'Connell, *Shadows.*

team of four horses. The basic design had not changed much during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries except for improvements in their springing and suspension. Earlier models had their bodies connected to the suspension by means of leather 'braces' attached to 'whip' or 'S' springs on a 'perch' undercarriage[27] which only partially cushioned the effects of rough roads on passengers and horses. Whereas later vehicles were provided with an improved system by which 'C' springs were combined with a 'crane necked perched' undercarriage thus providing a more comfortable ride for the passengers and permitting the front wheel carriage to rotate more freely and achieve a full lock when turning the vehicle.[28]

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[27] Waldrond, *Carriages*, p. 175.
[28] Thomas Martin, 'Coach-making',*Circle of the mechanical arts*, (London, 1813), p. 221.

During the early years of the nineteenth century the operation of stage and mail coaches was still regulated by a series of acts of the old Irish parliament [29] Similar legislation for Great Britain had been passed in the U.K. parliament on 3 April 1810. This limited the number of passengers to be carried on a public coach drawn by four or more horses to six inside and ten outside passengers 'exclusive of the coachman but including the guard'. In the case of a vehicle drawn by two or three horses, only four outside passengers was allowed. The number of passengers that each coach was licensed to carry, was to be inscribed legibly on the door. The amount of luggage carried on the roof of the coach was limited, and passengers were not allowed to sit on it. Coach drivers were not allowed to permit unauthorised people to drive the vehicle, and guards were not allowed to discharge their firearms except in defence of the coach and passengers.

Unlike the later mail coaches, stage coaches had their own individual names such as *The Cock of the North,* and the *Old Cock* both of which were rivals on the Newry route, and the *Fair Trader* which serviced Enniskillen.[30] These vehicles were normally painted in bright colours and had the names of the main towns between which the coach ran displayed on the side panels and boot of the vehicle. The stage coaches were normally cheaper, less reliable and not so well protected from robbers as the more glamorous mail coaches. Unlike the mail coaches which usually started at night, the stage coaches operating from Dublin normally commenced their journey early in the morning. They proceeded at a fairly leisurely pace during the day with stops every ten miles or so to change horses. Passengers were allowed a reasonable time for meals and comfort stops and on long journeys, overnight accommodation was arranged for passengers at various inns along the route.

However, highway robbery was still a problem during the early years of the nineteenth century until improved methods of policing made the roads safer during its second decade. In 1808, in an attempt to reassure anxious passengers a new stage coach intended for the Dublin to Cork route was advertised as being lined with copper

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[29] Irish Acts, 33, 35, 38, and 39 George III..
[30] McCracken, pp 57-8.

sheeting and therefore bullet proof. [31] Stage coaches were attended by an armed guard whose duty it was to protect the vehicle from marauders, look after the seating arrangements of the passengers, tend to their luggage, and apply a brake called a 'skid pan' to a rear wheel to enable the vehicle to negotiate a steep incline, and then to remove it once the hill was negotiated The guard was provided with a horn or a key bugle which was used to both warn ostlers of the approaching vehicle at the appropriate coaching inns or stages where the horses were changed. It was also used to clear the road ahead at blind corners. [32] In contrast, mail coach guards who were employed by the post office used a post horn or 'yard of tin' for the same purpose. The distance between stages was normally from about five to fifteen miles depending on the nature of the terrain and the speed of the horses.

Passengers in Irish stage coaches were reported to be quite selective with regard to the vehicles they chose to travel in Thackeray in his *Irish Sketch Book*, writes that at the time of his visit in 1842, there were 'Catholic coaches and Protestant coaches ; nay in the North, I have since heard of a High Church coach and a Low Church coach adopted by travelling Christians of either party.'[33] The *Traveller's Guide* of 1819 lists twenty stage coach lines running from Dublin, mostly from the Royal Mail office in Dawson Street, to the principal centres in the provinces. Many of these are listed as 'day coaches' in order to distinguish them from the night travelling mail coaches.

An interesting account of the setting up of a day-coach route in 1810 appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1853 :

When the day-coach for Mullingar, was launched about the year 1810, it was considered a prodigy. The country-people used to leave their work at the sound of the horn, and run across the fields to look at it as it swept past, at the rate, which it required the evidence of sight to realise, of five miles an hour.[34]

During their high period of operation as public transport, and indeed ever since, as is indicated by the frequency of their depiction on such items as modern Christmas cards and chocolate boxes. Stage and mail coaches had an aura of romance which no other form of land transport, except subsequently railway trains, ever seem to have acquired, though coach travellers often complained about their lack of comfort. It is

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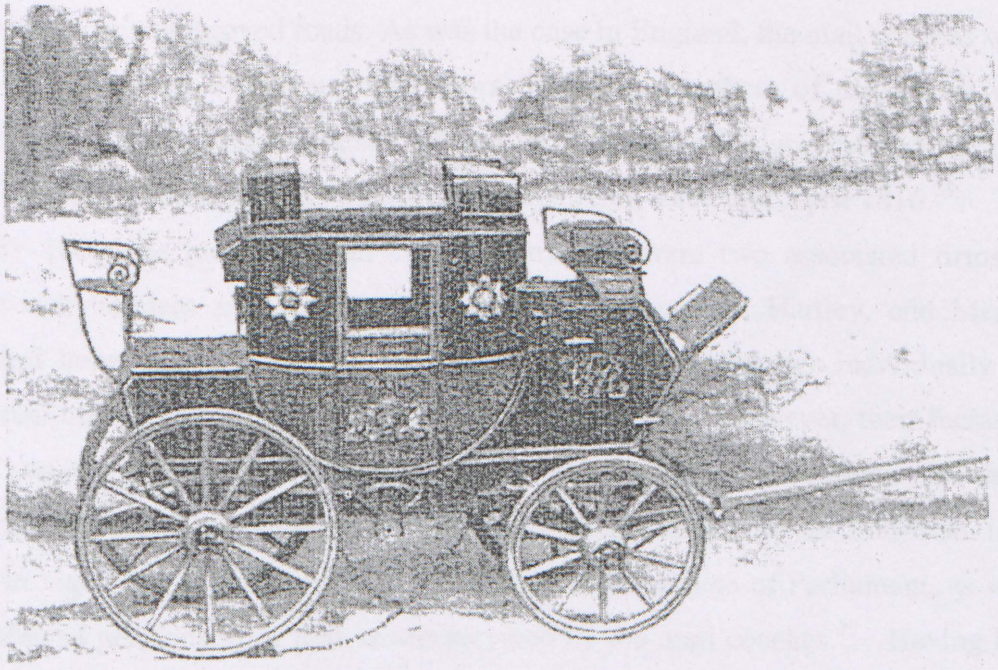
[31] Maxwell, *Country and town,* p. 295.
[32] Walrond,*Carriages.* p., 180.
[33] W. M. Thackeray, *Irish sketch book*, (London, 1869), p. 32. Henceforth cited as Thackeray.

interesting to note that both mail and stagecoach guards and drivers enjoyed considerable status, and were invariably treated with respect by all classes. Members of



Scale model of an early nineteenth century mail coach. Maidstone Carriage Museum.

the nobility and gentry sometimes bribed coach drivers to let them take the reins though this was illegal under the Act of 1810 quoted above.

Such was the perceived glamour of travel by stage coach, that even after the railways had replaced horse drawn coaches as the premier method of public transport, enthusiastic amateurs continued to operate private stage coaches known as 'drags' or 'road coaches' for their own amusement.[35] Thackery relates how he was given a lift from Carlow to Waterford in 1841 on 'an amateur stage coach drag'.[36]

Mail Coaches

The early stage coaches were used principally for public transport. However, in 1784 a separate post office was established for Ireland under the control of John Lees, a Scot, who had occupied a number of government posts since his arrival in the country.[37]

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[34] 'Rory Oge','Getting on in Ireland', *Dublin University Magazine*, April 1853, p. 176.
[35] W. C. A. Blew 'The coaching revival' in Duke of Beaufort (ed.) *Driving*, (London, 1889), pp 273-97.
[36] Thackery, . p. 3.
[37] Beatrice Bayley Butler, 'Secretaries of the Irish Post Office, 1774-1831'. *Dublin Historical Record*, Vol. X111. 1953. Nos. 3 & 4, pp 138 ff

Under his supervision, a coach service designed to carry the mails as well as human cargo was set up in 1790 by the new Irish post office. The operation of this service was possible by the new improved roads. As was the case in England, the mail coaches were serviced by a number of private contractors including members of the gentry who provided horses and vehicles. These included the Marquis of Sligo who ran the mail coaches between Ballinasloe and Westport between April 1809 and April 1816.[38]

By 1832, the principal mail coach contractors were two associated firms of Dublin coach builders and entrepreneurs, Messrs. Bourne and Hartley, and Messrs Purcell and Jameson. Both Purcell and Bourne had been contractors individually for several mail coach lines since the first decade of the century. However, their lucrative contract was lost in 1843 to the Edinburgh coach building firm of Croall who succeeded in undercutting the Irish tender. The granting of the contract to an non-Irish firm resulted in vigorous protests from a lobby of the Irish Members of Parliament, as well as a number of petitions from Irish towns serviced by the mail coaches.[39] Having lost most of its business, the firm of Bourne and Hartley finally sold out to Charles Bianconi who ran a successful public transport system based in Clonmel.[40] Bianconi's activities will be reviewed later in the chapter.

The coaches used in Ireland were built in a similar fashion to those used in Great Britain to a design that had been developed in 1784 by John Palmer, a coach maker of Bath. [41] Palmer made use of the latest and most advanced coach building technology of the time, and the vehicles were constructed of the very best materials available. Later coaches at least, were built to a uniform design so that parts were interchangeable one with another.[42] When the mail coaches were first introduced in 1790, It was found that most Irish drivers were not used to managing the teams of four horses needed to draw the vehicles, and ten English coachmen had to be brought over in order to train them.[43] The mail coaches normally carried four passengers inside and three outside, together with a guard perched on a small seat behind. He was equipped

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[38] *A return of the number and description of the mail coaches in Ireland,* 1820, p.4.
[39] *Memorials to the Treasury, and correspondence, relating to the new contract for the supply of mail coaches for the use of the Post-Office in Ireland,* 12 August 1843.
[40] M. O'C. Bianconi and S. J. Warson, *Bianconi king of the Irish roads,*(Dublin, 1962), p. 114.
[41] D. J. Smith, *Discovering horse-drawn carriages* (Aylesbury 1974) . p. 29.
[42] *Memorials to the Treasury relating to the new contract for mail coaches in Ireland,* op. cit., p. 3.

with a blunderbuss and sword in view of the danger of highway robbery, and a coach horn to warn all and sundry of the approach of the coach.[44] On some routes where the danger of highway robbery was considered significant, a second guard was provided as well.

The expression 'horses for courses' was particularly relevant to coaching as different types of terrain required different types of coach horses when proceeding between stages. For example those which required a lot of hill work were best tackled by tall, strong horses in order to pull heavily loaded coaches up inclines, while smaller, active, fast galloping horses were more suitable for flat stages where they could make up time.[45]

Unlike the public stage coaches which were usually painted in a variety of bright colours, the new mail coaches were more restrained in colour, in the post office livery of black upper coach work, scarlet wheels and under-carriage, with the doors and lower body in maroon. The royal arms together with the names of the towns between which the coach ran were displayed on the door panels, and the royal cipher, on the sides of the rear boot.[46] Like their English counterparts, the Irish mail coaches ran on a tight time schedule and had a reputation for reliability. As government vehicles, they had full right of way over all other traffic which was warned by the sounding of a post horn to get out of the way. There were not many toll gates in Ireland at that period, and those that did exist warned by the post horn to be opened in advance so that the mail coaches might pass through without delay as they were not required to pay tolls.

In addition to providing a postal and passenger service, the mail coaches were used to send official government documents and communications, as well as military dispatches from Dublin to outlying garrisons.[47] The mail coaches were of course, an instrument of government, described by Pakenham as 'a finely spun web of communications that held the country together', and as such the Directory of the United Irishmen regarded the mail coaches as a legitimate target. Consequently they ordered the five mail coaches leaving Dublin on 24 May 1798 to be stopped on the roads going out of

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[43] Maxwell, *Country and town.* p. 303 n.
[44] Duke of Somerset 'Old Coaching Days' in Duke of Beaufort (ed) *Driving* (London, 1889), pp 177-8
[45] Duke of Beaufort, 'The coach horse' in Duke of Beaufort (ed) *Driving*, p. 77.
[46] Information from the London Transport Museum, Covent Garden.

the city so that their non-appearance would be the signal for the uprising to begin. As it happened, the plan misfired, and four of the five mail coaches got through due to the intrepidity of the guards and drivers.[48]

From around the time of the 1798 Rebellion to about 1820, many Irish roads were frequented by highwaymen often in large gangs, and it was sometimes found necessary to provide additional security for mail coaches in the form of military escorts. Anne Plumptre writing in 1817, describes an attack by fifteen or twenty assailants on the Limerick to Cashel mail coach at Littleton near Cashel. This in spite of the presence of two armed coach guards, and two dragoons one of whom was killed in the assault.[49]

As was the case with stage coaches, mail coach drivers and guards enjoyed a high status, and this type of employment was considered suitable for members of the gentry class down on their luck. An example of this is mentioned by William Makepeace Thackery in his *Irish Sketch Book* of 1842. He refers to the guard on the mail coach from Castlebar and Tuam to Ballinasloe :

The jolly guard himself was a ruin, it turned out : he told me his grandfather was a man of large property ; his father, he said, kept a pack of hounds, and had spent everything by the time he, the guard, was sixteen : so the lad made interest to get a mail-car to drive, whence he had been promoted to the guard's seat, and now for forty years had occupied it, travelling eighty miles, and earning seven-and-two pence every day of his life.[50]

The number of horses needed to work a mail coach was said to be approximately the same as the distance in statute miles of the one way journey between the two termini. That is to say, that a coach running between Dublin and a town 100 miles away would require 100 horses to make the journey up to the exacting standard demanded by the Royal Mail service. The distance between stages varied, but was about ten miles on the average. For this ten horses were required, four of which provided a team for the up coach, four for the down coach, while the remaining two rested. An average mail coach horse, was expected to do one hour's work a day for, three consecutive days and have the fourth day off. But the work- load was hard on the

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[47] Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty*, (London, 1972), p. 124.
[48] ibid. p. 131, quoting *Saunder's News Letter.*
[49] Anne Plumptre, *Narrative of a residence in Ireland*, (London 1817), p.310.
[50] Thackery, p. 227

horses, and they only lasted an average of four years in first class service. After that they would be sold or transferred to lighter or slower work.[51]

Five mail coach services were listed in the notices regarding mail and stage coach services out of Dublin in 1800 – the Northern mail coach to Belfast which departed from the Belfast Hotel, Capel Street at eleven o'clock carrying four inside and one outside passenger. The Cork and the Athlone mail coaches departed from the Royal Mail Coach Office, Dawson Street, also at eleven o'clock. In addition, 'elegant post coaches – carrying only four inside and two outside passengers' departed at six o'clock on the mornings of Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday for Limerick. Passengers seeking accommodation for the night could be accommodated at Macken's Royal Mail Hotel which was conveniently situated close to the Royal Mail office in Dawson Street. [52] T.W.Webber of Kellyville, Athy, mentions in his journal that :

> Two mail coaches a day each way, used to pass near us on the old Cork road, all heavily laden , and I well recollect the red-coated guards and the horn, and the rattle of the fine teams of great coach horses which did their ten miles in sixty minutes. They were of the same stamp as my grandfather's carriage horses, mostly 15.2 to 16.2 and with high withers and immense bone and power, perfectly clean-legged and [with] small well-bred heads. The whole country was full of such horses. They often were the produce of the many Irish farm mares, and had a thoroughbred in their pedigree, but were sired not by thoroughbreds, but by the farmer's own stallions, and never a Scotch cross in any of them.[53]

John Carr writing in 1805 mentions two additional mail coach services which had been established by 1805 between Limerick and Cork running via Fermoy and Charleville respectively [54]

We find more information regarding these two coach lines in a government document of 1818 which gives such details as the names of the contractors, the numbers of horses required, and the number of passengers licensed to be carried by each vehicle.[55] The Fermoy coach which commenced operations in April 1803, was drawn by four horses with four inside and one outside passenger, it was expected to complete the journey in thirteen hours. The contractor was John Anderson of Cork

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[51] H. C. B. Rogers, *The mounted troops of the British army*, (London, 1959), p. 188. Henceforth cited as Rogers, *Mounted troops.*
[52] *Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack*, (Dublin, 1800)
[53] Ms. Journal , preserved in the National Archives (2003/73).
[54] John Carr, *The stranger in Ireland*, (London, 1805), p. 85.
[55] *Abstract of the contracts which have been made by His Majesty's Postmasters General in Ireland*, 1818.

who also ran a number of other mail coach lines including Dublin to Cork and Enniskillen, and later the Northern Mail to Belfast. The contractors for the Charleville coach were William and Henry O'Shea. It too, was a four horse coach with a similar number of passengers as the Fermoy vehicle but was expected to complete the journey in fourteen hours. It also commenced operations in April 1803.

The mail coaches from Dublin almost always started in the evening, and continued through the night at a specified average speed of four or five m.p.h. including the briefest of stops to change horses, and sometimes the driver and guard as well. These were conducted with the maximum efficiency. Ostlers at the various posting inns on the route warned in advance by the guard's post horn would be waiting, ready to tend to the team with a minimum of delay. Two or three minutes was considered to be adequate for a normal change of teams, though a quick change could be effected in under a minute.

If the distance between stages was short, the ostlers would simply wash out the horse's mouths with water and give them a wisp of hay before they continued on to the next stage where they would be replaced by a fresh team. The harness would be taken off and the tired horses rubbed down, before being given a few mouthfuls of hay and a feed of corn. Before their evening feed they might be given a warm bran mash, and if the weather was cold and wet, some beans might be added to the feed as well.[56] Passengers were allowed only brief meal stops of twenty minutes for breakfast and a mid-day meal, as well as occasional breaks of five minutes for comfort stops.

Eleven coach mail lines are listed together with their posting stages in 1819[57]. Additional information concerning five of these was obtained from the *Abstract of the Mail Coach Contracts* made in June 1818 for the Postmaster general in Ireland. The majority of the mail coaches departed at a quarter to eight in the evening, and when departure times were different from this, they will be specified. All mail coaches listed were drawn by teams of four horses which were changed every ten miles or so. Details regarding the various mail coach services are as follows : The Dublin to Galway departed from the Royal Mail Coach Office, 12 Dawson Street, and arrived at half past

[56] Rogers, *Mounted troops.* p.190.

nine the following night. The contractor was John Anderson. The number of passengers licensed was six inside and three outside, Anderson's contract had commenced on February 1812 and was due to terminate on February 1833.

The Limerick mail coach left number 46 Dawson Street and arrived at its destination at three o'clock the following afternoon. No further details are available. The Galway mail left the Royal Mail office in Dawson Street and arrived at Galway at five o'clock the following afternoon. Richard Bourne was the contractor, and the number of passengers was six inside and three outside. The Sligo mail started from the Royal Mail office at the usual time and arrived in Sligo at five in the afternoon. No further details are available. The Wexford mail started from number 41 Exchequer Street at the usual time. The contractor was John H. Hogan, the number of passengers was four inside and one outside. The Northern mail coach departed from number 97 Capel Street every evening at twenty to eight. It provided a service to Belfast, linking up with the mail packet operating between Donaghadee and Portpatrick in Scotland. The contractor was John Anderson, the passenger numbers were four inside and one outside. Two additional outside passengers were permitted to be carried on occasion, in which case an extra hour was allowed for the journey. The Enniskillen mail coach departed at twenty to eight every evening. No further details are available. The Killeshandra coach started from the Royal Mail office at six o'clock on the mornings of Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and arrived at Killeshandra at seven o'clock in the evening. The Derry mail coach started from Gosson's Hotel, 6 Bolton Street, every evening at half past seven. The contractor was David Watt, and the coach was licensed for four inside passengers and one outside. The Drogheda mail departed from number 2, Bolton Street, at eight o'clock in the morning. No further details are available. The Waterford mail left from the Moira Hotel, New Sackville Street, at the usual time. The contractor was Peter Purcell, and the coach was licensed to carry four inside passengers and one outside.

In addition to the mail services operating from Dublin, the 1818 *Abstract of Mail Coach Contracts* lists a number of 'cross-mail' services operating in the provinces. These include passenger and mail services between : Ballinasloe and Westport, Belfast

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[57] *Traveller's new guide through Ireland containing a new and accurate description of the roads ... &c* (London, 1819), pp. 555 ff.

and Derry, Carlow and Waterford, Clonmel and Waterford, Cork to Limerick, Waterford, and Youghal, Kinnegad and Sligo, Limerick to Ennis and Tralee, and Newry to Dungannon.

The correspondence between the Treasury and the General Post Office in London regarding a new contract for the building and supply of Irish mail coaches in 1843, reveals that the Irish mail was not to be entrusted to the railways 'for some time to come' and at that time, 'forty two coaches only, were required for the working of every mail



Model of an English post chaise. London Transport Museum.

coach line in Ireland. In addition to that number, eight spare coaches were required in case of accident. Four were to be kept in Dublin, two in Cork, and one in Belfast. This made the entire number of coaches required for service in Ireland, fifty. In fact, a list appended to the correspondence reveals that the number of coaches available for service by the Irish Post Office in 1843 was actually 66. [58]

Post Chaises

During the late eighteenth, and early years of the nineteenth centuries, if a traveller in any part of the United Kingdom or the Continent, not travelling by private carriage and wishing to avoid being crammed and jostled in a crowded stage or mail

coach, an expensive, but usually more comfortable, alternative was to hire a post chaise. This gave the independent traveller opportunities visit places off the regular routes. The post chaise was exactly similar in form to the privately owned dress or court chariot normally used for formal occasions in town, except for the fact that the private vehicle was invariably driven by a coachman, and the public chaise by one or more post boys who directed the horse or team of horses by riding them. The post chaise and indeed the dress chariot was, in effect a type of chair or bench mounted on wheels, and covered over for protection against the weather. It was not intended for more than two passengers. The private vehicles were, as might be expected, better appointed and finished than their public counterparts. However, old and discarded private chariots were often converted for use as public chaises.

Travel by post chaise depended on a country wide network of posting inns or posting houses usually about eight miles apart. Horses together with post boys could be hired by the traveller at these establishments. The standard of both varied tremendously from place to place, but it seems to have been generally low.

An account of posting and turnpike charges in 1826 show that the cost of horses and post boys at each stage was usually about £2, and this meant that the journey from Kilkenny to Cork via Fermoy, for example cost £8. 10s. 6d. with a further 14s. for turnpike tolls.[59] Sir John Colt Hoare pointed out in his *Tour of Ireland*, published in 1807, that 'the traveller in Ireland did not enjoy those comforts and conveniences which he would have met on the Bath road or even in many of the remote provinces of England.' He says :

He must not expect to find post-chaises and post horses ready at a moments notice to waft him from the Lake of Killarney to the Giant's Causeway, for these accomodations are to be found only on the great roads of communication from one city to another. On the cross-roads he must bear with patience the delays of post-boys, and the indifference of post-masters ; his purse will be taxed, and his time lost.[60]

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[58] *Memorials and correspondence relative to the new contract for mail coaches in Ireland*, 1843, p.17.
[59] McCracken, p. 50.
[60] Maxwell, *Country and town.* p. 286.

The Irish writer Maria Edgeworth describes an Irish post chaise in her novel *Ennui* (1809) which, allowing for some literary exaggeration, may well provide a fairly accurate account of a typical Irish post chaise of the period. It is worth quoting in full : From the inn yard came a hackney-chaise, in a most deplorable crazy state ; the body mounted up to a prodigious height, on unbending springs, nodding forwards, one door swinging open, three blinds up, because they could not be let down, the perch tied in two places, the iron of the wheels half-off, half loose, wooden pegs for linch pins, and ropes for harness. The horses were worthy of the harness, wretched little dog-tired creatures, that looked as if they had been driven to the last gasp, and as if they had never been rubbed down in their lives ; their bones starting through their skin ; one lame, the other blind ; one with a raw back, the other with a galled breast ; one with his neck poking down over his collar, and the other with his head dragged forward by a bit of a broken bridle, held at arms length by a man dressed like a mad beggar, in half a hat, and half a wig, both awry in opposite directions ; a long tattered great coat, tied round his waist by a hay rope ; the jagged rents in the skirts of his coat showing his bare legs marbled of many colours, while something like stockings hung loose about his ankles. The noises he made by way of threatening or encouraging his steeds, I will not presume to describe.[61]

The post chaise remained an important part of the transport system in Ireland from the late eighteenth century until about the third decade of the nineteenth, when its use declined due to competition by other cheaper and more efficient forms of public transport, especially Bianconi's famous network of 'long cars' which by then, served virtually every corner of Ireland.

Bianconi's Cars

A new form of horse drawn transport was introduced into Ireland on 6 July 1815 by Carlo Bianconi, a Clonmel based Italian immigrant, who realised the potential for a form of cheap public transport affordable by all. The enterprise was launched with an army surplus artillery horse for which he paid £10, and an outside jaunting car which he bought second hand. Bianconi's first scheduled service was between Clonmel and Cahir, a distance of only ten miles. In later life he explained that he had chosen that particular route instead of linking Clonmel with the larger and more prosperous towns in the area, such as Carrick-on-Suir for the reason that Carrick and Cashel were just that

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[61] Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui,* (London, 1999), p.184.

little bit too far apart to allow a horse to make the journey both ways in one day. He was also influenced by the fact that Carrick was already linked to other centres by river traffic, and the mail coach from Dublin went through Cashel, but at that time there was no public transport available between Clonmel and Cahir. [62]

At first business was slow, the conservative country folk used to travelling on foot were unwilling to pay the fare of two pence a mile. However, in time the new form of transport gradually became more accepted and the business began to show a healthy profit. In addition, Bianconi did a deal with local mail contractors, offering to carry the cross mails between Clonmel and Cahir for half the amount paid to the contractors by the government.



Bianconi's Long Car 1836. Print from Cullen, *Life in Ireland.*

By the end of 1815 Bianconi's cars had become an established feature of public transport in the ever expanding areas in which he operated. In his first year of operation, he had established new routes from Clonmel to Limerick, Thurles, and Cashel, and in the following year new routes were established linking Clonmel with Waterford via Carrick-on-Suir. His cars were now covering a total of 226 miles a day. [63] He continued to increase the number of his vehicles and routes, and by 1819 he had extended his mail and

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[62] M.O'C. Bianconi and S. J. Watson, *Bianconi,* (Dublin, 1962), pp 57-8. Henceforth cited as Bianconi and Watson.
[63] ibid., p. 59.

passenger services to include Waterford, New Ross, Enniscorthy and Wexford. Cork was added in 1821. Soon his cars were covering over a thousand miles of road each day, linking the principal towns of south Leinster and East Munster. By the end of 1825, the distance covered by his cars had reached over 1,170 miles a day.[64]

By the beginning of 1834 he already owned some seventy vehicles most of which were pulled by two horses. Bianconi's cars operating from his Clonmel base, were now covering 2,000 English miles a day, and his routes included the whole of the province of Munster, as well as much of Leinster and Connaught, for which he needed between 500 and 600 horses to maintain his services which included the lucrative mail contracts.[65]

The Vehicles

Bianconi's cars were a development of the Irish outside jaunting car with passengers seated back to back with a 'well' in the centre in which luggage was carried, sometimes piled so high that it formed a substantial barrier between the seats. A disadvantage of the outside car design was that it was, in effect, open to the elements and passengers were not protected from the rain except by heavy waterproof aprons which could be drawn up to the chin. Horsehair cushions were provided to cover the seats. If the weather was wet these cushions were supposed to be changed every two stages.[66] However, a corresponding advantage was that Bianconi's cars were better balanced and less liable to overturn than the regular coaches, and that passengers could easily descend from the vehicle to relieve the strain on the horses when going up hills.[67]

In the early years of his enterprise, the majority of Bianconi's vehicles were the ordinary two wheeled jaunting cars bought second hand, and adapted to carry extra passengers. These were drawn by one horse in the shafts with another fixed to a device called an 'outrigger'. They could accommodate eight passengers. However, as the business developed, Bianconi found it increasingly necessary to introduce larger vehicles to carry his increasing number of passengers. These were still based on the jaunting car design, but could be two or four wheeled versions of the traditional vehicle. The largest

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[64] ibid, p. 67.
[65] *Freeman's Journal,* 1 January 1834.
[66] Thomas P. O'Neill, 'Bianconi and his cars' in Kevin B. Nowlan (ed), *Travel and transport in Ireland,* (Dublin, 1973). p. 89.
[67] Constantia Maxwell, *The stranger in Ireland from the reign of Elizabeth to the Great Famine* (London, 1954)., p. 243. Henceforth cited as Maxwell, *Stranger in Ireland.*

of the new two wheelers, which could carry five passengers on each side, were known as Massey Dawsons after a popular Clonmel M.P.

In addition to these, Bianconi developed other types of four wheelers. One of these was called a 'Finn McCool.' It was drawn by three horses and could carry fourteen passengers. However, the largest of the new vehicles was drawn by a team of up to four horses, and was known as a 'Long Bian'. It could carry nineteen passengers, eight on each side, two in the luggage well, and one in the front with the driver. Smaller two wheelers called *faugh a ballaghs* were mostly relegated to the less frequented routes.[68]

Characteristically relying on his own resources, Bianconi set up workshops and forges in his principal depôt Clonmel, as well as Galway and Sligo[69] in where teams of skilled coach builders, carpenters, wheelwrights, harness makers and smiths were employed in the construction of his cars though the work of shoeing the horses was left to local farriers.[70] The finished vehicles were painted in the firm's livery of red and yellow, with the serial number of the car together with the towns it served displayed on the back. Mail carrying vehicles carried the inscription 'DAY MAIL' or 'NIGHT MAIL' depending on which function it served. Both the vehicles and harness made in Bianconi's own factories, were constructed of the best quality materials available. The harness was silver plated with the initial 'B' displayed on the back straps and blinkers.[71]

The Horses

The horses favoured by Bianconi were a good breed of carriage horses standardised at about 15 hands, of which he had hundreds in his stables round the country. Their uniformity of height ensured that the harness could to a large extent be made to a standard size, and it was easier to change teams at posting stations. [72] Bianconi was prepared to pay top prices for suitable horses in order to maintain the quality of his service. He is recorded as paying over £40, which was higher that the regulation price authorised by the government for army horses at the time.[73]

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[68] O'C. Bianconi and Watson, op. cit., p. 90. O'Neill, op. cit., pp 88-9.
[69] Maxwell, *Stranger in Ireland.* p. 245.
[70] ibid.
[71] O'C. Bianconi and Watson, op. cit., p. 67, O'Neill, op. cit. p.89.
[72] ibid., p. 61.
[73] O'Neill, op. cit., p. 86.

Bianconi preferred not to run his horses on Sundays except when providing scheduled connections with the Royal Mail or canal services, partly because there was little demand for travel on the Sabbath, but more importantly, because he found that by giving the horses a day off, they could run eight miles a day for six days in succession, whereas without a rest day they could only do six .In this way he calculated that he would achieve a 12 ½ % economy in horse power by not working on Sundays. The amount of feed and bedding which each horse was allowed, was also carefully assessed in order to balance economy with efficiency. Each animal was given a daily ration of 15 pounds of oats in three equal feeds, 16 pounds of hay, and 8 pounds of straw for bedding. The idea was that too much hay could give rise to broken wind, and that a minimum amount of straw bedding was sufficient for practical purposes. [74]

The railways that were pretty well established in Ireland by the 1850s, had almost completely wiped out the mail coach services radiating from Dublin and provided serious competition to Bianconi's network of public transport. His reaction to them was typical. Realising that he could not compete with the new development in public transport, he took advantage of the business opportunity provided by the need for 'feeder' routes to carry passengers to and from railway stations and personally invested money in the railways, even becoming a director of the Waterford Limerick Railway Company. In addition, he extended his own transport network to cover the many parts of the country not served by the railway system. Bianconi retired in 1866 and sold his business to his own agents. Even after his death in 1875, his 'long cars' continued to provide the principal form of public transport in the remoter parts of Ireland even into the early years of the twentieth century when they were finally replaced by omnibuses.

Social and Economic Importance of Bianconi's cars.

Bianconi succeeded, perhaps unintentionally, in bringing about a minor social and economic revolution. First of all, he took the class distinction out of travel. In coach travel it was regarded as being rather *infra dignitatem* to travel 'outside', whereas there was no social stigma attached to travel on Bianconi's cars where all classes mingled happily on the open vehicles. His contribution to the Irish economy was immense. His network boosted the fashion of tourism to such places as Killarney before it gained

[74] O'C. Bianconi and Watson, op. cit., p. 61.

momentum with the advent of the railways. Many of the well known literary tourists including Johann Georg Kohl, W.M.Thackeray, Sir Francis Head, and the Halls, travelled on his cars, and published their experiences which provided useful publicity both for his transport company and for Irish tourism generally.



Bianconi car c, 1895. Photograph from Gorham, *Dublin* yesterday.

Although Bianconi had succeeded in undercutting the cost of coach travel by at least thirty per cent, the fare was still beyond the reach of the very poor. His principal clientele were tourists, middle class travellers, the better off country people and small business classes. He provided the farmers of even the sparsest populated areas with contact with the principal market towns, and arranged special transport which gave the fishermen of Westport and Clifton access to the Dublin market for their fish, guaranteeing delivery within twelve hours. In a paper which he read to the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Dublin in 1857 he asserted that:

The facility for conveying goods enabled the consumer to buy his wares more directly from the manufacturer, and he thus bought them cheaper than when they had passed through the hands of many retail dealers. For instance, in the more remote parts of Ireland before my cars ran, purchasers were obliged to give eight or nine pence a yard for calico for shirts, which they afterwards bought for three or four pence. The poor people, therefore, who previously could ill

afford to buy one shirt were enabled to buy two for a less price than they had paid for one, and in the same ratio other commodities came into general use at reduced prices.[75]

Bianconi had a good reputation among the country people who appreciated his contribution to their local economies , and such was his popularity in his adopted county of Tipperary, an area where unrest and lawlessness had been endemic, and molestation of travellers common even into the early decades of the nineteenth century, his cars had never once been attacked,

The Canals

The system of canals that was established in Ireland towards the end of the eighteenth century had an optimistic vision of including the country in the benefits of the Industrial Revolution then burgeoning in England. The two main canals in Ireland were the Grand founded in 1772 and the Royal founded in 1789, both of which connected Dublin with the West. The canals never succeeded in encouraging the growth of industry to any great extent, nevertheless they provided an alternative form of transport for conveying both passengers and freight by means of horse drawn 'passage' or 'fly boats' to a limited number of destinations using a system of stages using relays of horses, not unlike the operation of the road coaches.

The Royal Canal provided a passage boat service from the Broadstone harbour in Dublin that left every morning at eight o'clock, and arrived at Mullingar at eight o'clock the same evening. The Mullingar to Dublin boat operated at similar hours. The Grand Canal boats operated from Portobello harbour near Rathmines. One boat left at seven o'clock in the morning for Athy and Tullamore. Another departed for Shannon Harbour at two in the afternoon. The return service from Shannon Harbour arrived at Dublin at twenty minutes past seven in the morning, while the Athy and Tullamore boat arrived at Portobello ten minutes past eight a.m.[76]

The canal companies frequently organised cross links by road coaches in conjunction with a number of existing coach contractors, for the convenience of their passengers. The Grand Canal Company organised link services from Shannon Harbour to Ballinasloe, Birr, Loughrea, Tuam, and Limerick, as well as one between Tullamore and Athlone. The introduction of the new faster Scotch boats by the Grand Canal

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[75] ibid. p. 168.

[76] *The traveller's new guide through Ireland* 1819, op. cit., p. 561.

Company in 1834 encouraged other coaching firms to establish routes in connection with them. The same company subsidised coach services from Carlow to Athy, Mountmellick to Mountrath, and Mountmellick to Abbeyleix via Maryborough, and provided free road transport between the Blundell aqueduct and Edenderry, and between Stradbally and Vicarstown.

In 1836 Charles Bianconi who had already organised a link service between the Royal Canal and Athlone, offered his services to the Grand Canal Company with a view to organising routes in conjunction with the canal boats. He agreed to take over the existing coach service between Ballinasloe and Galway which had up to then been operated by the firm of Hartley and Desmond, and to set up a new service to Tuam. Within a year Bianconi had extended his Tuam route to Castlebar and had agreed to run a car service from Roscrea to Shannon Harbour. He operated all these routes at a standard fare of 1½d. per mile. Shortly after this he arranged to have his Birr car diverted to meet the canal at Gallen, but on finding that this route was not commercially viable, he closed it and transferred the cars to his service between Kilbeggan and Athlone .

Travel in Ireland 1800 - 1850

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century road travel in Ireland was comparatively expensive, difficult and sometimes dangerous, the choice being between individual travel by horse or foot, a public coach, or canal travel, though the latter could be extremely slow.[77] However, there was a considerable improvement in comfort and safety as time went on. Improved methods of policing from the second decade onwards, made the roads safer from the threat of highway robbery. At the same time, Bianconi's network of routes with his 'long cars' introduced the concept of moderately priced road travel for all, which opened up the country to commerce and tourism as it had never been done before, and prepared the way for the coming of the railways.

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[77] 'Rory Oge' 'Getting on in Ireland', *Dublin University Magazine*, April 1853, p. 474.

Chapter Six

The Agricultural Improvement Societies

The agricultural improvement societies that were such a feature of the Irish agricultural scene during the nineteenth century played a major role in the development and marketing of Irish horse breeds during this period. The five principal associations in this field were respectively, the Royal Dublin Society (founded in 1731), the Farming Society (founded in 1800), the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland (founded in 1841), The North-East Agricultural Association (founded in 1854), and the North-West of Ireland Agricultural Society (founded in 1821). In addition to these, there were a number of county and local agricultural societies generally affiliated to the larger organizations. By the end of 1841 the first year of its being,[1] the Royal Agricultural Society had acquired forty five associated local societies, some of which had led a previously independent existence.

The Royal Dublin Society

The Dublin Society[2] was founded on June 25, 1731 by a group of fourteen leading citizens who met in the rooms of the Philosophical Society in Trinity College to consider how they could best 'promote improvements of all kinds'. This meeting resulted in the formation of the 'Dublin Society for improving Husbandry, Manufactures, and other Useful Arts and Sciences.'[3] The association was, in effect, a pioneering one being the first of its kind in the British Isles. Arthur Young writing in 1780 declared that 'great honour is due to Ireland for having given birth to the Dublin Society, which has the undisputed merit of being the father of all the similar societies now existing in Europe.[4] Although accusations have been leveled at the R.D.S. from time to time, that it catered only for gentlemen and rich farmers, this is not strictly true. As early as 8 January 1737, the society had declared

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[1] Thomas Carroll, 'The Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland' in William P. Coyne (ed). *Ireland industrial and agricultural,* (Dublin, 1902), p. 185.
[2] It did not become the Royal Dublin Society until 1820.
[3] William P. Coyne (ed.), The Royal Dublin Society', *Ireland industrial and agricultural,* p. 175.
[4] Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland,* Dublin 1780, vol 2, p. 95.



Dublin Society silver medal. 1767.



Dublin Society Silver Medal. 1804.

that its object was the instruction of 'the poorer sort, husbandman and manufacturer'.[5] From the time of its establishment, the society had advocated the introduction into Ireland of the latest and most advanced methods of agriculture, and encouraged, by means of the granting of premiums, the importation of improved strains of livestock including horses, to upgrade the standard of native breeds. Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* of 21 June, 1747 reports that 'Premiums for the best and dearest mares imported in 1746, not less than four, and in foal in 1747, on oath of price, and proper certificate, the sum of twenty pounds will be awarded.' [6] These premiums, together with others for the importation of mares and stallions [7], were granted by the society, and repeated for a number of years, largely through the efforts of Dr. Samuel Madden, one time Provost of Trinity College. Dr. Madden, was one of the early members of the Dublin Society

[5] H. F. Berry, *A history of the Royal Dublin Society*,(London, 1915), p. 35. Henceforth cited as Berry, *R.D.S.*
[6] Michael Cox, *Notes on the history of the Irish horse*, (Dublin, 1897), p. 101.
[7] *Reports by the commissioners appointed to inquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland,* (Dublin, 1897), question 7256. Henceforth cited as 1897 *Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland).

obtaining its original Charter. He donated much of the premium money from his own pocket, an act of generosity which earned him the soubriquet of 'Premium' Madden [8]

In 1801 the society inaugurated one of its most ambitious schemes, that is the commissioning of a series of 'statistical surveys' of the counties of Ireland. These were intended to record all the economic, industrial and agricultural activities carried on in their respective areas. By 1831, twenty- two county surveys had been completed and published by the society. These surveys, which were put together with varying degrees of competence by their respective compilers, are now important works of reference which provide an interesting record of the social and economic conditions existing in the majority of the Irish counties during the early years of the nineteenth century.[9] In addition to detailed accounts of the general agricultural conditions and practices found in the various regions, they contain a mass of information concerning agricultural, and other classes of horses and their place in the various local economies.

In 1815 the society moved to Leinster House[10] which it had purchased from the Duke of Leinster, and acquired the title of Royal Dublin Society under royal charter on June 29 1820, when George IV became its patron. In its early days, the society which was largely funded by the public administrations of the time, had undertaken a number of roles which now would be regarded as a function of national government . These included the operation of departments concerned with the Arts and Sciences, as well as the organization of establishments that later became the National Museum, the National Library, the Botanic Gardens and other national institutions. The running of most of these bodies was taken over by the government when it acquired Leinster House from the society after 1877. The latter however, remained in its former premises under a short lease until 1880, when it moved to its present premises in Ballsbridge.

In 1800 a Farming Society was founded 'under the patronage of the Dublin Society. This society took over much of the agricultural functions of the Dublin Society,[11] and introduced the concept of agricultural shows that were held at Smithfield, Dublin, and

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[8] Berry,*R.D.S.,*. pp 62-63.
[9] Out of this work arose the Geological Survey of Ireland. Ref. 'The Royal Dublin Society' in *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, p. 177
[10] Now the seat of the Oireachtas [i.e Dáil and Seanad], (the Irish Parliament).

Ballinasloe. At the latter show, a premium of £10 was offered 'for the best draft stallion of any kind'. In addition, a premium of £50 was offered 'to any person who shall import the best lot of horses of the Suffolk Punch breed, to consist of one stallion and two mares'[12]. The Farming Society came to an end in 1828, after which the Royal Dublin Society, as it was then, resumed a leading role in agricultural affairs. The R.D.S. inaugurated a 'spring cattle show' in 1831 which became an annual event that continued to be held until recently. A class for agricultural draught stallions of several breeds was included in the 1831 spring show, also one for 'Spanish asses', a type of equine which were assuming economic importance at the time as 'the poor man's horse'[13].

The Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland

The Royal Agricultural Society, as it was usually called, was founded largely through the efforts of a philanthropist Peter Purcell, who has been described as 'a large landed proprietor, an owner of stage coaches, a mail contractor, and a large employer of labour in Dublin.[14] The society was established in the early part of 1841 under the name of the Agricultural Improvement Society, at 'a well attended public meeting' held in the Royal Exchange, Dublin, under the presidency of the Duke of Leinster.' [15] From the very beginning it had received the support and assistance of the Royal Dublin Society.[16] The A.I.S. received its royal charter under the title of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland on 28 June 1860.

The aims of the original Agricultural Improvement Society had been declared as follows :

1. The establishment of at least one Annual Agricultural Show, to be held each year, and as far as possible, in each of the four provinces alternately.

2. The founding of Local or District Agricultural Societies, to act in co-operation with the parent Society for the improvement of husbandry, farming, and the breeding of cattle.

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[11] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 222.
[12] 1897 *Commissionon on horse breeding* (Ireland)., question 7257.
[13] ibid. p. 345.
[14] Thomas Carrtoll, 'The Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland' in *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, op. cit, p. 181
[15] ibid.
[16] Berry, *R.D.S,*. p. 297.

3. The establishment of an Agricultural Museum in Dublin for the exhibition of the newest and most improved implements of husbandry 'similar to that in Stirling'.

4. The encouragement and circulation of practical and useful knowledge connected with husbandry and Agriculture in all branches through the medium of cheap periodical publications and the formation of an Agricultural Library in Dublin.[17]



Royal Dublin Society Silver Medal.1824.



Royal Dublin Society Silver Medal.1840.

While the Royal Agricultural Society tended to overlap somewhat with the Royal Dublin Society with regard to horse-related activities, in practice the former tended to concentrate more on agricultural horses and their place in progressive farming, while the latter was largely concerned with the improvement of the Irish hunter which was regarded as an important national asset. Among the livestock classes in the Agricultural Improvement Society's show of 1842, classes were held for both 'cart horses' and thoroughbreds, as well as for 'Spanish donkeys'. Cash prizes and silver medals were awarded to the winners.[18]

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[17] ibid. p. 182.
[18] ibid. p. 186.

There was in fact, a good deal of co-operation between the R.A.S.I and the R.D.S. on a number of levels during the independent lifetime of the former society which lasted forty six years. The two societies were finally amalgamated by Royal Charter in 1887.[19]

The Dublin Horse Show

The annual Dublin Horse Show traditionally held in August by the Royal Dublin Society, is probably the event for which the society is most famous in this country and internationally. Although individual horse shows had been held in the R.D.S. premises in Kildare Street in 1864 and 1866, they had in fact, been organized by the R.A.S.I largely through the influence of Lord St. Lawrence of Howth Castle.[20] The first horse show to be hosted by the R.D.S was held on Leinster Lawn in 1868, on the site where the National Museum now stands. At first it was intended to be an annual event held exclusively for horses, but in 1870 a decision was made to include rams as well. However, the inclusion of the latter did not prove an unqualified success, and after some years the ram classes were discontinued.

An account of the circumstances which led to the holding of this first R.D.S. horse show on 28 August 1868, was published in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* in September 1880, on the eve of the last show to be held before the society's move to its present home in Ballsbridge.[21]:

In 1863 the attention of the Council of the Royal Agricultural Society was directed to the decline which had, previous to that time, taken place in horse-breeding in Ireland, there having been a decrease of 50,000 in the number of mares between 1859 and 1863. Along with this decrease in numbers there was also a serious deterioration in regard to the quality of the animals, which was justly attributed to the scarcity of good sires... The general breeding of horses had fallen into the hands of farmers, who did not understand or appreciate the value of thorough-bred sires best adapted for getting even troopers ; consequently, the stock produced by them had become more weedy and unsound than formerly. Irish – bred horses were, in fact, fast losing their repute, as the valuable class of horses for which this country was so long celebrated bore but a very small proportion to a most inferior class of horses, the breeding of which was a loss to the community.

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[19] ibid. p. 196.
[20] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 350.
[21] *Irish.Farmer's Gazette*.. 4 September, 1880.

The Council of the Royal Agricultural Society appointed a special committee on the 24 September 1863 'for the purpose of obtaining information upon the cause of the deterioration of the breed of horses in Ireland, and to report to the Council at some future period as to the best mode of providing a remedy for the evil complained of.' The committee forthwith instituted a very searching investigation in the course of which a mass of valuable information was obtained from various gentlemen who had special opportunities of knowing the state of horse-breeding in Ireland.[22] Different plans for stimulating public attention to this subject, and ultimately it was resolved to hold a show of horses in Dublin as a preliminary step. In the establishment of the show Lord St. Lawrence, now Earl of Howth, took a leading part. [23]

The first show was held by the R.A.S.I. on 15 April, 1864, in the premises of the Royal Dublin Society. An article written some years later, commenting on the 1864 show, remarked that :

The show was a most important one, were it for no other reason that by means of it our weak points have been indicated. As an instance of the weak points referred to , we may mention that of the class of horses calculated for troopers – a class for which this country was supposed to be celebrated – not one animal was exhibited which was considered worthy of a prize.[24]

The Royal Agricultural Society held a horse show in the same place at Michaelmas, 1866, after which the management passed into the hands of a special committee of the Royal Dublin Society. The ram show was an afterthought. It was well attended for a few years ; but it has subsequently dwindled to very limited dimensions.

In 1867 the Royal Agricultural Society held its annual show in Stephen's Green, Dublin:

and for the first time the horse show held in connection with the general show was a decided success, and created a considerably increased amount of interest in the undertaking. Another cause of the success which has attended the establishment of horse shows in Dublin is to be found in the fact that the show has proved an excellent mart for the sale of a superior class of horses, and the result is that fewer horses of that class are now to be found at Ballinsloe and other great autumn

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[22] Further details of this committee which was concerned principally with improving the standard of army remounts, appears in Chapter 9 which deals with military purchases.
[23] *Irish. Farmer's Gazette*, 4 September, 1880.
[24] *I.F.G.* 31 August, 1872.



Royal Dublin Society Silver Medal. Mare and Foal. 1854.

fairs than formerly. Of the large numbers of entries at these shows, a very considerable proportion of the animals are for sale. [25]

The resolution of the R.D.S committee in setting up the show published in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* of 27 June 1868, is worth quoting in part:

Humbly Sheweth – That in fulfilling the duties connected with one of the great departments of the Royal Dublin Society, the improvement of agriculture and livestock in Ireland, the attention of the society has been long called to the serious decline both in numbers and quality of one important class of livestock, namely horses …

That the testimony of land owners, extensive agriculturists, as well as of field officers of standing and experience, on whom has devolved the duty of providing remounts for her Majesty's troops and artillery, coincided with the opinions of veterinary surgeons, dealers in horses, and farmers, that the diminution which is rapidly becoming greater, is fraught with consequences of grave importance.

That the Society is so deeply impressed with the importance of this subject, that it has in this year, inaugurated a horse show, to be held annually on its own premises and under its direct auspices …

The 1868 horse show which was fully reported in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette,* included showing classes for thoroughbred stallions, heavy, medium, and light-weight hunters, young colts and fillies, ladies' horses and 'park horses', carriage horses, officer's chargers and troopers, and brood mares. There were 368 entries for all classes. The society

[25] *I.F.G.* 4 ,September 1880.

introduced in this event, an innovation which was later to become the main feature of all future horse shows in the world – namely jumping or 'leaping' competitions. These appear to have been derived from the practice of training young horses to jump over ditches and other obstacles in order to prepare them for the hunting field or military use. It was also the custom of vendors at Irish horse fairs such as Ballinasloe, to jump young horses over poles or hurdles in order to demonstrate their potential as future hunters. On the other hand, a report on the R.A,S.I. show in Belfast suggests that jumping competitions for horses may have originated in America.[26]

The entries for the show closed about a month before the opening, and 'in addition to the entrance fee, exhibitors were required to lodge a deposit of £2 on each horse. At the adjudication there was a preliminary selection of horses to be examined by veterinary surgeons before the prizes were finally awarded.' [27]

During the early years of the show, jumping competitions were confined to *bona fide* hunters. Competitors were allowed to practice between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m every morning.[28] In 1868 there were only three obstacles – 'the high jump' consisting of adjustable wooden poles starting at a height of four feet six inches. These were designed to test ' weight carrying hunters' (from 12 stone to 14 stone and not less than five years old). The first prize was £5, the second £2, was competed for on the Tuesday. The 'long leap' which took place on the Wednesday, consisted of a twelve foot water jump with a 2½ foot take-off fence in front. This competition was 'open to all horses'. The first prize was £5, the second, £2. There were also 'champion prizes', which were 'contested for over a stone wall'. This was open to competition for 'horses that have on the preceding day cleared four feet six inches over the timber fence to the satisfaction of the stewards'. The first prize was a silver cup value £10, and second, a riding whip value £5.[29]

It is interesting to note that many keen hunting men at first frowned on the idea of a jumping competition. However, in an after-view of the horse show, the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* remarked that:

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[26] *Irish.Farmer's.Gazette*. 3 August 1868.
[27] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 351.
[28] Terence De Vere White, *The story of the Royal Dublin Society*, (Tralee, 1955), p.158.
[29] *I.F.G.* 1 August, 1868.

Straight – laced sportsmen may condemn such a prostitution of the noble qualities of the hunter ; but a horse that can jump five feet of timber at a moment's notice, or that can, in cold blood span some twenty feet, possesses the first qualification of a hunter in these rapid days, when a man who does not get a start with hounds is not likely to recover his lost vantage ground. For if a hunter has his prize honours of the show-yard thick upon him, but will not face water, and declines to rise at a piece of timber, of what value is he to a hard rider? [30]

In organizing the horse show, the intention of the R.D.S was to encourage the improvement of the standard of Irish horses by awarding prizes rather than to provide an opportunity for selling them. Nevertheless, from the very first, buying and selling at a high level took place. The *Irish Farmer's Gazette* covering the first show reported that :

Dublin is certainly the best locality in Ireland to find a purchaser for a horse, as the prices obtained during the Punchestown week amply testify. But 'the Saxon' must invade us afresh next spring before such prices can be obtained in the Green Isle. The dealers, as a class, are liberal with the Irish farmer but the advantages of bringing the breeder in direct communication with English sportsmen cannot be overlooked, and it is very decidedly of advantage to both. [31]

The first Dublin Horse Show was an undoubted success both with regard to attracting entries and achieving public support, the jumping competitions being especially popular with spectators, 6029 of whom attended the show.[32] The total receipts for the event were £1,856. 9s. The balance to credit after all expenses had been paid was £161.14s. [33] Encouraged by the general enthusiasm of the public, the R.D.S. proceeded to plan a bigger and better event for 1869. Excursion trains from the provinces were organized by the railway companies 'at a reduced tariff of charges.' On 10 July 1869, a preview of that year's forthcoming show appeared in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* announcing that 'every species of the equine tribe, ranging from the thorough-bred in the stud book down to the Spanish ass, will be on view.' It was further stated that:

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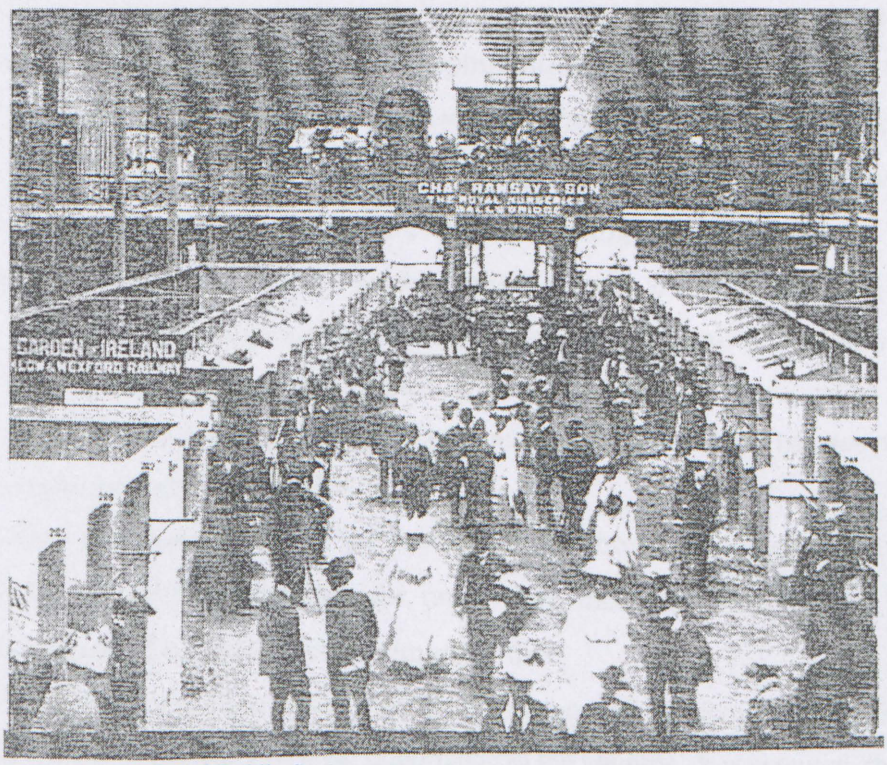
[30] *I.F.G.* 8 August, 1868.
[31] ibid.
[32] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 350.
[33] De Vere While, *The story of the Royal Dublin Society*, op. cit. , p. 157.



Royal Dublin Society Jumping Enclosure 1903. Photograph R.D.S.



Royal Dublin Society, Main Hall 1903. Photograph R.D.S.

A list of the prizes for the high wall, water, and other descriptions of jumping is thoroughly systemized, and for which liberal prizes have been offered. The attraction which is certain to result from this department will be considerably increased by lady equestrians of respectability, whose attendance will, it is hoped, be secured for the purpose.

The showing categories were much the same as the previous year, however, an innovation was the inclusion of trade stands. The Royal Agricultural Society, mindful of its responsibility to husbandry, donated a challenge cup 'value £50 for such pure-bred agricultural stallions as may be considered most desirable for improving the breed of draught horses in this country'. According to the *Irish Times* of 10 August 1869 :

It is most satisfactory to find that the exhibition this year is so superior to that of 1868, as well in the numbers as in the character of the animals collected. Some idea of the high quality of the horses shown may be formed from the sum, over £70,000, fixed upon as their monetary value. Every county in Ireland is represented, and represented well, and the immense numbers who visited the show yesterday prove how general and deep is the interest in the improvement of the Irish equine stock. In every possible way the exhibition this year is a triumphant success, and the committee of management have well deserved the warm congratulations they have received.

As in the previous year, the jumping competitions, which took place in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant and his party, attracted the most attention from the public. The standard was high, especially with the 'long leap' on the Wednesday, the winner being Mr. Richard Flynn's Bashful Boy who cleared 27 feet.[34] Selling was brisk, and :

During the day many of the best horses changed owners at very high prices. The foreign buyers seemed most anxious to become purchasers ; not a few animals of first class blood were bought for Italy. The French horse dealers offered remunerative rates ; for the Austrian Government the sales were frequent and satisfactory, and the English buyers became the possessors of all the thoroughbreds within their reach.[35]

By 1870, the organization of the Dublin Horse Show had settled down to a regular pattern, and for the first time classes for rams were included. An editorial in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* of 7 May of that year, remarked that:

The horse shows which have been established in connection with the Royal Dublin Society excite much interest, and are intrinsically of great importance to the country. It is essential, therefore, that

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[34] *Irish Times*, 13 August 1869.
[35] *Irish Times*, 14 August, 1869.

these shows should answer the purpose for which they were instituted ; and the object we understand to be, to encourage the breeding of horses of a superior class.

The First Royal Visit to the Dublin Horse Show in 1871.



THE JUMPING COMPETITIONS.—LORD DUFFERIN IN THE SADDLE.
(From a Contemporary Drawing.)

"At the 1871 Show Prince Arthur (now Duke of Connaught) distributed the prizes, and was informed by one of the prizetakers that he would willingly pay the thirty sovereigns awarded him if the Prince would make them more frequent visits."

Press cutting courtesy of the R.D.S.

A report on the 1870 show commented that:

The entries in the different classes amounted altogether to 493, constituting, we believe the largest show which has yet been held by the Royal Dublin Society. This large number of entries included, as a matter of course, a considerable number of inferior animals, brought out by their owners more with the view of selling them than with the hope of winning any special marks of distinction.

This is to be expected in any exhibition of the kind, but it helps to detract from the general character of the show, and if it is to become a horse fair, we hope that its purely commercial features will be transferred to a great horse fair which we hope to see established in the Phoenix Park ...

Looking at the show in its most important light as a medium for improving the breed of horses in Ireland, our chief attention must necessarily be directed to the thorough-bred and other sires exhibited ... There yet remains another class of sires to be taken into account – namely 'pure-bred' agricultural stallions considered most desirable for improving the breed of draught horses in this country ...

The leaping prizes excited much interest, and in order to get a good view, a large stand was erected, to which, however, a separate charge for admission was made. Notwithstanding this, the stand was crowded each day. On Tuesday the first competition was for hunters over a hurdle trimmed with gorse, commencing at four and a half feet high ... On Wednesday afternoon the leaping was resumed, a large assemblage being again present, including his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant, the Countess Spencer, and the vice-regal party. The leap was over a stone wall, raised progressively until it reached six feet in height, the competing horses carrying not less than 12 stone weight ... On Thursday the leaping was over a hurdle, trimmed with gorse, 2½ feet high, and on the off side 12 feet of water. Mr. Richard Flynn's Valeria and Mr. George Low's Jack Spring were equal, and £10 awarded to each. [36]

The R.D.S. did not hold a separate horse show in 1871, but combined it with the agricultural event organized by the Royal Agricultural Society which was held that year in Dublin. The R.A.S.I. show which included various types of livestock as well as horses, was too large to be held at the R.D.S. premises in Kildare Street, so it had to be staged in Ballsbridge where a fifteen acre site on the Pembroke estate was rented for the event. This site was later acquired by the R.D.S. when it moved from Kildare Street.

The 1871 agricultural show was an extremely fashionable affair. The Prince of Wales who was president of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, arrived at Kingstown in the royal yacht, accompanied by a large party. The attendance of High Society including royalty, together with the high standard of the exhibits including many trade stands, ensured the success of the show by attracting large numbers of visitors to the show from all over Ireland and Great Britain. There were 599 entries in the horse classes [37] which consisted broadly of the same categories as the previous R.D.S. shows, plus several classes for agricultural stallions including one for Clydesdales or Suffolks, and another for

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[36] *I.rish Farmer's.Gazette,* 20 August 1870.
[37] *I..F.G.* 5 August 1871.

'any other breed'. Jumping competitions, which had become such a popular feature of the previous R.D.S. shows, were included as well:

The jumping trials excited a vast amount of interest, being conducted on Wednesday in view of the Royal Party. The stands afforded an admirable view of the proceedings. It is to be regretted, therefore, that the jumping, with a few exceptions, was bad, and not at all equal to what would be expected from trained horses over a country. Much of this may, however, be attributed to the riding, which was of a helter-skelter and very unscientific nature, more like one would expect to see at a 'stageen' race than in the jumping ground of a Royal Show – yard. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales knows something of how Irish horses ridden by Irish sportsmen should go across a country ; but we hope that others of the Royal party who have not enjoyed the same experience, and strangers among the on-lookers will not take the leaping they saw as a specimen of the generality of Irish hunting, particularly as the best horses do not compete in the trials, which, we think, they should be compelled to do ...

The jumping on Thursday was rather better than on Wednesday; and it is only right to say that the horses and the men who rode them were placed at a disadvantage, in consequence of having to take the jumps with a bright sun shining in their faces. This would have been avoided if the position of the various leaps had been reversed, so the jumps could have been taken with the sun on the back.

During the jumping on Wednesday the celebrated 'Master Magrath'[38] was led into the ring and exhibited to the Royal party. The appearance of the far-famed winner of the Waterloo Cup elicited loud cheers from the spectators. [39]

In 1872 the horse and ram show resumed its venue at the R.D.S. premises. There were 576 horses, of which 220 were hunters, entered for the various classes. 70 rams were also entered. The jumping arrangements were the same as in 1870.[40] There was a record attendance of 10,529 visitors to the show[41]. Among these visitors were 'several gentlemen employed in purchasing horses for foreign governments, chiefly Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy, and France.'[42]

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[38] A famous greyhound of the time.
[39] *I.F.G.* 12 August 1871.
[40] *I.F.G.* 31 August, 1872.
[41] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 352.
[42] *I.F.G* 31 August, 1872..

In 1873 entries for class were somewhat lower at 539 [43], than in the previous year. The jumping competitions were over the same course as before. The *Irish Farmer's Gazette* in covering the show, reported that :

The very popular meeting of the Royal Dublin Society commenced on Tuesday morning, and closed on the evening of yesterday. From the interest attached to the question of the supply of horses consequent on the recent commission of the House of Lords, and the report which has been published by that body, the show may justly be considered as of more than usual importance. It has served to prove, at least, that there is no falling off in the quality of Irish horses.[44]

The 1874 horse show was reviewed in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette as follows* [45] :

The Horse Show of the Royal Dublin Society was first set on foot by the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, and still continues to maintain its position as the premier show of the kind in the United Kingdom, notwithstanding the formidable rivals which have risen up of late years in England. The Registrar General reports that there are fewer horses this year in Ireland than the number given last year to the enumerators, but this did not affect the turn out in Kildare Street ... Last year there were 529 entries of horses, while this year the catalogue contained no less than 610 entries [46] ... The autumn show is now looked upon as a likely place to sell a useful horse, and it is owing as much to this as to any other reason that the entries have increased so much compared with what they were at first. But as the accommodation which the Royal Dublin Society is able to give is at least but limited, the conclusion to be drawn from the growth of the show, considered as at, is obviously that a great horse fair held in connection with the show, and as much in the vicinity as possible, would undoubtedly be a success. [47]

The *Irish Farmer's Gazette* commenting on the 1875 horse show, reported that :

The total number of entries of horses, in all classes, was 615, against 610 in 1874, and 529 in 1873. The fact that the entries now sent forward are fully as many as the premises belonging to the Royal Dublin Society can accommodate, and if there is any increase in the future, increased space must be provided, but how that is to be accomplished it is not easy to see. [48]

Public attendance at the 1875 show reached the maximum of any year at the Kildare Street premises when 21,857 visitors passed through the turnstiles during the four days of the event.[49] However, there was a considerable reduction in the number of show entries in

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[43] This may be an error as other sources report 529 entries.
[44] *I.F.G.* 30 August, 1873.
[45] *I.F.G.* 29 August, 1874
[46] According to Berry *R.D.S.*, p. 352, the entries in 1874 amounted to 636 which was the maximum number of competitors reached during the R.D.S occupation of the Kildare Street premises.
[47] *I.F.G.* 29 August, 1874
[48] *I.F.G.* 7 August 1875.
[49] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 352.

1876 which amounted to 489 horses in all categories, as opposed to 615 the previous year. Nevertheless, an editorial in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* commented that :

The diminution in the numbers was not any disadvantage ; for although the decrease occurred chiefly in the hunter classes, it did not mean any inferiority in these classes as compared with former years. On the contrary, the absentees consisted of animals which might swell numbers by their presence, but would not have added to the *prestige* of the show.[50]

There were 534 horses entered for all classes in the 1877 show.[51] The showing classes and the jumping competitions were similar to those of previous years. Two important questions, concerning the future of the Royal Dublin Society's horse show, had however, arisen ; namely, the government had been negotiating to take over the society's premises in Kildare Street together with some of its functions in the arts and sciences, including the National Library and the National Museum. In addition, the shows were obviously getting to big for the society's premises, and the acquisition of a larger site had become inevitable. Secondly, there had been much discussion about the advantages of amalgamation with the Royal Agricultural Society. The proposed name for the combined societies was the Royal Irish Agricultural Society.

There was no R.D.S. horse show in 1878 as the R.A.S.I. held their agricultural show in that year at Ballsbridge. There were about 700 entries for the horse competitions. An innovation was special classes for Dublin hackney cars and cabs :

The novel competition for hackney cars and cabs, with harness and appointments, excited much attention. The display was very good, and, we trust, prefigures something what the citizens of Dublin may expect to have at their service in the good times coming. Mr. James Tallon took first prizes for cars [outside jaunting cars] and cabs ['growlers'] . His cars were built by messrs. Doyle and Sons, Queen Street, and his cabs by messrs. Saunderson. Premiums were also awarded to drivers distinguished for honesty, sobriety, civility, and attention to business.[52]

On 16 November the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* reported that:

The contemplated amalgamation with the Royal Agricultural Society has necessarily delayed ... It will be remembered that the proposed scheme for amalgamation drawn up by the joint committee of the Royal Dublin Society and Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, was dependant upon the government undertaking to extend to the new Royal Irish Agricultural Society all the advantages to agriculture contained in Lord

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[50] *I.F.G.* 2 September 1876.
[51] *I..F.G.* 11 August 1877.
[52] *I.F.G.* 10 August, 1878.

Sandon's letter of February, 1876, and the agreement with the Royal Dublin Society of the 5th. March, 1877. The government felt a difficulty in dealing with any other society other than the Royal Dublin Society. But with the view of removing obstacles to amalgamation that would thus arise, it has been proposed by the government to hand to the society the sum of £25,000 in lieu of the obligation of clauses 9 and 10 of the agreement, and that part of clause 1 which relates to agriculture.

The clauses referred to are as follows : -

1) The government will allot to the Royal Dublin Society in Leinster House such accomodation free of rent and taxes, as in the judgement of the government is sufficient for the function of the society still remaining to it in science and agriculture. The conditions of occupation will be the same as those accorded to the learned societies in Burlington House.

2) The government will either allow the agricultural shows of the society to be continued in Kildare Street ... or provide for the transfer of shows to some other convenient place ...

The last horse show to be held in Kildare Street was in August / September 1880. Entries for the horse classes amounted to 600.[53] In 1879 the R.D.S. took out a long lease on the same Ballsbridge site that had been used for the R.A.S.I. shows of 1871 and 1878. The terms obtained from the Pembroke estate were exceptionally favourable ; fifteen acres of good building land for a term of 500 years at a yearly rent of £180. [54] Plans for the new show halls were commissioned in 1879, and work on laying out the new show grounds was commenced shortly after. Later in the same year, the R.D.S. agricultural hall in Kildare Street was taken down and reassembled on the new site in readiness for the society's annual spring show, which took place from 19 to 22 April, 1881.

An article in the *Freeman's Journal* published on the eve of the 1881 horse show - the first to be held in the new premises - reported that :

The preparations at the Ballsbridge premises are virtually complete. The buildings there are a great ornament to the locality, and the advantages they afford for shows of the kind are made more and more manifest by each successive event. The two large halls are fitted with substantial and well-finished wooden compartments

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[53] *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, p. 179.
[54] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p. 313.





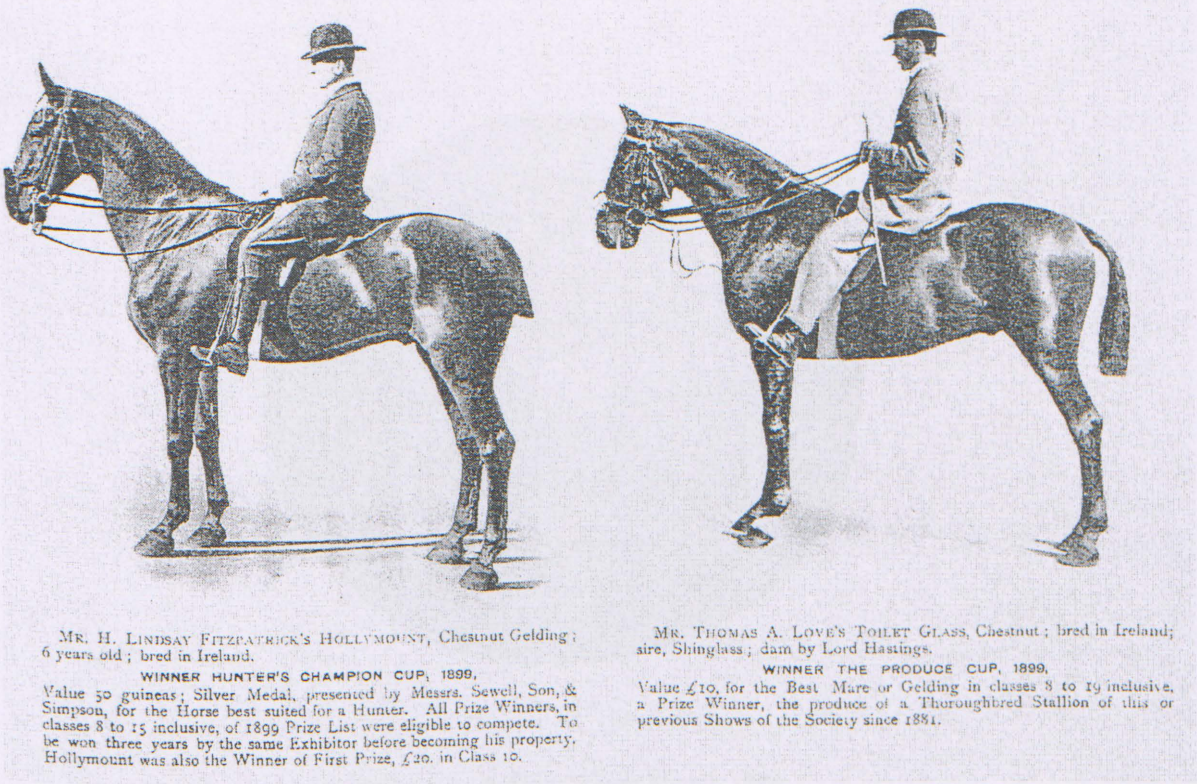
Jumping over rails at the R.D.S Horse Show, 1900. Photographs R.D.S.

for the reception of horses, a large number of which will be placed in them, while the remainder will be accommodated in permanent slated sheds which have been built along the boundary walls of the grounds. At the horse shows formerly held in Kildare Street, there were next to no means of showing off the appearance and action of the horses unless the animals took part in the jumping competitions. This deficiency is most effectively supplied on the Ballsbridge ground, four spacious rings being enclosed which will give ample scope for exhibiting all the horses. The entries of horses for this show reach the gross total of 589. This is 11 less than the gross total of last years show. The number of hunters, however, is larger than last year, while there is a large falling off in ponies. The entries of rams – the only other kind of livestock to be exhibited – number 62. These will be located in sheds outside the main buildings. The gallery of the hall will be occupied with goods of some 70 exhibitors.

The arrangements for the jumping competitions are the best that we have ever had in Dublin, and should the weather prove favourable this will be the grand feature of the show. It will be carried on during Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. A space of four acres has been allotted for this purpose at the rere of the buildings, and commanding agreeable prospects in every direction. The ring is of magnificent dimensions. At the side of it, farthest from the entrance, a grand stand has been erected capable of accommodating 1,500 persons. This resembles that recently constructed at Punchestown, having an iron corrugated roof resting on supports of the same metal [55]..

The additional ground afforded by the new premises enabled a much more spacious

[55] *F.J.* 28 August, 1881.



MR. H. LINDSAY FITZPATRICK'S HOLLYMOUNT, Chestnut Gelding; 6 years old; bred in Ireland.

WINNER HUNTER'S CHAMPION CUP, 1899.

Value 50 guineas; Silver Medal, presented by Messrs. Sewell, Son, & Simpson, for the Horse best suited for a Hunter. All Prize Winners, in classes 8 to 15 inclusive, of 1899 Prize List were eligible to compete. To be won three years by the same Exhibitor before becoming his property. Hollymount was also the Winner of First Prize, £20, in Class 10.

MR. THOMAS A. LOVE'S TOILET GLASS, Chestnut; bred in Ireland; sire, Shinglass; dam by Lord Hastings.

WINNER THE PRODUCE CUP, 1899.

Value £10, for the Best Mare or Gelding in classes 8 to 19 inclusive, a Prize Winner, the produce of a Thoroughbred Stallion of this or previous Shows of the Society since 1881.

Dublin Horse Show 1899. Riding Class winners. Photograph from *Dublin Horse ShowYear Annual1900.*

The additional ground afforded by the new premises enabled a much more spacious jumping arena to be laid out than in Kildare Street where the horses had to jump in a constricted court-yard with wet saw dust laid down to provide a suitable surface.[56]

At Ballsbridge, three newly built permanent obstacles were designed to reproduce natural features which horses and riders could expect to encounter while hunting in various districts of Ireland. These were supplemented by additional movable fences, normally hurdles. The first permanent obstacle consisted of a double bank built of sods over a stone foundation, grassed over to provide a firm surface. It was three feet across at the top, with a ditch in front, similar to banks found in parts of Limerick and Tipperary. As the week progressed it was found necessary to provide this obstacle with guard-rails.[57] The double bank was immediately in front of the grandstand. The second obstacle was a water jump in

[56] Berry, *R.D.S.* p. 351.
[57] *Irish Times,* 3 September 1881.



R.D.S. Horse Show Silver Medal. 1884.

the centre of the arena. It was intended to imitate a brook, and described as 'about the size of that at Baldoyle.' The third fence consisted of a stone wall similar to those encountered by hunters in Roscommon. This obstacle was built of large flat stones at the base with loose round stones on the top which would not damage a horse's legs if knocked. It could be raised by adding more stones on top.[58] The bank was jumped first, then the wall, and finally the water fence. Competitors were allowed three attempts to negotiate each obstacle.[59] On the Friday the culmination of the week was the 'Champion Wall Jump for all horses over a wall not exceeding at first four feet'. The competition took place in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant and his party who had seats in the centre of the arena. The wall was raised six inches for the second and third rounds. However, the *Freeman's Journal* [60] reported that not all the jumping was of high quality. In fact, 'refusals and clumsy jumping prevailed'. On the other hand, it was conceded that 'a lot of the jumping

[58] *F.J.* 28 August 1881
[59] *F.J.* 1 September 1881.
[60] ibid.

was against the sun'. It must be conceded however, that by 1881 show jumping had not yet fully developed as a sport in its own right, and these competitions were in fact, still intended to enable horses and riders to demonstrate their prowess in the hunting field rather than as show jumpers. Nevertheless, contemporary reports indicate that horses and riders took part in these early jumping competitions in a spirit of healthy rivalry, while the crowds were not slow to demonstrate their approval, or lack of it, regarding individual performances.

Notwithstanding the popular enthusiasm generated by the developing sport of show jumping, the principal object of the show was still considered to be the improvement and encouragement of horse breeding in Ireland, especially the weight-carrying hunter, which also had a military function. It was considered that this end would be best achieved by holding showing classes and rewarding excellence. The principal award was the Pembroke Cup which was given 'for the best mare or gelding exhibited in the class of young horses suitable for hunters, bred in Ireland by the exhibitor'. The showing classes[61] included categories for thoroughbred sires 'calculated to get thoroughbred stock and weight-carrying hunters', 'sires calculated to get harness horses, roadsters, and hacks, young horses suitable for hunters, weight-carrying roadsters, ponies, brood mares, and agricultural horses. The Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland had donated a challenge cup for the latter category.

Spectator numbers were recorded at 15,736 for the 1881 show.[62] These numbers had been surpassed many times at previous shows in Kildare Street, and probably reflect a popular opinion of the time in Dublin, that Ballsbridge as a venue was rather too remote for ordinary visitors. [63] Nevertheless, the receipts for the first show in Ballsbridge amounted to £1705 as compared with the 1880 show, which was held in Kildare Street.[64]

Spectator numbers through the turnstiles in 1882 at 14,973,[65] were considerably down on those for 1881, no doubt partially for the above reason, and partially because of heavy rain during the latter part of the week. It is however, probable that the majority of the absentees from the 1882 show belonged to the poorer classes as by this time, the Dublin

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[61] *I.T.* 1 September 1881.
[62] *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, p. 179
[63] Berry, *R.D.S.*, p.352.
[64] ibid. p. 312.

horse show was regarded as 'far and away the biggest event of the Dublin summer season'. The *Irish Times* reporting on the 1882 show, related that '1,400 spectators from the best class of society, both of town and country' attended the jumping competitions on the Thursday in spite of the bad weather. [66] And :

many visitors attended the show with no interest beyond that which any fashionable promenade would have for them, but the great majority were of a different class – persons who had purchased catalogues to see the names of persons great in connection with horse shows, whose horses were likely to obtain a place in the prize list.

The jumping competitions were as always, the most popular feature of the show, and attracted the largest number of spectators. There had been considerable modification to the jumping arena since the previous year. A single bank was added to the course on the opposite side of the arena to the double, the water jump was 'made to much more resemble a natural ditch', while the stone wall had been moved to a more suitable part of the arena.[67]

As well as the usual showing classes, a category for Dublin jarvies and their vehicles was introduced in 1882 no doubt inspired by a similar competition held by the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland in 1878. However, unlike the 1878 event which had separate categories, for outside cars, and hackney cabs, the R.D.S. included both categories in one class. The *Irish Times* reported, that of the seven competitors :

Each ... turned out in capital style, the modern and improved appearance of the vehicles, the really handsome harness, and the excellent horses, were highly approved of – indeed the horses would have done credit to any private gentleman, and we cannot help thinking that such encouragement as the society thought fit of holding out to car proprietors will have a good effect in the way of of creating healthy emulation amongst them. [68]

As had become customary at R.D.S. shows, a good deal of buying and selling of horses had taken place during the week, and in addition, a special sale in connection with the show took place at Sewell's horse repository in Lower Mount Street, where some unusually high prices were realised.[69]

By 1884, the Dublin horse show had become well established as an annual social event as well as one of the most important international marts for the sale of horses. The

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[65] *Ireland industrial and agricultural*, p. 179.
[66] *I.T.* 1 September 1882.
[67] *I.T.* 30 August 1882.
[68] *I.T.* 1 September 1882.
[69] ibid..

earlier reluctance of Dubliners to venture as far as Ballsbridge had been overcome, and the number of visitors passing through the turnstiles was recorded at 26,558.[70] The Duke of Edinburgh together with his party attended the show, and no doubt the presence of royalty boosted the number of spectators. The Dublin Tramways Company played its part by providing an increased service from Nelson's Pillar with twenty cars running to the show grounds every three minutes, and from the show to the pillar in the evening.[71] In addition, a number of railway companies in Great Britain and Ireland put on extra trains to cater for the visitors. These included The London and North Western, The Great Northern of Ireland, The Midland Great Western of Ireland, The Great Southern and Western of Ireland, The Waterford and Limerick, The Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford.[72] The numbers of horses entered for all classes in 1884 reached a record 806.

Referring to the 1884 show, the *Freeman's Journal* commented :

Of late years the show under the auspices of the Royal Dublin Society has grown into a position of importance such as few of its most sanguine promoters could have anticipated. It has completely snuffed out and made generally obsolete all kinds of local and provincial horse shows and fairs - at least it has so strongly influenced and effectively impressed its influence upon them as to make all minor efforts absolutely insignificant. The great horse show in Dublin has now reached the limits of a great national fair, and it has become a recognised centre from which spring almost all the chief transactions in horseflesh in Ireland. [73]

Such was the success of the annual show, that it had become evident that more ground would be needed for its activities. Consequently, it was decided to acquire an additional twelve acres of ground in the area enclosed by Merrion, Simmonscourt, and Anglesea roads. Lord Pembroke 'very liberally' granted a lease for this site on the same terms as the original holding.[74]

The Dublin horse show continued to develop, and by the following year the *Freeman's Journal* was able to report.[75]:

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[70] *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, p. 179.
[71] *F.J.* 28 August 1884.
[72] *I.T.* 25 August 1884.
[73] *F.J.* 27 August 1884
[74] Berry, *R.D.S.*,. p. 313.
[75] *F.J.* 26 August 1885.

The jumping ground had undergone such alterations as would make the place almost unrecognisable ... There are two stone walls – one a new one – in the centre of the ground, both built up with round sea stones to five feet, and there is also the water jump, the double and three other banks, and a gorse hurdle. One competition is for all horses over the course, 13 stone and upwards to be carried. The other is at catch weights, and a third for ponies over a special course ... In the adjoining enclosure there is a trial or veterinary paddock, with a ditch bank and gorse hurdle set apart specially for the trial and examination of horses.

The 1885 jumping course, which became popularly known as the 'Ballsbridge Course', continued to be used virtually unaltered until 1935. By 1895, the number of entries for all classes had grown to 1,402 [76]. The competitors for the jumping competitions had become so numerous that they had to negotiate the course in pairs. By that time, show jumping was well on the path of development as a sport in its own right, and was now commonly included as an event at local agricultural shows. In 1897 entries numbered 1431, and visitor numbers, boosted by the attendance of the Duke and Duchess of York, reached an astonishing 66,167. By the end of the century, show jumping competitions were attracting foreign riders to Dublin.[77]

During the 1880s rules for judging show jumping at Dublin were comparatively simple. Competing horses had to carry a minimum weight. There was no set time, but competitors were expected to complete the course 'at a fair hunting pace', and the obstacles were to be cleared simply 'to the satisfaction of the judges'. After 1895 'all rules and standards of judging were withdrawn and judges were left to express their own preferences. which usually meant that, in making his decision, the judge would simply consider how well each individual horse would carry him personally in the hunting field. This method of judging show jumping competitions persisted until the nineteen twenties when it was replaced by a new system which took into account mistakes made with the placement of fore and hind legs.[78] In 1899, the practice of holding regular Horse Show auctions of

[76] *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, p. 179.
[77] Brian Smith, *The Horse in Ireland*, (Dublin 1991), p. 272.
[78] ibid.



RDS Horse Show 1908. Photograph from Gorham, *Dublin Yesterday.*

horses in the society's premises on the north side of Merrion Road, was introduced. Similar auctions continued to be held until the late twentieth century. [79]

Royal Dublin Society's Premium Schemes [80]

In its earliest days, the R.D.S. had been accustomed, on and off, to offer cash premiums for the improvement of horse breeding in Ireland. This practice which had proved successful in the past, was revived in order to counter the perceived deterioration of Irish equine stock which occurred during the mid-nineteenth century. A special committee was set up by the R.D.S. to go into the matter. In 1887 that the society approached the government, and were promised a sum of £5,000 'to encouragement improvement in the breed of horses and cattle in Ireland'. £3,550 of this grant was apportioned to horse breeding. In 1888, sixteen premiums of £200 were offered 'for thoroughbred stallions to serve not less than fifty half-bred mares, the property of farmers whose tenement valuation did not exceed £200.' Local committees were appointed to carry out the scheme in their

[79] Berry, *R.D.S,* p. 353.
[80] 1897 *Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland), questions 7252 – 7415.

own districts, and proceedings were carried out under strict veterinary control. When the stallion fee was more than £3, the R.D.S. subsidised it to the extent of £1.

According to the 1897 report on horse breeding in Ireland,[81] the bigger farmers (those with valuations over £200) together with the gentry did not in fact, require assistance, and the poorest districts in Ireland were already under the charge of the Congested Districts Board. The economic classes that were set to benefit most from the R.D.S. scheme were said to be the small agricultural tenants and working farmers with holdings from twenty to thirty acres. This economic group bred most of the horses in the country, and 'generally keep one or two brood mares with which they do their farm work, and from which they breed a foal as a rule every year.' In 1895, the premium scheme for thoroughbred stallions was replaced by a system of registration organized by the society. This scheme was however, of somewhat limited scope. The report of the 1897 commission [82] stated that:

A system of registration has also been suggested, whereby every stallion in the country should be inspected, and registered, if sound, and considered suitable to the wants of the breeders in the districts where it is proposed he should stand. This, it may be pointed out, is an e4xtension of the scheme at present in operation under the rules of the Royal Dublin Society ... We are of the opinion that it would be a very substantial benefit if the registration of the Royal Dublin Society could be largely extended. The owners of mares would, we hope, gradually realize the value of the guarantee of soundness and suitability that such a registration would confer.

The task of encouraging improvement in the breeding of horses, together with the registration of stallions was transferred to the newly-established Department of Agriculture in 1900.

The North-East Agricultural Association

According to information supplied by its secretary to the editor of *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, this Association was founded in Belfast on October 20 1854 under the chairmanship of the Marquis of Downshire. [83] It had the same broad objects as the Royal Dublin Society and the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland but concentrated its activities

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[81] ibid. pp 28- 9.
[82] ibid. p. 10

on the counties of Down, Antrim, Armagh, and Monaghan. The stated intentions of the association were (1) the improvement of stock and farm produce by holding an annual show for their exhibition ; (2) the encouragement of the manufacture of implements suitable to the North-eastern counties of Ireland, and (3) the dissemination of practical and useful knowledge concerned with agriculture in its various branches.

The association held its first agricultural show at Belfast on August 23 and 24, 1855 where money premiums, medals, and certificates were awarded to the winners of the various classes. The show committee introduced the concept of two distinct categories of exhibitors, namely 'amateurs' and 'working farmers', the latter grouping being allotted higher premiums than the former. Classes for horses were included in the 1855 show, 29 in the 'amateur' section, and 42, presumably working animals, in the working farmer's section. There were also 29 implement stands in connection with the latter. The N.E.A.A. held annual agricultural shows from 1855 to 1896, except for 1861 when it deferred holding its show as the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland was holding its exhibition in Belfast that year, and 1866 when the show was cancelled on account of an outbreak of cattle disease. Horse classes were a regular feature of these shows. Towards the end of the century the association organized a 'spring show' and a 'horse and sheep show' similar to those held by the R.D.S. The 1897 spring show included classes for draught horses, polo ponies, draught horses in gear, and harness horses. There were also jumping competitions similar to those in Dublin. The 1897 horse and sheep show had classes for thoroughbreds, hackneys, 'yearlings and two-year olds other than thoroughbreds', hunter brood mares and foals, young horses suitable for hunters, hunters, roadsters and saddle horses, harness horses, and trotting horses. There were also jumping and driving competitions.

Congested Districts Board, Horse-Breeding Programme.

The Congested Districts Board was created as part of the 'Balfour act' in August 1891 with the object of ameliorating 'the conditions of life of the inhabitants of certain of the poorest districts of the western coast of Ireland.'[84]. In certain of these districts, notably in parts of Galway, Mayo and Kerry, several ancient races of small, hardy ponies had

[83] Kenneth M'Crea, 'The North East Agricultural Association', *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, pp 197 – 204.

survived. These were used for such tasks as transporting turf, and the collection of seaweed for agricultural use. As well as introducing donkeys that were comparative rarities until that time in the West of Ireland, the C.D.B. instituted a horse-breeding programme for the areas under their control which they considered suitable for that form of livestock rearing. They used the existing stock as a starting point. Starting in spring 1892, the C.D.B, who had their own stud-farm at Shankhill, Co. Dublin, purchased seventeen stallions of which twelve were hackneys – an English breed which had been developed purely as a specialist harness animal. They did this on the advice of one of their commissioners, a Mr. Wrench who was an enthusiast for the breed.[85] In total, the Board purchased, hired, and bred thirty six hackney sires.[86] During the covering season these stallions which had cost the board an average of between £190 and £200 were stationed at a number of local centres for the purpose of serving mares belonging to small local breeders, charging only a minimum fee of five shillings. The Board's choice of sires was criticized severely by many horse breeders and dealers in other parts of Ireland. The reason for their objection was the fear that hackney blood might contaminate the strain of hunters for which Ireland had become internationally famous, and which were so economically valuable to the country. Hackneys had been developed especially in Norfolk, purely as a harness breed of a certain type, which was not considered suitable for Ireland which required strains developed purely for local conditions. These included 'riding horses and harness horses of a particular stamp'.[87] On the other hand, the Irish hunter had become internationally famous for its jumping ability, and many people in the Irish horse world were aware of the danger of the unsuitable Hackney strain spreading from the congested districts to the hunter breeding areas in other parts of the country, especially as 'large numbers of foals are driven from the Western districts of Ireland to various fairs in the country, many of them being sold even as far to the east as Kildare, Meath, Wicklow, Wexford, and other hunter-breeding districts.'[88] Many of the dealers who regularly bought horses in Ireland declared that even the merest

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[84] Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 1891 (54 & 55 Vict., c. 48). Establishes Congested Districts Board.
[85] William Micks, *History of the Congested District's Board,,* (Dublin, 1925), p. 28. Henceforth cited as Micks.
[86] 1897*Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland), p. 12.
[87] ibid., p.11
[88] ibid., p.8.

suspicion of Hackney blood in a horse would cause them to reject it.[89] On the other hand, some witnesses to the 1897 commission who were Hackney enthusiasts, pointed out that the introduction of stallions of that breed would:

materially benefit the poorer farmers in the congested districts by enabling them to obtain an enhanced price for their young stock : that there was no danger of the blood percolating through the country : that even if the Hackney blood did disseminate through that portion of the country devoted to the production of hunters, it would not prejudice the future of the hunter, and by some few it is even argued that it will have the opposite effect by infusing more substance into the hunter brood mares ...[90]

There was a considerable difference of opinion between the supporters of the different breeds, the so-called 'battle of the stallions'[91], which was reflected in the evidence submitted by each side to the 1897 commission. After examining the arguments of the opposing parties, the commission finally concluded that :

The introduction of Hackney stallions in the congested districts must also be considered with reference to their effect upon the country generally; on this point the witnesses, more especially the dealers who at present buy horses in Ireland, are almost *unanimously* of opinion that if Hackney blood finds its way into the hunter breeding districts it will be highly injurious ... The commercial value of Irish horses is, to a large extent, due to a well founded belief in their comparative freedom from any admixture of so called 'soft blood' ; and whatever individual opinions may be held on the merits of Hackney blood, we cannot doubt, from the evidence before us, that an infusion of that strain throughout Ireland would depreciate the value of the Irish horse.

The Congested Districts Board took note of the danger to the integrity of the general hunter population imposed by their use of hackneys. They reported that they had the progeny of their stallions carefully watched, and 'in no case has any want of staying power in the half-bred hackneys been alleged.' 'The board's chief difficulty was ... the tendency – not confined to the congested districts – shown by small landowners of selling the best fillies and keeping the worst, generally the unsaleable ones, for breeding purposes. However, the C.D.B. did introduce some other breeds as well. These included Welsh cobs

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[89] ibid., p.11
[90] ibid.
[91] *Ireland industrial and agricultural,* p. 265

(8), thoroughbreds (7), hunters (6), Arab (6), Shires (2), Cleveland Bay (1), barb (1), Connemara (1), Norwegian (1).[92]

A welcome boost to the incipient horse breeding industry of the congested districts came in the form of the demand by the British Army for small hardy ponies to mount their newly formed units of 'mounted infantry' for use in South Africa. The best type of Connemara and Belmullet ponies especially if crossed with more 'blood' were considered eminently suitable for mounted infantry, and gave a great stimulus to the horse – breeding industry in the west. Large numbers of these animals were purchased at an average price of £30[93] and shipped out to South Africa. This encouraged small holders to breed more foals. However, the C.D.B. reported that the good prices that could be obtained tempted many to sell their best mares. They pointed out that the serious drawback to horse breeding in the west of Ireland, as well as in other parts of the country was the 'wretched quality of the mares, and the belief that any mare will do to breed if she has the chance of a good horse.[94]

A related market which opened up for Connemaras was for polo ponies. Although polo had been played in England from 1870 onwards, its adoption as one of the most popular games in the army coincided with the introduction of mounted infantry. A good polo pony was considered the ideal cob for mounted infantry. The original height specified for polo ponies was 13 hands, two inches, and although many mounted infantry horses were no bigger, the later height of 14 hands, two inches allowed for polo ponies was considered ideal for mounted infantry service.[95]

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[92] Micks,.
[93] ibid. p.27.
[94] *Ireland agricultural and industrial* . p. 266
[95] Maj. G. Tylden, *Horses and saddlery*, (London, 1965), p. 24.

Chapter Seven

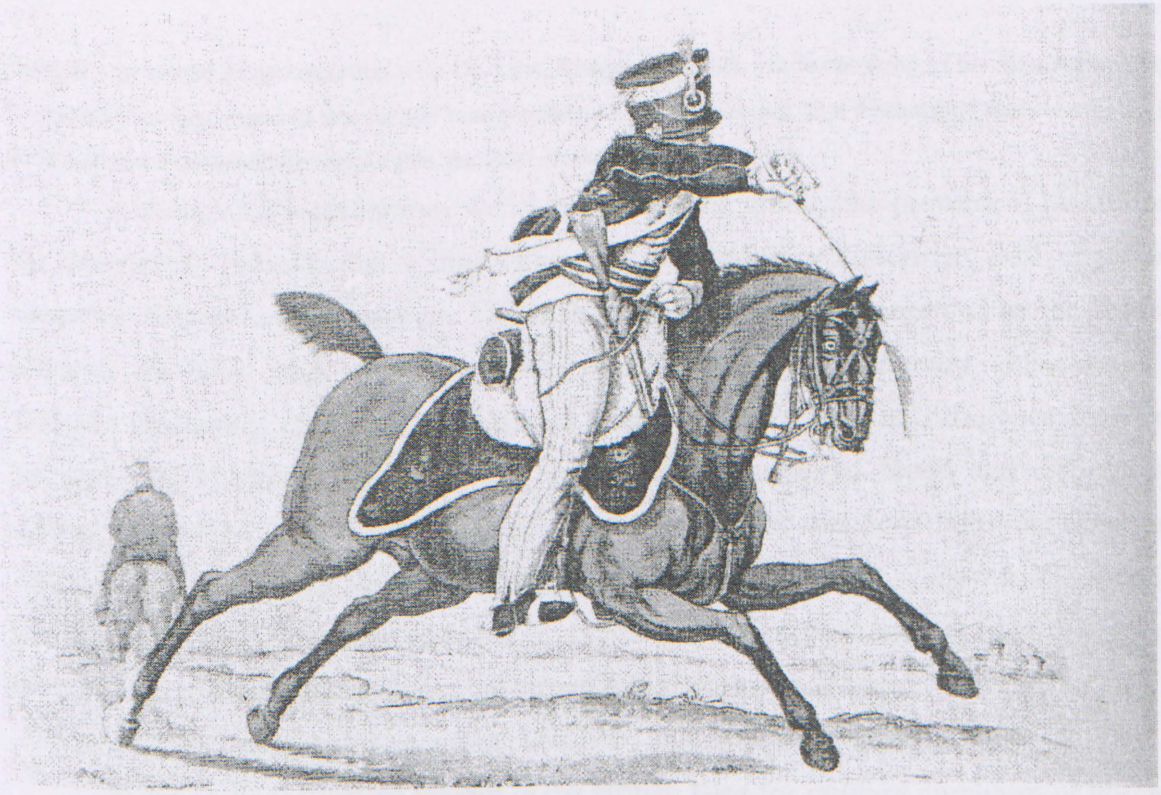
Military Purchases

The supply of military horses for the use of the British and a number of other armies has long been an important constituent of the Irish horse industry. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the international reputation for breeding fine horses for export which Ireland presently enjoys, was in fact, largely a development of the last two centuries. Prior to the last quarter or so of the eighteenth century, the trade was still very much in its infancy, and by that time, Ireland had lost its earlier pre-eminence for the excellence of its native horses, the old breed of hobbies having largely died out during the seventeenth century.[1]



Lewis Nolan demonstrates the jumping ability of his Irish hunter to the Austrian General Staff. From Nolan *The training of cavalry remount horses* London, 1852.

[1] John O'Donevan, *Economic history of livestock in Ireland* (Dublin, 1940), p. 199



13th Light Dragoons c. 1812. Print by Hamilton Smith

It was the development of the modern Irish hunter during the course of the eighteenth century that renewed the country's reputation for fine horses.

A large proportion of the influential county families that provided most of the officer class for the cavalry were keen followers of hounds. The sport, as practiced in Britain and Ireland, gave its followers a facility of crossing a wide variety of obstacles over country on horseback which was unsurpassed elsewhere in Europe. The army encouraged its officers to hunt as it developed skills in the cavalry officer, which were useful in combat conditions. [2]

The equestrian prowess of an Irish volunteer cavalry unit, who had most probably learned their skills in the hunting field, is referred to by an English visitor to Ireland in 1818:

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[2] Bt. Lt. Col. E.A.H. Alderson, *Pink and scarlet or hunting as a school for soldiering*, (London, 1900), Chap 1.

Lord D – in course of conversation with Dr. Law, Bishop of Killala, while speaking of his alert regiment of Volunteer Cavalry, asserted that he had brought them to such perfection, that in charging and clearing a six foot wall, the line would not be put into the least disorder.[3]

Although his lordship may well have been exaggerating the prowess of his troops, his assertions indicate that a high degree of cross-country equestrian skill might be expected of Irish cavalry troopers. The Irish half bred hunter was regarded by the British army as the *beau ideal* of a troop horse or 'remount' for the cavalry 'other ranks'.[4] Officers frequently rode thoroughbreds as chargers. However the difference between troopers and chargers was often the degree of thoroughbred blood and difficult to define.[5] In 1811, the 'correct type of remount for light dragoons' was described as follows; 'active up to 17 stone, stout and good limbs – stout backs – good feet – open in the counter – good shoulders and well up before. Deep-chested and not light carcassed, not too heavy in the hind quarters, but strong in the gammon and open between the jaws'[6] This is as good a description of a first class Irish hunter as you can get.

Ireland was the largest market in the British Isles for military purchases of horses, except for the Household Cavalry who rode black horses, specially bred from black Lincolnshire draught mares crossed with thoroughbreds.[7]. The only other British cavalry regiment to ride horses of a special colour were the Scots Greys (2nd. Dragoons) who as their name implies, always rode greys. Cavalry regiments were classified as 'heavy' and 'light', and were mounted accordingly. In theory, heavy cavalry were used to charge the enemy when occasion demanded, such as a situation when enemy infantry were retreating in disorder. Light cavalry were especially suited for such work as scouting and reconnaisance, but in practice, at least in the British service, they were often expected to charge in line like the heavies.

Times of war were boom periods for Irish horse breeders as they were seller's markets. During the Peninsular campaign of 1808 – 14, Wellington was:

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[3] J. C. Curwen, *Observations on the state of Ireland, principally directed to its agricultural and rural population,* 2 vols. (London, 1818), ii, p. 236.

[4] 'Dragoon ' was the generic term for any class of cavalry during the early years of the nineteenth century. Cavalry remounts were known as 'dragoon horses'. Maj. G, Tylden, *Horses and saddlery*, (London, 1965), p.19. Henceforth cited as Tylden.

[5] J.H. Walsh, *The horse in the stable and the field*, (London, 1873), p.100. Henceforth cited as Walsh.

[6] Tylden, p.17

[7] Walsh, p.101.

in constant anxiety about his supply of horses. He even discusses whether it were practical to import them from America or from Brazil for his army. He spoke of £30 or £40 each, then a very large sum, being given for cavalry horses, and complains that England and Ireland seem unable to supply one-twentieth of the horses which the French can command. All this makes it perfectly certain that there must have been a great drain on Irish horses, not only those fit for cavalry, but cart horses, which Wellington tells us are unfit for that purpose, and lighter horses used for draught and transport.[8]

Again, Tylden writing about the scarcity of horses from the British Isles during Wellington's campaign of 1813 note that :

A dragoon horse costs 25 guineas, rising three and not fit for work or service for 1 ½ to 2 years. We prefer them here (in Spain) at 5 years. So it would not be unreasonable to add to the sum about half as much again. Would it be extravagant to give £40 or 40 guineas for five and six-year-old horses for regiments on service and £45 or guineas for horses for artillery abroad? If not we must draft the 5- and 6-year-olds from regiments at home and make a great effort to replace them by 2 – and 3 – year-olds at the usual price. Old and worn-out horses if sent out are useless.[9]

Wellington was passionate about the benefit of foxhunting for his officers. He personally kept a string of seven hunters in Spain as well as a pack of hounds which he hunted regularly during the Peninsular campaign. In addition, he kept seven chargers. All of his horses were worked severely. His favourite mount was Copenhagen, a 15 hand chestnut thoroughbred which had won races.[10] Interestingly enough, there is a widespread folk tradition in Co. Cork, that Copenhagen was originally purchased at Cahirmee horse fair. This is unsubstantiated, as the evidence suggests that Lord Grosvenor brought Copenhagen's dam on an expedition to capture the Danish fleet at Copenhagen in 1807, and sent her back to England on discovering that she was in foal. Copenhagen was born in 1808 and died in 1830. He was buried at Stratfield Saye, the duke's estate in England where a tombstone marks his grave. However, it is quite possible that the dam was purchased at Cahirmee, which may have led to the confusion.[11]

The nineteenth century opened with the introduction of another type of remount. The Royal Artillery, which hitherto used cart horses harnessed tandem to the guns which

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[8] Rev. J. P. Mahaffy, 'The Introduction of the Ass', *P.R.I.A.*, Vol. 33 C, 1916 – 17, pp 535 – 36.
[9] Tylden, p. 18, quoting Brett-James, *Wellington at War*, p.263.
[10] Tylden, ibid.
[11] *Irish Sword*, vol. xiii, 1977-79, p.82.



Officer of the 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars c. 1823. From a contemporary water colour in private possession.

accompanied infantry in the field, now followed the example of the Royal Horse Artillery and used teams of six harnessed in pairs with the drivers mounted on the near side horses, instead of walking alongside them as had been the previous custom.[12] The technology of the fast road coaches from about 1780, made possible by the new improved roads which had formed a network of good and rapid communication throughout Ireland in the last quarter of the eighteenth century[13] had led to the development of lighter and more active harness horses which were also of considerable benefit to the army. They made possible

[12] Tylden, p.17.

a new type of 'Flying Artillery' which was capable of hauling their guns at considerable speed, and maintaining a fast trot for long periods. They could even gallop on occasion, and were able to keep up with rapidly moving cavalry for a considerable distance.[14]

It must be admitted however, that except for reconnaissance work, Wellington's cavalry in Spain was not particularly efficient, and the Irish especially were frequently inclined to get out of control in pursuit. This lost them the beneficial results of many otherwise successful actions, resulting in unnecessary losses of both men and horses, and earning them the strictest censure of the Iron Duke.[15] Wellington in fact, had a great admiration for the French cavalry and indeed, when the war was over in 1816, introduced lancers on the French pattern into the British army. They were mounted on the same type of troop horses as the light dragoons.[16]

1815 - 1854

The reduction in military expenditure after Waterloo, an economy usual after any major war, not unnaturally, caused a slump in the demand for military horses in Ireland with the result that breeders became discouraged with that particular market, though of course, the same type of animals had value as first class hunters. During the reigns of George IV and William IV (1820–1837), the horsed units of the British army were reduced drastically. The Royal Horse Artillery and the field batteries were weakened to a 'skeleton force. At the same time the cavalry was allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that by 1836 most of their troop horses were reported as being unfit for a campaign.' [17]

At this time, the purchasing of remounts for the cavalry and artillery units of the British army was the responsibility of the commanding officer of the regiment concerned. The normal procedure was for the colonel to appoint an officer, often the regimental veterinary surgeon, to buy horses in the open market, usually at fairs. John Wilkinson (1804 – 1876) the veterinary officer of the 17th. Lancers, who was well known as an exceptionally good judge of a horse, and for many years had the responsibilty for

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[13] J.L.McCracken, 'The age of the stage coach', in K.B. Nowlan (ed.) *Travel and transport in Ireland*, 1973
[14] Tylden, ibid.
[15] Col. H. C. B. Rogers, *The mounted troops of the British Army*, (London, 1959), p. 168.
[16] Tylden, p. 19
[17] ibid..

purchasing the remounts for his regiment.[18] In Ireland the principal horse fairs for military purchases were Ballinasloe, Banagher, Hospital, Cahirmee, and Mullingar [19], but there were others as well. The purchasing officer in fact, ran some risk financially, as it was possible in theory, and sometimes in practice, for his purchases to be rejected by his commanding officer.[20] In 1847 an extraordinary situation arose with the 6th. Dragoon Guards, then stationed in Ireland. The colonel of the regiment had apparently purchased a batch of nineteen remount horses without having them checked by the veterinary officer. On a subsequent examination, seven of them were found to be unsound, and several even blind. The regimental vet made a report of this in writing to the military authorities above the head of the colonel, who immediately had him disciplined for insubordination. The vet appealed to higher authority, but the Duke of Wellington, then commander-in-chief of the armed forces, upheld the officer who had purchased the horses, and ordered the vet to be severely reprimanded by the commander-in-chief in Ireland.[21]

In the case of the artillery and transport units , specially appointed officers were responsible for all purchases.[22] In peacetime, the army preferred four-year-olds which were ready for training, but were sometimes willing to accept promising three-year-olds which could be put out to grass until they were ready. Five years was the normal age at which cavalry horses were considered capable of hard work At this period, the government allowance for four-year-old remounts for the cavalry, with the exception of the Household Cavalry and the Scots Greys (2nd. Dragoons) was fixed at £26, 5s. 0d. The last two specified units were allowed to pay more for their horses.

In 1844 extensive purchases were made at Irish fairs for the British army[23], and *The Queen's Regulations* of the same year indicated that by that time, for all practical purposes there was now little, if any, difference between heavy and light cavalry, and explained that :

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[18] Maj. Gen. Sir Frederick Smith, *History of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps* 1796-1919, (London, 1927), pp 133-4. Henceforth cited as Smith, *Veterinary Corps.*

[19] Hugh Ferguson, V.S., 'The Irish market for weight-carrying hunters'.*Irish Farmer's Gazette*, 8 June, 1861.

[20] The Marquis of Anglesea, *A history of the British cavalry 1819 - 1919.*, (London, 1975), vol. 2, p. 422, Tylden, p. 21. Henceforth cited as Anglesea

[21] Smith, *Veterinary Corps*,. pp, 122 – 123.

[22] Tylden, p. 22.

[23] *Farmer's Gazette*, 6 July. 1844.

The number of Cavalry in the British Army being small ... it is of the utmost importance that this portion of the Army should be of the best description, that is both Heavy and Light Cavalry should be equal to the Charge in Line as well as the Duty of Outposts. The Horses which are selected and trained for the Cavalry should therefore be of sufficient height and strength to be capable of performing the duties of that branch of the Service with the greatest efficiency " '[24].

However, by the mid-nineteenth century horse breeding in Ireland appeared to be in decline. An alarming situation with regard to the integrity of the Irish horse population was perceived to have developed during the years between Waterloo and the Crimea, as it was becoming apparent that the breed of Irish horses suitable for hunting and military use was deteriorating at an alarming rate.[25] The causes of this degeneration were complex, but put simply, it appeared that the breeding of hunter type horses which formed the staple of military remounts, which at one time were bred almost exclusively by the minor gentry and others who were knowledgeable in equine matters, was increasingly falling into the hands of the smaller farmers who were ignorant of the finer points of horse management, and were not prepared to pay for the services of good thoroughbred sires. They were inclined to breed from weedy, unsuitable mares because they were cheap, thus producing weedy, unsuitable offspring.[26]

The realization that Ireland's reputation as the breeding place of first class hunters and military troopers, was in jeopardy, provoked a storm of protest in the press and other publications. The anonymous author of *The deteriorated condition of our saddle-horses*, clearly a military man who had served at Waterloo, explains in 1853:

Very many of these horses are unable to carry fourteen stones of weight, even at home, where they are well fed, and exposed to no privations, while on service they will be hard worked, exposed to great privations, and have to carry, on an average, twenty stones of weight when fully equipped for service ... Even the chargers of the officers, though costing much money, are unfitted to go through a severe campaign. Most of them are well bred, but nearly all are characterised by weak form The incapacity of our cavalry to carry much weight is of little consequence, so long as peace continues ; but when war arrives – and arrive it will – a large portion of our dragoons will be dismounted after a single week's real service ; while the increased demand for horses, *consequent* on a war, will be met with an insufficiency in the supply unknown in the previous history of this country.

For some years past a large portion of our cavalry horses have been purchased in Ireland, but the supply there has greatly declined owing to the farmers who bred them having emigrated.

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[24] Rogers, *The mounted troops of the British Army*, p. 196.
[25] Anon. *On the deteriorated condition of our saddle-horses; the causes and the remedy*, (London, 1853)

In the report of the last Ballinasloe fair, as given in the *Globe* newspaper, I find the following paragraph :- "The horse fair was held yesterday, some good horses were exhibited, but the majority were rather inferior. *Both breeders and dealers concurred in stating that one-fourth the number of horses are not now produced in this country, as compared with former years.*" [27]

Captain L.E. Nolan, an influential authority on cavalry matters who later became notorious as the officer who was partially responsible for the ill-fated Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, in which he met his death, states in his 1853 book – *Cavalry; its History and Tactics*, :-

The fine Irish troop-horses, formerly so sought after, are not now to be procured in the market. Instead of the long, low, deep-chested, short-backed, strong-loined horse of former days, you find nothing now but long-legged, straight-shouldered animals prone to disease from the time they are foaled, and whose legs grease after a common field-day. These animals form the staple of our remount horses.[28]

A letter written to the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* a few years later, expressed the situation as the writer saw it :

The Arabs attach so much more importance to the mare than to the horse for stud purposes … The same feeling formerly obtained in Ireland, when the gentry who enjoyed fox-hunting bred weight-carrying hunters that fetched the highest price given in the United Kingdom. They selected the best fillies, and put them to stud when four years old, which, if trained for the field, would have been up to fifteen stone with fox-hounds. The present practice is to sell the big fillies, as they fetch a *big* price, and to endeavour to breed from weedy mares, by putting them to a large horse, without even ascertaining whether a suitable cross.

Now, as like is said to beget like, I submit that breeders of horses should be recommended to adopt the system of our forefathers, and select mares possessing power with sufficient breeding, perfect action, free from hereditary diseases, and as far as practicable faultless in form ; still if a slight fault shall exist, it will probably be corrected in the produce by selecting a sire that is perfect where the dam is defective[29]

Just before his death in 1852, the Duke of Wellington, concerned at the unfit state of the army, particularly the cavalry that had been comfortably ensconced in barracks with no real combat experience since the Napoleonic wars, suggested the H.M.s armed forces should be made to shake off the cobwebs, and get some practical knowledge of mass manoeuvres while living under canvas. Consequently, a divisional 'Camp of Exercise' was set up on Chobham Common in Surrey in June 1853. Hitherto there had

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[26] See below pp 222-26.
[27] Anon. , *On the deteriorated condition of our saddle horses*, (London 1853), pp 2/3.
[28] Quoted in Rogers, *The mounted troops of the British army*, p. 198.



Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava. It was more successful than the better known Charge of the Light Brigade. Painting by G.D.Giles illustrated in Philip Warner (ed.), *The fields of war*.

been nowhere in the United Kingdom, except the Curragh in Co. Kildare, where sufficent men could be collected together for the manoeuvring of even a single brigade.[30] Some 8,000 men took part, including four regiments of cavalry, two of which were Irish, the 8th. Hussars and the 6th. Dragoons (Inniskillings)[31] – as well as a troop of the Royal Horse Artillery. The same units, the following year, spearheaded the British invasion of the Crimea.

Crimean War 1854 - 1855

The horsed units which left Britain for the Crimea between mid-April and mid-July, 1854, numbered at the most, 3,100 officers and men, and 3000 horses. Of even this modest number, there was considerable wastage before they even reached the seat of war.[32] By 1855 the attrition of cavalry remounts under the severe conditions of the Crimean winter had become extremely serious. In consequence of this, the government of

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[29] *Irish.Farmer's Gazette.*, 3 Oct., 1863.
[30] Anglesey, p. 27.
[31] Robert H. Murray, *The History of the VIII King's Royal Irish Hussars* 2 vols (Cambridge, 1928), i ., p. 403.



Major Burton 5th Dragoon Guards. 1855.



Unknown Officer of the 11th Hussars. 1855.

Photographed by Roger Fenton at the Crimea

extended its purchasing remit, and issued instructions that horses from five to nine years old were to be bought.[33] Under wartime conditions it was important that they should be in good condition, and fit enough to endure the rigorous sea journey to the Crimea. However, the Irish troop horses in particular, appear to have withstood the extreme conditions of the Crimean winter better than most. Colonel Doherty of the 13th.Light Dragoons noted that 'the well-bred horses, especially the Irish, stood the work and the exposure better than the low-bred horses, more particularly such as were of small size.' [34]

The first year of the Crimean War was, not surprisingly, a boom period for the Irish remount trade. This is reflected in the press accounts of the various horse fairs of 1854. The *Irish Farmer's Gazette* is a particularly good source. The report on the Ballinasloe October fair of that year explained that 'On Thursday the horse fair opened, which exhibited a great deal of animation, several eminent horse buyers being in

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[32] Anglesey, p. 31.
[33] Tylden, p.21.
[34] Anglesey, p 113.

attendance to purchase for the army and constabulary ; a good many fine animals were shown'..[35]



Lieut. Yates, 11th Hussars at Balaklava. The horse was probably purchased in County Limerick. Photographed by Roger Fenton. 1855.

attendance to purchase for the army and constabulary ; a good many fine animals were shown'[36]. Again, 'horses suited for the army could be obtained at the regulation price' at Rathsallagh horse fair of 4 September [37], and at Athlone fair of 6 September 'the horses brought prices higher than those obtained the last fair day. There was a very meagre supply of what we would call first-rate hunters. Those sought for were more for cavalry and farming purposes.' [38]

The same high demand for remounts continued into the first half of 1855, but seemed to tail off towards the autumn as the army acquired its quota of replacement horses. According to the report on Mullingar fair in July :

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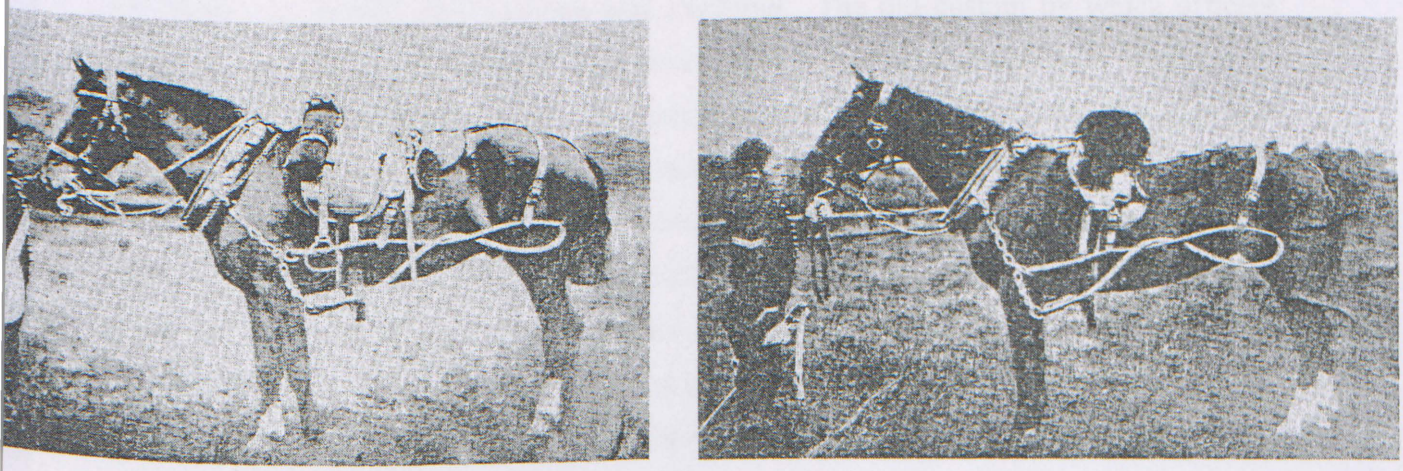
[35] *Irish Farmers Gazette*, vol. X111,1854, p. 483.
[36] *Irish Farmers Gazette*, vol. X111,1854, p. 483.
[37] ibid., p. 438.
[38] ibid.

Horses worth notice found ready purchasers, and a large number changed hands ... Those suited for the army were purchased early in the day ; not more than half a dozen were in the fair, three of which were purchased by Alderman Reynolds [a Dublin horse dealer who supplied the army]. On the whole, the fair was not remarkable as denoting any change in the value of stock, but something of a diminution in quality was evident.[39]



Artillery horses, c. 1861. Photographs from Tylden, *Horses and saddlery.*

Dunboyne Summer fair of 14 July of the same year was described as :

One of the best for many years, the demand for horses – for which Dunboyne was long celebrated far exceeded the supply, particularly those suited for the army. There were several English dealers present ... Mr. M. Manley got nine troopers for which he paid from £35 to £40 ; Mr. P. Manley got about the same number for the artillery at from £30 to £35 each.[40]

The report on Lisburn horse fair held on 28 July, stated that :

Several very fine horses for the saddle or light harness brought high rates. Those purchased for the Dragoons were of great promise, and went off at £40 to £50 each ; another class sold at £25 to £30 each.[41]

However, the demand for army horses appear to have started to ease off by the autumn of 1855, though horses suitable for military purposes were still being produced at fairs. The report of the 'Great Harvest Fair' of Drogheda of 1September which appeared in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, stated that 'in the horse fair ... cavalry horses brought from £25 to £35,'[42] which would indicate a weakening in price. In the Mullingar

[39] ibid., 7 July, 1855.
[40] ibid., 14 July, 1855.
[41] ibid., 28 July , 1855
[42] ibid. ,1 September 1855

Autumn Fair of the same year 'in the horse fair the supply exceeded the demand to a very large extent, and the purchasers for the army, were much fewer in number than had been expected.'[43]

Nevertheless, there were always *some* military purchases in the ensuing years especially at the principal horse fairs, especially Ballinasloe ; however, about this time, the pattern of British army buying was changing. The old custom by which officers commanding cavalry and artillery regiments detailed an officer to purchase remounts in the open market at fairs was being increasingly replaced by a system in which regimental remounts were provided by civilian contractors appointed by regimental headquarters[44] Notwithstanding this, individual officers continued to make occasional visits to fairs, and make purchases for their units. For example, the *Farmer's Gazette* of 8 October 1864, reporting on the Ballinasloe October Fair of that year, notes that 'Colonel Philpotts bought six horses for the Royal Artillery at an average of £35 each, but could not get all he wanted ' ... As it happens, Colonel Philpotts was at that time, the officer commanding the Royal Horse Artillery in Ireland, and also held the rank of 'Inspector and Purchaser of Horses for the Royal Artillery in Ireland.'[45] It seems unusual that so high ranking an officer would attend fairs in person to buy remounts for his service, but he probably did the purchasing himself as the choosing of suitable artillery horses was a particularly skilled job at that time and the standards required for remounts for that service were much more exacting than those for the cavalry. The gun teams at that time, were required to pull 37 cwt., well in excess of the 30 cwt considered sufficient for six horses to pull when keeping up with cavalry. These artillery horses had to be matched precisely, and very little deviation from the high standard demanded was ever permitted.[46] In 1864 the government allowance for horses for the Military Train, the service that provided transport for the army, was £36 for an officer's charger and £30 for a draught horse. These would have been slower than artillery horses and less well bred.[47]

The progressive degeneracy of the Irish horse population that had been suggested as early as the 1850s had by the 1860s developed into a general ground swell of concern

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[43] *I.F.G.*
[44] Tylden, p. 23
[45] Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, *Report of horse breeding committee*, 24 September 1863, p. 15.
[46] Tylden, p. 23.

among those who had the well being of the Irish horse at heart. The Horse Breeding Committee of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, being concerned at the perceived 'deterioration of the breed of horses in Ireland' especially 'horses adapted for cavalry remounts and chargers, *weight-carrying* hunters, and road purposes', set up a board of enquiry to investigate the causes of the decline which was 'affecting our material wealth and our military resources (through the prestige of our cavalry and horse artillery)[48] In an effort to establish the cause of the deterioration and suggest a remedy, the committee sent out a large number of questionnaires to members of the landed gentry and army officers in various parts of Ireland. The questionnaire contained four questions :

(1) Are there many horses bred in your locality of that class adapted for Cavalry Remounts or Chargers, Weight-Carrying Hunters, and Road Purposes ?

(1) Has the breeding of such horses increased or decreased of late years ?

(2) What Thorough-bred sires exist in your district, and what is your opinion of their soundness and merit, as also the quality of the stock produced by them ?

(3) Would the services of a first-class Thorough-bred stallion be appreciated, and what is the maximum price which your stock breeders would be disposed to pay for such service ?

Replies to the first two questions indicated a general decrease in the breeding of horses corresponding to the Registrar-General's return showing that in 1859 there were 629,000 horses in the country, while in 1863 numbers had declined to 579,000.[49] Replies to question number 3 indicated that the thoroughbred sires 'now in the country' were 'generally more weedy and unsound than formerly'; while answers to number 4 indicated that 'the general breeding of horses had fallen so much into the hands of those poor farmers, who did not appreciate or understand the value of that class of thorough-bred sire best adapted for getting even troopers, it would be necessary, if such a sire were provided to subsidize his stud fees.

As part of their investigation, the committee of the R.A.S.I. consulted a number of experts: Mr. Bernal Osborne M.P. of Clonmel stated that 'owing to the succession of bad seasons, farmers have given up the breeding of horses to any extent'[50] . Captain Edward Croker of Ballinagarde asserted that ' the railroad has effected a revolution in the supply of horses, as well as in other matters. There are now fifty dealers attending fairs for one

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[47] ibid.
[48] *Report of the horse breeding committee of the R.S.A.I.*, op. cit. p.3
[49] ibid., p. 4

in the trade twenty years ago.'[51] According to Colonel R. Wardlow of the Royal Dragoons ' Since the return of the troops from the Crimea, Government has been purchasing four in place of three-year-olds for the cavalry, and that circumstance, together with the large importation to England of colts at the age of two and three years, leaves us a much more limited choice'[52] Colonel A. Phillpotts, Officer Commanding the Royal Horse Artillery (Ireland) begged 'to state that I have observed a great falling off during the last two years at nearly all the great horse fairs of Ireland, of animals likely to make good artillery horses, and I have no hesitation in saying that, unless some remedy is provided for the evil, the consequence in the event of war will be very severely felt by the nation, as even at present, when so few horses are required, the supply is scarcely equal to the demand.'[53] General Yorke Scarlett the officer who had commanded the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava, when major and colonel of the 5th. Dragoons had 'found the difficulty of procuring horses latterly (my last fair was in 1854) from several causes. The chief one as regards the quality of horses was, that very many landed gentlemen farmers on a large scale ceased to breed, so that the stock to be selected from were chiefly bred by poorer farmers, who take no pains to get well-shaped mares, and so are content to breed from anything and by anything that can be had cheap...

In the meantime the demand increased, as many foreigners and many more English dealers latterly came to Irish fairs, and bought poor two-year-old colts...' As a remedy, General Scarlett suggested the setting up of special studs in Ireland 'one for the production of carriage horses, artillery horses, and heavy cavalry ; the other for brougham, phaeton, park horses, and light cavalry. The same sires would do in either case, as I have always found as a rule, that the stock follows the dam in shape and substance.'[54]

Hugh Ferguson, (Veterinary Surgeon to the Queen in Ireland, and Professor of Veterinary Science to the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland) stated that:

Of late years the exportation of mares from Ireland for different European studs, principally government ones, has been very great, and is annually increasing ... The supply of good horses in Ireland is not equal to

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[50] ibid., p. 11.
[51] ibid., p. 12.
[52] ibid., pp 14-15.
[53] ibid., p. 16.
[54] ibid., p. 17.

the demand, and foreign states are making the experiment of trying to breed horses of the required stamp themselves ... Although hunters are the animals hitherto principally alluded to in this communication, with the stock from which they are selected must be classed the horses best fitted for the army, either as troopers or chargers ; for a horse is more perfect for military purposes just in proportion as he possesses the requisite shapes, power, stamina, action, and amenability to the hand of his rider as a hunter.

Ireland, from its soil and climate, is universally acknowledged to be better adapted for a full development of animal life, such as that for which it is suitable by nature – and is currently so for the equine tribe – than any other country in the world. It is to be regretted that no effort has been hitherto made in the only quarter which could command success to check the generation of the breed of horses in Ireland, and improve it to the extent to which it is capable in this country above any portion of her Majesty's dominions. [55]

H. J. MacFarlane, Vice-Chairman of the Agricultural Society Committee, observed that:

Our horses have fallen off woefully since the Battle of Waterloo ; and those of our friends now, who were opposed to us then, have been as much improved as ours have deteriorated. The Emperor of Russia also has so improved the horses of his Imperial Guard that I believe he has ten thousand men better mounted than any ten thousand men in England or anywhere else. [56]

If one looks this problem dispassionately, the real cause of the decline in the general horse population of Ireland would appear to be that small farmers who were largely unskilled in scientific horse production, realized in time that the breeding of low quality animals was uneconomic, and that it was more profitable to concentrate on rearing cattle and sheep which were rising in price whereas even the best military-style horses were not.

Nevertheless, good horses were still being bred by the bigger farmers though in reduced numbers. The cost of rearing a young horse at that time was on an average from £10 to £15 pounds a year for good ones.[57] Farmers preferred to sell their young horses in the fairs as three year olds, whereas the British army wanted them as four year olds in peacetime, and were only willing to pay from about £30 to £35 for ordinary cavalry troopers. There was very little profit for the breeders to sell to the British army. However, the agents of a number of continental armies were willing to pay more, and were constantly outbidding the British for Irish horses.[58]

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[55] Ibid, p. 20.
[56] ibid., p. 26.
[57] Hugh Ferguson, 'The Irish market for weight-carrying hunters', *Farmer's Gazette*, 24 March, 1866
[58] See pp 230 ff.

In brief, the situation was that first class weight carrying hunters and horses suitable for cavalry remounts in Ireland were often bought up before they appeared on the open market. The advent of the railways in the 1840s and 1850s had made Ireland much more accessible to travelers. At the same time horse dealing was becoming more professional in Great Britain and Europe, and Ireland was gaining universal popularity as the best place to buy good horses. Consequently, an increasing flood of foreign dealers were coming to Ireland, making use of the new railway system to seek out the best horses and purchase them, often directly from the breeders, at higher prices than the British government were prepared to pay :

Years ago, at every horse fair of importance in Ireland there was a score of desirable horses for every buyer ; now there are nearly as many anxious buyers for every horse having the qualification of a first-class weight carrying hunter, as well as a good marketable appearance ...

It may be thought that the difficulty of getting highly bred, well shaped, good actioned hunters at present in Ireland is in consequence of there being less of that class of animal bred in the country than there was in former years ; but such is by no means the case, for they are bred in much greater numbers than formerly. They are also better fed, and generally better cared for. The true explanation of their scarcity is the fact of the demand for first-class Irish weight-carrying hunters of late years been so great that it has at least exceeded by many per cent , the supply ...

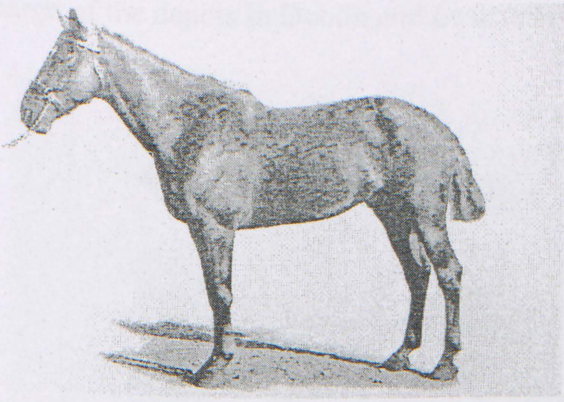
[English and foreign dealers make] frequent and rapid direct personal contact with the owners and breeders desirous of disposing of their horses, and to purchase them at their own stables. Thus owners find a ready sale for their animals, without either sending them to fairs or repositories. Dealers (the first-class English ones especially) have their agents continually travelling through the different parts of Ireland, in search of horses. These agents, in turn, have their emissaries in different localities to give information as to where the desired class of animals are to be found ...

The number of horses purchased by one English dealer for the purposes of supplying the continental (principally the Parisian), as well as the English market is extraordinary...

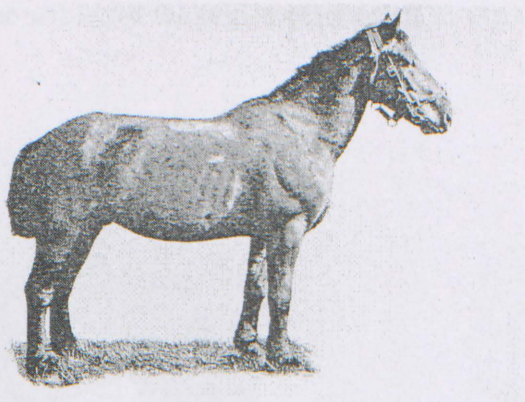
Almost all highly bred, unblemished, sound, well-shaped, and good actioned weight-carrying horses are too eagerly sought after by agents having commissions for the purchase of such animals not to be bought up at a fair price immediately on its being known that they are on the market...

From the great number of first-class horses that are annually exported from Ireland, it is thought by many that there must be numbers of large breeding establishments in the country, from which the supplies are principally obtained. This is a most mistaken idea. Comparatively speaking, such establishments in Ireland, from their number and extent being so inconsiderable, cannot be relied on as offering sufficient advantages even to private buyers, let alone extensive dealers. The principal supply comes from the farming class, and from persons throughout the different parts of the country who have

only a couple of mares – more frequently only one. The majority of such breeders seldom keep their young stock over till they are four-year-olds. At three years they are sent to fairs, where they are purchased to be broken, and either retained for private use or kept over as a speculation, to be again put into the market as hunters after their training, and when they have been habituated to the hunting field. It would seem that the Irish taste is prone to horses. If the country has what are called its "gentlemen farmers" it can also equally boast of its amateur "gentlemen-horse-dealers" – a class of men who, although they purchase on speculation, and are most successful in their sales, do so mainly as a profitable kind of speculation.[59]



Royal Artillery horse, c. 1895



Army Service Horse, c. 1895

Photographs from Alderson, *Pink and scarlet.*

From the 1860s onwards, the British government found itself under increasing competition for Irish horses from a number of continental powers including the French . Sir John Power addressing the Royal Agricultural Society in 1863 reported that:

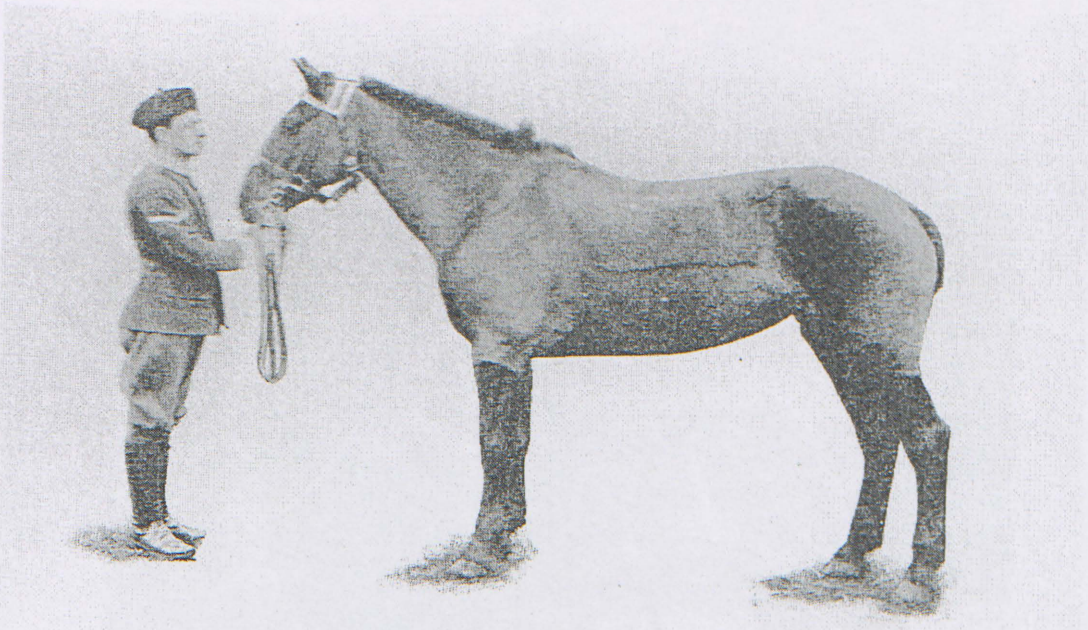
It was stated in the *Times* of September 9, 1861, that there were 10,465 horses sold at one fair at Banagher! It was also asserted that within the last twelve months 5,000 horses (one fifth of them unbroken colts and fillies) had been sent from the port of Dublin alone. If they added to those, what were sent away from the other ports of Ireland, the drain from the country must be enormous ... The number of thorough-bred horses bred in Ireland has decreased to a very great extent, and the quality of those produced has deteriorated to the lowest standard ... When well-shaped horses or mares are discovered they are immediately purchased for foreign countries, and even half-bred sires and young half-bred mares are greedily bought by foreign dealers. [60]

In 1887 the British army abolished the old system by which individual regiments purchased their own remounts, and set up a central Remount Department which took over that responsibility, thus adopting a procedure which had been in operation in France

[59] ibid., 8 June, 1861.
[60] ibid 26 September 1863.

since 1831[61], and in Prussia since before 1800.[62] The new method of purchase had immense advantages over the old. Its introduction ensured that from that time on, there would be better standardization of horses purchased, and a pool of remounts available in the case of general mobilization.

The Dublin depôt was at Island Bridge barracks under the command of an Assistant Inspector of Remounts (Ireland) assisted by a Staff-Captain[63] who was in charge of the depots in Dublin and Lusk, and was responsible for the registration of all



Mounted Infantry Cob, c. 1897. Photograph from Alderson, *Pink and scarlet.*

military horses purchased in Ireland. He also assisted the A.I. with the buying when required.[64] There was also a veterinary officer, a quartermaster, and a complement of 36 n.c.o's and troopers.[65] Young cavalry horses were purchased at about £40 each, mainly from five or six registered 'government dealers' who would buy them on the open market

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[61] Denis Bogros, *Les chevaux de la cavalerie française*, (Roche-Rigault 2000), p. 62

[62] Karlheinz Gless, *Das Pferd im Militär Wesen*, (DDR. Militärverlag 1980), p.85. Henceforth cited as Gless.

[63] In 1899 this position was held by Major the Prince of Teck.

[64] *Proceedings of a court of enquiry ...on the administration of the remount service since January 1899*, (London 1902), question 47.

[65] Tylden, p.25

[66] though purchasing officers did occasionally attend fairs in person. The animals purchased were kept at the Remount Farm, Lusk, Co. Dublin.

Training of a cavalry horse occupied a period of three or four months. The new arrivals were first sent to the riding school, where they were accustomed to the saddle and bridle by army 'rough riders'. They were also subjected to coloured flags, newspapers etc. being waved near their heads, and shots were fired in their vicinity until they were no



Officer of the 15th Hussars, 1895. Photograph from Kemp, *15th. The King's Hussars 1759 – 1914.*

longer frightened by such distractions. They were given light work, and ridden in line under fire. This process lasted about a month after which they were considered fit to be

[66] *Proceedings of a court of enquiry – remount service*, op. cit., question. 643.

sent to their individual units. [67] They were not however, considered fit for heavier work, such as use on manoeuvres until they were six years old.

In the later years of the nineteenth century the concept of 'mounted infantry' was re-introduced by the British army. The concept was not new as the original dragoon regiments had been formed in the seventeenth century as highly mobile units who used horses for transport but fought on foot. However, they were later reorganized as regular cavalry who fought on horseback. Mounted infantry had made a brief reappearance during the Zulu war of 1879 but had been discontinued after its termination, only to be re-activated in order to counter the Boers in South Africa who fought on foot, using their horses only as a means of transport. This created a huge demand for small hardy cobs such as Connemara ponies, the breeding of which was encouraged by the Congested Districts Board in the West of Ireland. 5,000 to 6,000 Irish cobs, ranging from 14 ½ to 15 hands[68], were purchased per annum for South Africa during the hostilities at an average price of £30 each.

In 1888 a system of voluntary registration of horses was created under the National Defense Act. In a time of national emergency the Government had the power to requisition all the horses, vehicles, and means of transport in the United Kingdom. In Ireland, the horses registered under this scheme were mainly draught horses belonging to the tramway companies and breweries - the Belfast Tramways Company registered 400 horses of which 77 were taken for the Boer War[69] The Meath Hunt registered a large number of hunters, as did a number of other hunts[70] but few of these were taken up as regular cavalry horses as Lord Kitchener would not have any horse over 15.1 in South Africa.[71]

French Military Purchases

There are persistent folk traditions of French military purchases of Irish horses at the fairs of Ballinasloe in Co. Galway, and Cahirmee and Bartlemy in Co. Cork, during the period of the Napoleonic wars. These traditions are unsubstantiated by any written records. Nevertheless, it is conceivably possible that these expressions of folk memory

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[67] Royal Dublin Society, *Dublin Horse Show Annual*, (Dublin, 1900), p. 58.
[68] ibid., q. 668
[69] ibid., Appendix B, p. 315.
[70] ibid., qq. 747, 749.

may contain a grain of truth. It would appear extremely unlikely that French purchasing agents would have been able to attend these fairs during wartime; however, there was a short interval of peace in 1804 – 1805, during which contact would have been possible. It was at this time (December 1804) that Napoleon had established *le Service des Haras* – official stud farms, and ordered English-type thoroughbred stallions to be installed.[72] It is quite possible that these were purchased in Ireland. In addition, as the purchase of cavalry remounts was, as in the British army, the responsibility of individual regimental commanders, some purchases may have been made in Ireland.

After the downfall of the First Empire, the French king Charles X established a cavalry school at Samur in 1825. General Oudinot a distinguished cavalry officer who had fought in Russia in 1812 was appointed commandant.[73] One of his first actions was to acquire twenty five Irish horses *pour les exercices à l'extérieur* at an average price of 1,200 francs. This was the origin of the tradition of the arena displays still demonstrated by the elite French equestrian team the *Cadre Noir.* In addition, General Oudinot obtained twenty four saddles of English type in order that his pupils could gain experience in cross-country riding.[74] This of course, was natural to the Irish and English cavalry officers for whom fox-hunting was a way of life, but much less so to the French whose equestrianism tended to be more influenced by *Haute École.*

In 1831 King Louis Phillipe founded a new *Service Général des Remontes* which took over the responsibility of purchasing remounts for the army[75]. Up to that time, the practice had been for the military authorities to procure their horses from dealers and contractors, which as was the case in Britain, had tended to be unsatisfactory.

In 1840 under threat of a general European war (which did not materialize), the French government felt the necessity of increasing the number of its cavalry remounts to 34,000. National resources being unable to provide more than 14,000 horses, they were compelled to seek the remainder abroad.[76] A large number of these were purchased in Germany. However, purchases were made all over Europe, and it is quite possible that

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[71] ibid., q. 674.
[72] Bogros, op. cit. p. 45.
[73] Ibid. , p. 59
[74] Capitaine L. Picard, *Origines de l'École de Cavalerie et ses Traditions Équestres*, (Samur, 1890), p. 38
[75] Bogros, op. cit. p. 62
[76] ibid.,p. 63

some were made in Ireland.[77] Following the French colonial adventures in North Africa, it became customary to mount the French cavalry on barbs and anglo-arabs (crosses between English thoroughbreds and arab horses), as well as horses purchased in Prussia.

The last major European conflict before 1900 was the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. Some years before this, dealers acting on commission for the French government had been buying military type horses in Ireland. A press report on the Mullingar horse fair of November 1867 announced that 'Mr. George of Burchfield, Clontarf, purchased for the French army two grey horses at a very high figure, and three others at an average of £70.[78] At the Ballinasloe October fair of 1868, 'Mr. Vanderlin, contractor for the French cavalry, bought a number of troop horses at prices ranging from £20 to £31.[79]

During the war of 1870, about 30,000 horses were exported from the United Kingdom to France. The number of these which originated in Ireland is unspecified, but it was probably substantial.[80] The war proved disastrous for the French, and resulted in immense losses of their horses. Large numbers were captured by the Prussians at Metz and Sedan, and upwards of 600,000 reputedly eaten in Paris.[81] The total loss which presumably includes not only deaths, but also the casting of broken-down and useless horses, has been estimated at 200,000.[82] These would obviously take a lot of replacing in the post war period, so it is not surprising to find continuing reports of purchases in Ireland by buyers on behalf of the of the French Republic after 1871. Peter George was retained as agent by the new administration. In August the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* reported that :

The exports of horses to France have greatly increased this year, the number sent to that country from the United Kingdom having risen to 3,584 in the six months ending June 30 against 189 in the corresponding period of 1870, and 747 in the corresponding period of 1869. The whole number of horses exported from

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[77] Bogros to Lane, 7/12/2001

[78] *I.F.G.* 16 November 1867. Peter George was known in the trade as 'French' George because of his Gallic connection. *Reports of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the horse breeding industry in Ireland* (Dublin 1897), interview, no. 10140. Henceforth cited as 1897 *Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland)

[79] *I.F.G.* October 10, 1868

[80] ibid., 25 March, 1871

[81] ibid. .

[82] ibid., (supplement), 4 October 1873.

the United Kingdom to June 30 this year was 4,416, against 829 and 1,570 in the corresponding periods of 1870 and 1869.[83]

The report on Ballinasloe fair for 1872 in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* contains the information that 'Mr. George of Dublin, bought for the French Republic twenty horses suitable for cavalry purposes, at from £30 to £50.[84] Again in 1873 the same journal reporting on 'Banagher Great Annual Fair' relates that 'A great number of horses were also purchased for the French and English armies, at prices ranging from £25 to £40 ... Mr. George bought for the French army ... a large number of troopers at prices ranging from £20 to £35'.[85] French agents were not only buying horses of ordinary trooper type, but also better quality animals, either as officer's chargers or stud animals to replenish their depleted breeding establishments. At Ballinasloe October fair of 1874 'Mr, Vandeneynd, Silveracre, Raheny, who is buying for the French government, purchased six horses at £76, £120, £67–10s, £180, £100, and £150 respectively.' [86]

An article in the supplement to the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* of 4 October 1873 gives some details of the French purchasing requirements :

Prices paid for troopers in France, are on the whole, higher than are given in this country ... The price for Cuirassier horses is 1,200 frs. or £48 ; for dragoon, 1,100 frs., or £44, light cavalry and artillery horses are bought for £40; and draught animals for £32. All are purchased at four years old, spend three month (sic) at remount depôts, nine with their regiments before being worked for purposes of training, and at five years old they are placed in the ranks.[87]

An editorial in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* of May 8, 1875 entitled 'French Imports and Exports of Horses' remarks that purchases of foreign horses by the French republican government had decreased rather than intensified as one might have expected, after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. However:

Even were it true that a contract had been entered into for the purchase of 10,000 animals during the present spring, the total number bought would be much under those bought in the corresponding period before the war (1867-69), the horses imported from abroad amounted to 50,150 ; whereas during the three years following the war (1872-74) the number was no more than 35,433, or a decrease of not far short of one-third. It is true that during 1870 and 1871 the imports amounted to 50,362, or slightly more than the three years immediately preceding ...

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[83] ibid ,12 August 1871
[84] ibid., 12,October 1872
[85] ibid., 29 September, 1873.
[86] ibid., 10 October, 1874.
[87] ibid., (supplement) 4 October, 1873.

The editorial then proceeds to mention the colossal French losses of horses at Sedan and Metz, as well as those eaten in Paris during the siege, and goes on to note that in spite of the 'pressing need there was for mounting cavalry both in the armies of the Loire and in the army collected together by M. Thiers to reduce the commune ... those purchases were really moderate.' It goes on to note that a large number of the foreign imports were from the United Kingdom in 1870 and 1871 [no doubt a good percentage of these were from Ireland]. However, 'within the last two years Germany has been drawn upon to a greatly increased extent.'

In 1900, the requirements for French cavalry was described as follows. The minimum height for light cavalry horses was about 15½ hands, and weigh from 775 to 800 pounds ; the minimum height for dragoon horses was between 15¼ and 15½ hands, and they should weigh from 880 to 1,000 pounds ; and the height for cuirassiers between 15¼ and 16 hands, and the weight from 1,050 to 1,150 pounds. All these had to be over 3 and under 5 years old, and be sound and well mannered. Prices for remounts varied from £36 to £52 and was paid in France.[88]

Prussia, (The German Empire after 1871)

German military purchases of Irish horses during the nineteenth century were largely restricted to the better class of thoroughbreds and near thoroughbreds in order to introduce a degree of 'blood' into their native breeds. However, as the Prussian/German government tended to use civilian contractors to do its buying, it is not always easy to identify such purchases as specifically for army use. [89].

By the mid-nineteenth century, Prussia had the reputation of having 'the best mounted cavalry on the continent'[90], with 58 cavalry regiments of 600 men each at its disposal, in contrast to Great Britain who only had 26 regiments of 450 men.[91] In fact, Prussia could summon an almost unlimited number of military horses from within its own state borders which had expanded substantially since 1740 and incorporated a number of additional horse breeding areas. In addition to these, a number of other German regions provided horses for the Prussian army. Each region had its own

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[88] Royal Dublin Society, *Horse Show Annual*, 1900, op. cit., p. 58.
[89] 1897 *Commission on horse breeding industry in* Ireland, question 10081.
[90] Anon, *The deteriorated condition of our saddle horses*, 1853, op. cit. p.5
[91] Gless, p. 88.

specialization, Hannover and Holstein supplied their traditional half-blood horses as remounts for the artillery and heavy cavalry, while East and West Prussia warm-bloods especially the Trakehner breed with its special qualities of 'heart' and 'energy'[92] were considered ideal for light and medium cavalry. East Prussia alone (*Remonteland Ostpreußen*), supplied up to two thirds of Prussia's military needs, providing annually 2000 to 3000 work-ready troop horses for the cavalry. Individual cavalry and artillery regiments were able to obtain their remounts from state depots, purchase them directly in the open market, or acquire them by *Entschädigung*, a system by which the government supplied private individuals with horses at a discount on the understanding that they would be eventually sold to the army.[93] In fact, there was such a sufficiency of military horses in the mid-nineteenth century that the Prussians were able to remount other military forces as well as their own.[94] These included the Saxon and Bavarian cavalry[95], and for most of the nineteenth century - the French.

Count Lehendorf, aide-de-camp and master of the horse to the German Emperor, who although engaged in active service against the French, took time to send a communication to *The Irish Farmer's Gazette* in 1871 in which he explains the *Entschädung* system :

No horses bred by the [German] government are taken for the army ; all the young stock not likely to make good country stallions are sold by public sale at four years old, at an average price of 22 ½ gs., and kept then in different depôts till four years old, at about 8 gs. expenses for each, consequently they cost the government, till the moment they are delivered to the different regiments, 30 gs. a piece. Four committees consisting of three officers, and one veterinary surgeon each, are buying the horses during the summer throughout the kingdom, but particularly in East Prussia (east side of the Weichsel or Vistula) ...

[The horses are sent to the various units] at four and a half years old ; but they are not wanted to do the service like old horses earlier than six years old ... The weight our cavalry horses have to carry – *viz.*, rider, saddle, arms etc. – cuirassiers (rider 75 kilos) total kilos about 141 ; uhlans [a type of middle weight lancer] (the rider 72 kilos) total 128 kilos, dragoons and hussars (rider about 68 kilos) total about 119 kilos.

Only horses with a certain amount of blood are bought for the army, particularly for cavalry ; common bred ones cannot go fast enough carrying those heavy weights ... In the year 1866, with the

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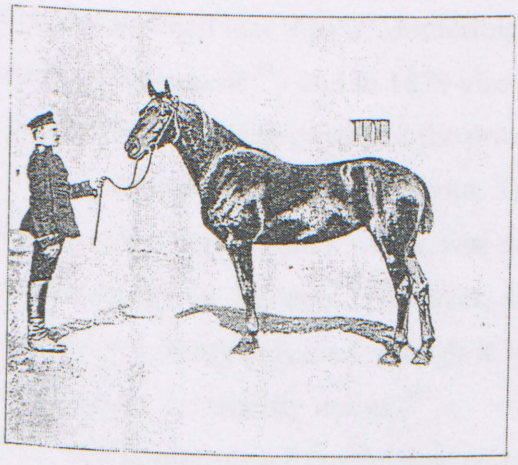
[92] Wehrmacht military file H.Dv. 11/2, *Das Truppenpferd,* Heft 11 vom 14 Juli 1938, Berlin 1938. I am obliged to the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundswehr, Dresden, for a photocopy of this document.
[93] Gless., p. 87.
[94] ibid.
[95] 1897 *Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland). p. 482

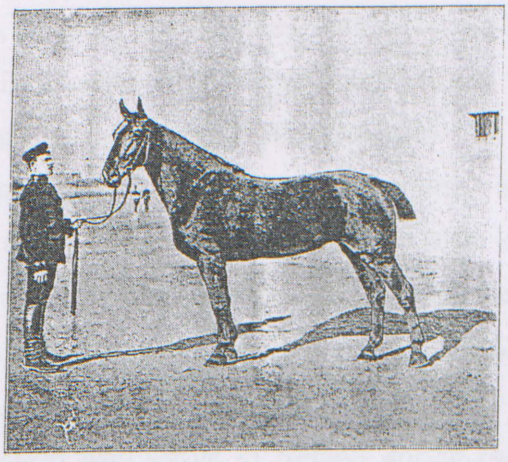
exception of 600 horses bought from dealers in England [96], all the horses required for the army by the increased demand were bought within the country. The province of Prussia alone, decidedly the richest in the production of horses, supplies the army alone with 3,000 horses per annum. [97]

Official Types of Cavalry and Artillery Horses

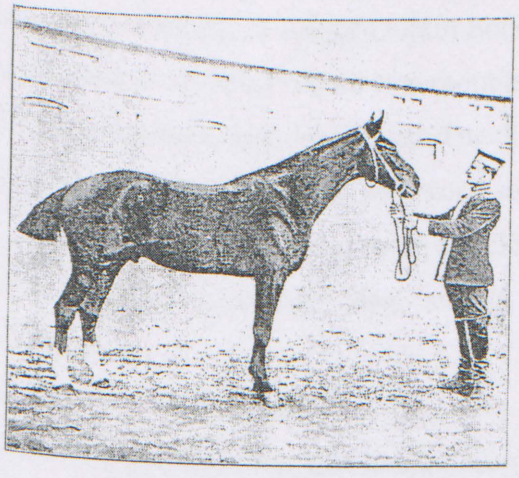
REQUIRED FOR THE GERMAN ARMY.



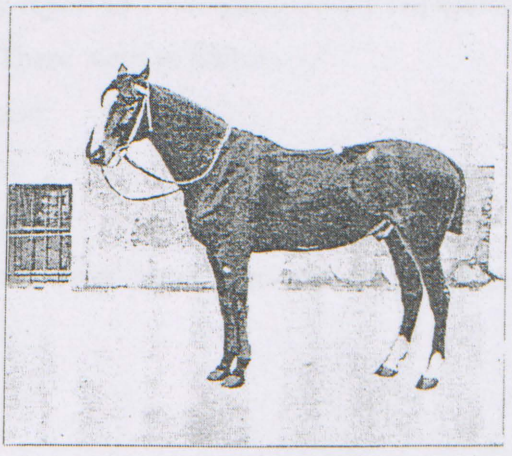
ARTILLERY FORE HORSE, GERTRUDE.
Five years old; Brown Mare; 160 centimeters high—15-3 hands.
Bred in Holstein.



ARTILLERY SHAFT HORSE, FREGATTE.
Seven years old; Dark Brown Mare; 164 centimeters high, say 15¼ hands.
Bred in East Prussia.



HEAVY RIDING HORSE, STROLCH
Six years old; Brown Wallach; 169 centimeters high, say 16⅔ hands.
Bred in East Prussia.



LANCERS HORSE. NELSON.
Ten years old; Brown Wallach; 160 centimeters high -15-3 hands.
Bred in East Prussia.

From the Dublin Horse Show Annual, 1900

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 witnessed a deployment of cavalry by both adversaries on an scale unprecedented since the Napoleonic period, and the losses on

[96] 'England' is probably a generic term for all of the U.K., it is therefore likely that a good number of these horses were in fact, Irish.

both sides were enormous. The Germans lost over a million horses, including all those captured from the French at Metz and Sedan, the original number with which they started the war was renewed three times.[98] With such colossal wastage, it is not surprising that the presence of German army buyers had been observed at the major Irish horse fairs from the mid-seventies onwards. In the report on Ballinasloe October fair of 1874, it was noted that 'Mons. Douterluigne, Belgium purchased several horses for the German government [99], and in 1879 also at Ballinasloe, 'The Russian and German agents in particular, sent off large drafts, the prices going so low as £20 in some cases. [100]

Questions were asked about German purchases during the course of the Parliamentary Commission which was set up in 1897 to enquire into the state of the Horse Industry in Ireland. However, little information was forthcoming concerning specifically military purposes, though it was conceded that private dealers 'take a lot out of the country'... 'chiefly mares'[101]

A German army purchasing commission was active in Ireland during the last years of the nineteenth century. As they were able to breed all the remounts they needed in their provincial studs, their main concern was acquire Irish stock in order to improve their native breeds. A Royal Dublin Society report in 1900 specified the requirements of the German army with regard to remounts. These were as follows :

1) Thoroughbred, small head, good neck poise.
2) Strong, well-placed legs, with good joints.
3) Arched ribs, with good sloping shoulders.
4) A well-built, not too long, strong back, with good connections and high-lying kidneys.
5) Healthy, strong hocks.
6) Round, good hooves, and healthy frogs.
7) Healthy constitution and good digestion.
8) A broad energetic step.

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[97] *I.F.G.*, 25 March 1871.
[98] Tylden, p. 26.
[99] *I.F.G*, 10 October, 1874. It is probable that these were better class horses than troopers.
[100] *Farmer's Gazette,* 11 October, 1879.
[101] 1897 *Commissio on horse breeding* (Ireland), questions 10076 – 10081.

An artillery draft horse was to be 15.1 to 15.3 hands high at three years, and when full grown should stand 15.3 to 16 hands. In addition to the requirements stated above, he should have strong bones, a broad breast, especially strong hind quarters, and goo0d collar shoulders. He had to be able to work while being ridden, and cope with the strain of heavy wagons together with five other horses, and draw a load of 42 cwt. while trotting and galloping alternately through difficult terrain.[102]

Netherlands

The 1897 commission established that at the time of the enquiry 'vast numbers' of horses were being bought 'for the Dutch, Italians, French and Danes.'[103] The two main dealers supplying the Dutch were John Widger of Waterford and Thomas Meleady of Dublin. The Widgers were a leading firm of horse dealers based in Waterford, and John had distinguished himself two years previously as the owner of a race horse -'Wild Man from Borneo'- which had won the Aintree Grand National of 1895.[104] He was interviewed first, and explained that he supplied about 500 three to five-year-old horses to the Dutch government every year. The height requirement was from 15 1 ½ to 15 3 hands, geldings or mare. They paid about the same as the British.[105]

Thomas Meleady explained that he 'was the man that bought principally for 'French George'[presumably for the French army], and when he died he bought for the Dutch – 400 horses a year. When he first started to buy for the Dutch after French George died, they gave him £48 for 'strong ones' and £44 for 'light cavalry' and 'riding artillery horses'. Meleady preferred to sell to foreigners than the British, as the former collected them 'from the yard' and that was the end of the matter, whereas the latter only paid £41 15s, and he had to deliver them to the British army depot. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that recently, the Dutch had reduced their regulation purchasing price to £42 and £43, but 'if they like a lot of horses you may ask them a price and they won't refuse you'[106]

According to information received from the Netherlands Institute for Military History (*Instituut voor Militaire Geschiedenis*) there were four ways that the Dutch army

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[102] Royal Dublin Society, *Dublin Horse Show Annual*, (Dublin 1900), p. 57.
[103] 1897 *Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland), question 756.
[104] John Welcome, *Irish horse-racing*, (London 1982), p. 99.
[105] 1897 *Commission on horse breeding* (Ireland), questions 10024 – 10097.

purchased its remounts. The first system was by public tender (*openbare aanbestedning*). By this, the War Department published the requirements that the horses had to meet and the terms of delivery. The second method was known as closed tender (*onderhandsche aanbestedning*). This was the case from 1879 to 1881 in Hungary and from 1881 to 1886 in Ireland. During a closed tender, the State, under certain conditions, awarded the contract to supply remounts to one or more contractors. It is probable that the Dutch government retained the services of John Widger and Thomas Meleady for the purchase of army horses during this period. The third method was private purchase (*aankoop uit vrije hand*) from individuals or companies with no formal long-term relationship. These could take place at breeding-farms, horse fairs or at a dealer's premises. The purchase was entrusted to a panel of military officers known as a 'remount commission' (*remontecommisse*) which could be permanent or temporary. After 1886, an Irish Remount Commission was established in addition to other remount commissions for various countries. The Irish commission visited horse fairs and dealers in Ireland. [107]

The final method of procuring horses for the Dutch army was known as 'appropriation' (*vordering*). This gave the army a right to the requisition and compulsory purchase from companies and private individuals in times of national danger. It was only exercised during periods of general mobilization and in times of war. [108]

According to a report in 1900, Major Braams, President of the Dutch Remount Commission was accustomed to visit Ireland twice a year usually in May and June, to purchase about 300 cavalry and 70 artillery horses. The animals were examined by an English vet acting on behalf of the Dutch army. The specifications for Dutch remounts were as follows : They had to be 3 or 4 years old ; only mares and geldings were purchased ; the cavalry horses were required to display breeding, have good fronts, shoulders, and show good paces, they were not to be too high in the croupe or too long in the back. The type wanted was similar to British light cavalry horses.

Cavalry remounts were to be from 15 hands and half an inch to 15¼ hands in height. Artillery horses were to be similar to those used in the British army. They were required to have good shoulders, back, loins, legs, and feet, and good quarters. Artillery

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106 ibid.. questions 10140 – 10152.
107 Smit to Lane, 3/1/2002.
108 Smit to Lane, 3/1/2002.

remounts did not require as much 'breeding' as those for the cavalry, but they were not be too common either.

Belgium

O'Donevan in his *History of Livestock in Ireland* informs us that 'since 1868 the Belgian Army has been supplied from Ireland. Mr. Ferdinand Delangle of Lille, was responsible for the introduction of Irish horses to Belgium, and he became, about 1890, one of the greatest horse dealers in the world.[109] Information from the *Musee Royal de l'Armee et D'Histoire Militaire*, in Brussels, confirms that they have the original *dossiers d'achat* of Ferdinand. Delangle in their archives.

According to the 1902 British parliamentary enquiry into the administration of the Remount Service, the Dutch and the Belgians armies were still buying large numbers of Irish horses at the very end of the century. However, at that time they tended to buy younger horses than the British, preferring three and four year olds, while the U. K. purchasers favoured older animals.[110]

Russia

During the nineteenth century the Russian Empire is said to have maintained a reserve of 15,000,000 horses available for military use. Officers commanding cavalry regiments had the responsibility for the purchase of their remounts in the open market,[111] as was the case with Great Britain. They had little need to import cavalry troopers from abroad, but they did import some good thoroughbred mares and stallions from Great Britain and Ireland in order to introduce some 'blood' into their hardy native breeds. However, there is a report of extensive Russian purchases of remounts in the Ballinasloe fair of 1878.[112]

Austria

The Austrian system for procuring remounts was similar to that of Prussia by which the Imperial government maintained a number of breeding studs to supply the general demand for horses by the public. [113] One of these at Kisbeer, established by the emperor Franz Josef, specialized in English and Irish thoroughbred stock. However,

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[109] O'Donevan, op. cit. p. 278.
[110] *Proceedings of a Court of Enquiry – Remounts* 1902, qq. 700, 705,
[111] Gless, p. 87.
[112] *Farmer's Gazette*, 11 October 1879.

none of these studs were specifically intended for the breeding of cavalry horses. The army obtained their remounts from private breeders and dealers in the open market. In 1871 their authorized purchase prices were as follows :-

Heavy cavalry and heavy artillery, £32 ; light cavalry, £25 ; pack horses, £15.[114]

The Irish Farmer's Gazette reports that : some years since' an Austrian colonel 'purchased in two or three years about 150 mares, the best of the old Irish blood, for Austria. He would not buy half-bred English mares, however good looking, because he could not depend on their back blood, and was afraid of their throwing back to the cart or under-bred horse, and so being soft and slow and therefore bad.[115]

Italy

Witnesses interviewed by the 1897 Commission reported that Irish horses were being bought for the Italian army. However, the latter were not interested so much in ordinary troopers as in better class thoroughbreds or near-thoroughbreds which could be used as officer's chargers, especially five year old mares. Their main Irish agent was John Widger who supplied about 350 or 400 horses annually at £50 to £100 each.[116]

At Ballinasloe fair In 1866, 'Colonel Castellengo attended by an interpreter sought to effect the purchase of some chargers for the King of Italy. For the horse which was purchased on the previous day by Mr. Magrane for £270 he offered £320 which was declined.[117]

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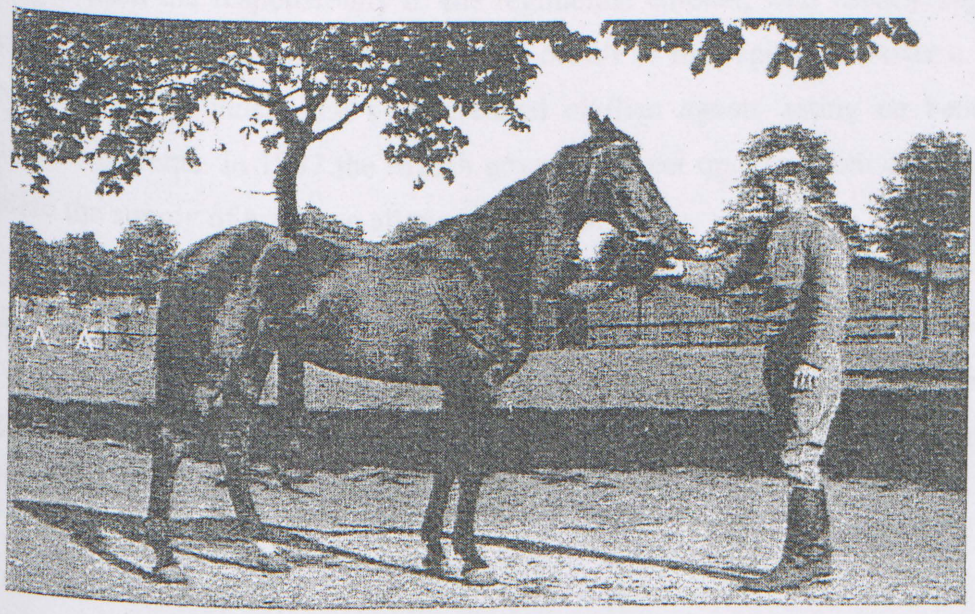
[113] Gless, p.88.
[114] *I.F.G.* 25 March 1871
[115] ibid.
[116] 1897 Commission, questions 10018 – 10026.
[117] *I.F.G.* 13 October, 1866.



En god Irlænder. »Eager Boy«. 1' Eskadron. Rekrut 1245/1921 Grandjean.

An Irish remount in the Danish army, early 20th century. Giersing, *Gardehusarregiment gennem 25 aar*. 1937.

Denmark

The 1897 Commission also reported military purchases by the Danish government.[118] Enquiries made to the Royal Danish Military Library in Copenhagen, elicited the information that while the Danish army certainly purchased Irish horses during the early part of the twentieth century, but there were no records of any such transactions having occurred prior to 1900.[119] However, since Danish purchases were specifically mentioned in 1897, it would seem reasonable to assume that some had in fact, taken place during the last years of the nineteenth century.

Summary

By the nineteenth century Ireland, with its international reputation for the excellence of its horses, had become an important market for the purchase of military remounts by British and European armies. The favoured animal was the Irish half-bred hunter which also made an ideal military trooper, as the sport of hunting as practiced in Ireland, had endowed the Irish horse with an unusual skill in crossing difficult country, an ability which was also of great benefit for military purposes.

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[118] 1897 *Commission on horse breeding*, (Ireland), question 756.

[119] Christensen to Lane, 12/ 02 /2002.

In the British army, during the earlier part of the century the replacement of troop-horses had been the responsibility of the regimental colonel, who usually appointed an officer to buy horses on the open market on behalf of the regiment. After c. 1850 this task was normally undertaken by accredited civilian agents acting on behalf of the individual regiments. In 1887 the British government set up a remount depot in order to centralize the supply of horses to all mounted units.

Other European armies made extensive use of Irish horses for military purposes during this period. Purchasing methods varied somewhat between governments, however, these normally entailed the use of civilian purchasing agents, either Irish or foreign, or sometimes, foreign military purchasing commissions who bought directly at Irish horse fairs.

Chapter Eight

Hunting

The pattern of hunting practiced in Ireland during the eighteenth century had been influenced by the type of landscape as the countryside was on the whole still more open than it became in later years, particularly after the advent of the Enclosure movement in the early part of the century. This development had resulted in the erection of field and demesne boundaries where there had previously been an open landscape which was a result of the extensive clearance of the ancient forests which had been in continual progress from early times up to seventeenth century and even later.[1] These forest clearances had made it possible to hunt on horseback over large areas of the country without having to jump obstacles. This recently cleared land had been used for the most part for grazing and pasturage. There were however, certain specific regions of the country where the practice of building enclosures had been established, usually connected with the reclamation of stony land in earlier times. In such cases, the method of disposing of unwanted rocks and other detritus had been to pile it around the perimeters of fields thus forming solid boundaries. Examples of this practice existing into modern times are the stone wall counties of Galway and Roscommon and the characteristic stone and earth banks of counties Limerick and Tipperary.[2]

Before the latter part of the eighteenth century, hunting in most parts of Ireland had been, not so much a matter of galloping at break neck speed over country with hounds in hot pursuit of a nimble footed quarry as the pursuit of deer or fox at a leisurely pace, through more or less open landscape using horses and hounds bred for endurance rather than speed. This type of hunting could take many hours, and was in reality a contest of stamina between hunter and hunted which only ended when one or other succumbed to exhaustion.

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[1] E. McCracken, *Irish woods since Tudor times*, (Newton Abbot, 1971).
[2] Field boundaries in the form of stone walls and banks and ditches were known from ancient times. Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming*, (Dublin 2000), ,pp 372-374.

For a long time, foxhunting had been considered for a long time the 'poor relation' of deer hunting in both Britain and Ireland until it was made fashionable by the fifth Duke of Beaufort in 1762. This sporting nobleman was said to have put his hounds on to a fox when he couldn't find a stag, and was so taken by the excitement of the chase that he subsequently gave up deer hunting and concentrated solely on foxes.[3] As a sport, foxhunting became especially popular in nineteenth century Ireland where it had developed from the practice of hunting with private packs of hounds kept on a more or less informal basis by the nobility and gentry during the previous century. Though there were no regular hunt clubs operating in the country during that period, these private packs constituted an informal focus for the sporting activities of their organizer's like minded friends and neighbours who were often invited to stay at their host's houses for prolonged periods of time in order to hunt and indulge in lavish hospitality. Different members of the gentry often took it in turn to provide sport and good fellowship for the hunting fraternity. Tom Conolly of Castletown was described as a 'thorough sportsman of the good old school a notorious *bon vivant* :

> He kept open house, and on hunting days all who participated in the pleasures of the chase with him were expected to dine in Castletown ; none were invited, all were welcome when they came ; in truth, it may be said that 'though he feasted all the great he ne're forgot the small. [4]

At the end of the eighteenth century, hunting in many parts of Ireland was put on a more scientific basis with the introduction of the hunting style pioneered by Hugo Meynell (1735 – 1808), master of the Quorn Hunt in Leicestershire, in order to cope with the changes to the landscape brought about by the Enclosure Movement and the Agrarian Revolution in Great Britain and Ireland. The Meynellian system required the planting of fox coverts at strategic points round the hunting country, and the development of faster breeds of horses and hounds specially bred for jumping.

Hunting in Leinster was perhaps more influenced by trends in England than was the case in areas more remote from the capital. The tendency for hunts to develop on a county basis as in England took a long time to evolve, and many private packs in Ireland continued to hunt in the old style until the very end of the nineteenth century. The first 'county' fox hunt in Ireland to operate on the Meynellian system was the Kilkenny which

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[3] Muriel Bowen, *Irish hunting,* (Tralee, 1954), p. xiv.
[4] B. M. Fitzpatrick, *Irish sport and sportsmen*, (Dublin, 1878), pp 13-14. Henceforth cited as Fitzpatrick.

had been founded in 1797 by John (later Sir John) Power together with his brother Richard.. The country taken over by the Kilkenny had been previously hunted over by a number of private packs which had hunted both hare and deer. When he had acquired the mastership, Sir John who had hunted in Leicestershire, found his territory to be open country with little natural cover except a few vestiges of ancient woodland. This area had previously been hunted in the old style and foxes had become scarce. Power's predecessors had often been reduced to hunting 'bagged' quarry.[5] In order to remedy this, Power set about planting carefully situated fox coverts and gorse to encourage foxes to breed so as to be sure of a 'draw' and a good run. He was also the first huntsman in Ireland to breed a pack of foxhounds of pure English blood which were considered superior to the Irish breeds.[6] It was Power's stated intention to make Kilkenny the leading hunting county, the so-called 'Leicestershire of Ireland'.[7] In this respect he achieved some success, and attracted sportsmen from all over Ireland and even further afield to ride to his hounds.

Another early follower of the Meynellian system and planter of coverts, was Colonel William Wrixton of Ballygiblin, Co. Cork, who founded the Duhallow Hunt Club on 29 September 1800. We are fortunate that the original minute book of the club (1800 – 1809), has been recorded, and gives details of its officers and administration.[8] There were 104 founding members consisting mainly of the gentry of the county including several members of the nobility. There were no women. Four of the hunt members were military officers, and there were seven clergymen, presumably of the Established Church. In addition, there were thirteen additional members admitted by ballot, including two lieutenants of the Royal Artillery, and two more clergymen. These figures give a useful indication of the type of people who hunted in Co. Cork at that time.

Types of Horses used for Hunting in Ireland

The horses used for hunting in Ireland before the wide spread introduction of thoroughbred blood into the national gene pool at the end of the eighteenth century were

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5 i.e. taken to the meet in a bag and released.
6 Roger Longrigg, *The history of foxhunting* (London, 1975), p. 156. Henceforth cited as Longrigg.
7 Fitzpatrick, p. 251.
8 Maj. James Grove-White, 'Extracts from Old Minute Book of Duhallow Hunt 1800 – 1809', *Journal of the Cork Historical &Archaeological Society*, 2nd. Series-Vol. II, February 1896, no, 14. pp 49 – 59.



Watercolour of hunt horses from Fermor Godfrey's hunting diaries 1863 – 1872.

principallyof the type known as the Old Irish Hunter, an animal which would nowadays be considered slow across country as it did not need to be particularly fast for the type of hunting then in vogue, nor did it normally require any great jumping skill with the notable exception of horses hunting over the stone wall counties of the West of Ireland and the bank counties of the south midlands.

W. H, Maxwell wrote in 1832 regarding hunting in parts of Connaught :

During the last century, the West of Ireland was celebrated for its breed of horses. They were of that class denominated 'the old Irish hunter' – a strong, well-boned, and enduring animal, that without any pretension to extraordinary speed, was sufficiently fast for fox-hounds, an excellent weight-carrier, and better still, able to live with any dogs and in any country. As *fencers*, this breed was unequalled ; and for a crack hunter to carry ten or eleven stone over *six feet six* of solid masonry, was no extraordinary event ; *seven feet* has been achieved repeatedly - and there are still, I have no doubt, many horses in the province capable of performing the latter feat. But, alas! This noted class of hunters is now comparatively rare – a higher blooded, and as all admit, an inferior caste, has been substituted – the racing hunter fills the stables that were formerly occupied by the old Roscommon weight-carrier – and in a few years this celebrated and valuable animal will be seldom seen.[9]

[9] W.H. Maxwell, *Wild sports of the West*, (London, 1832). pp 388-389.

The introduction of thoroughbred blood into the established Irish hunting stock though controversial, was in response to the desire on the part of some of the more elite Irish hunts to adopt the Meynellian system in order to introduce increased speed and jumping skills into their hunters, together with the planting of strategically placed fox coverts. Nevertheless as we have seen, the wide spread introduction of thoroughbred blood did not always meet with universal approval from the more conservative Irish huntsmen.

The English thoroughbred which had been first introduced into Ireland during the early years of the eighteenth century had developed over a hundred years or so into a distinct Irish type under the influence of the unique environment of the country with its fecund pasture-lands and calcium-rich limestone soil so beneficial to the formation of good equine 'bone'. When thoroughbred stallions were mated with Old Irish mares in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the result was the 'half-bred' Irish hunter for which the country became internationally famous in the nineteenth century, as indeed it still remains. A description of the Irish hunter in 1881 informs us that :

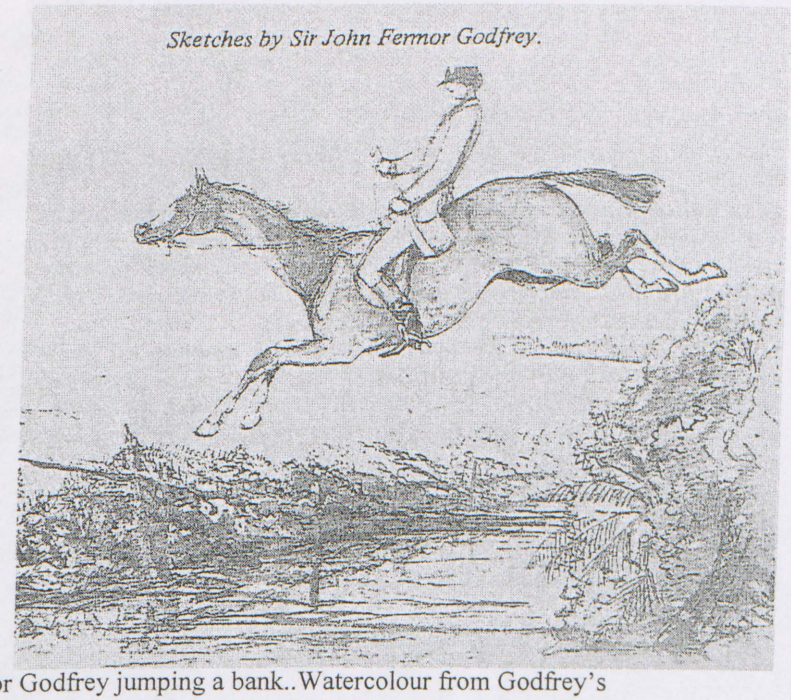
Between the English and Irish hunter there are several points of difference. Thus the latter is remarkable for a particularly neat head, almost too narrow across the forehead, but full between the ears. The muzzle is small, but with good nostrils ; jaws open, and head well set on. The shoulders are particularly sloping and powerful, the loins also being muscular and well united to the back. The croup is almost always sloping, and the tail set low. Legs and feet clean and sound. [10]

Different types of Horses for Different Types of 'Going'

As the type of terrain to be traversed while hunting varies considerably in different parts of the country, so different types of horses were needed for different types of 'going'. For example, wet boggy or heavy clay plough land into which horses were inclined to sink to their hocks in mud, or the penetration of dense thickets, required a strong, sturdy animal such as a half-bred cob which was capable of pushing his way though the obstacles concerned without tiring himself unduly, but at the same time was able to jump a variety of fences. This sort of animal didn't generally require a great deal of speed. In contrast flat, open countries particularly those with well drained sandy soils and containing occasional obstacles required horses that could gallop on and jump well.



Bank jumping, c. 1830. Print from Longrigg, *The history of foxhunting*.

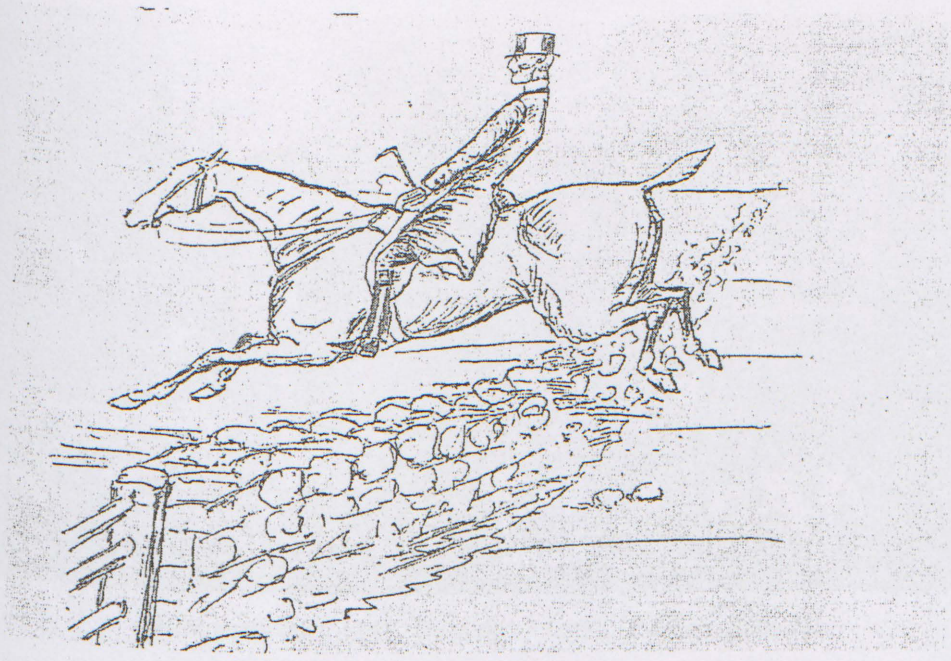


Fermor Godfrey jumping a bank..Watercolour from Godfrey's hunting diaries.

Going of this type generally required animals with a high percentage of thoroughbred blood to get the best out of it. Again, as the type of obstacles encountered while hunting varied a great deal from one part of the country to another, many horses became used to jumping only obstacles typical of their own district, and were not always very good at negotiating unfamiliar fence types found in other hunting areas. Nevertheless, the best Irish hunters were extremely versatile and capable of tackling any type of any obstacle that they might meet. Irish hunters with a high percentage of thoroughbred blood were in particular demand for the more elite hunts in the English shires where they could fetch extremely high prices.

Dr. Colin Lewis, formerly of the Geography Department of University College Dublin, has made a special study of the different types of hunting obstacles commonly found in different parts of Ireland. He notes that the most common fence types in the

[10] J.H.M Walsh, *The Horse in the Stable and the Field*, (London, 1873), pp 99



Jumping stone wall, c. 1880. From Longrigg, *The history of foxhunting.*

country are earthen banks sometimes faced with stone.[11] Earth banks occur normally in areas where heavy clays predominate which in many cases coincide with the classical horse breeding and hunting counties. Irish banks almost invariable have a ditch on one or both sides. They are classified by hunting aficionados as either 'single' or 'double' i.e. whether they are narrow or broad on top. Each type requires different techniques to negotiate. Single banks are normally cleared by the horse jumping straight on and off without changing his stride, while the broader doubles require the horse to change his legs on top before jumping off. In other areas a type of obstacle called a 'narrow' bank predominated. This again, requires a special technique negotiate successfully. The horse leaps over it landing on the opposite face from which he kicks off with his hind legs.[12] The size and structure of earthern banks varies a good deal from one part of the country to another. Professor E. Estyn Evans of Queen's University mentions some in Co. Limerick with cart tracks along the top.[13]

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[11] Colin Lewis, *Hunting in Ireland* (London, 1975), p. 87.
[12] Observations by the present writer who has had considerable experience in hunting in various parts of Ireland and England.
[13] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London, 1967), p.110. Henceforth cited as Evans.



Westmeath hunt, 1841. Painting by James Walsham Baldock.

Both single and double banks are commonly but not invariably planted on top with some form of hedging such as hawthorn or blackthorn,[14] and sometimes with gorse, which is not normally much of a barrier to a good hunter. Faced with a large double bank, a good bank jumper will clear the ditch in front of it, land on its face scramble to the top where he change his legs before jumping off, perhaps clearing a big ditch on the far side.[15] Sometimes the banks are faced with stone or slate. This depended on the geology of the area, and the fact that the preparation of land for cultivation in former times required the clearing of scattered stones and boulders which were then conveniently incorporated into field boundaries.

The same observation could be made about stone walls which are the next most common obstacle to confront the horse while hunting. These vary a great deal from one region to another. In Ireland the classical wall jumping country is Co. Galway where field boundaries are normally formed of dry limestone walls constructed with stones rounded by erosion in ancient times piled loosely on top of each other so that even if a horse hits one of these walls he doesn't usually hurt himself as the wall collapses and there are no sharp edges to cut him. These Galway walls are characteristically

[14].This is a very ancient practice. W. Groenman- van Waatinge, 'Field Boundaries in Ireland', *Irish Antiquity* ed. Ó Corráin (Cork, 1981), p.288. Evans, p.111.



Stag hunting, c. 1850. Probably the Garrison Hounds, later the Ward Union. From Smith, *The horse in Ireland.*

constructed with openings between the stones. This feature constitutes their strength as they offer less resistance to the wind than solid walls.[16]

Horses used to hunting in Galway tended to be specialists in jumping walls and often found it difficult to cope in other areas with types of obstacles unfamiliar to them such as banks or ditches, though they normally had no difficulty with 'fly' fences such as poles or hedges which were jumped in the same way as walls. Walls both dry-stone and mortared are of course, encountered as field boundaries in other parts of the country as well as Galway, but like banks, they tend to have regional characteristics. In most areas however, the stones used in wall construction are fragmented bedrock and tended to have sharp edges. Accordingly, they could injure the horse if he knocked against them. In areas where walls were constructed of varieties of flaky slate or shale, small shards of this material could enter a wound and cause infection to the horse if he struck against the obstacle. Consequently, any horse attempting to clear this type of obstacle had to learn to

[15] Observation by the present writer.
[16] Evens, p.105.

jump it cleanly, or the fence should be avoided altogether. There was a type of fence peculiar to Co. Carlow. It consisted of a single slab of granite about a metre high and mounted on stone posts about two metres apart. [17] The type of horse required for the Carlow hunting country is 'a short-legged, strong and well bred one, who can get through dirt, and must be an exceptionally good bank jumper.'[18]

The classic hunting counties which tend to be flat such as north Co. Dublin, Kildare, Westmeath, Louth and Meath, are characterized by broad ditches, some of them positively enormous, particularly in the latter county. A fast bold horse that could jump well, preferably with a good percentage of thoroughbred blood, was required to hunt successfully over that type of country. In the same way as horses had to be suited to specific various types of terrain, so they had to be appropriate for their riders with regard to age and ability, as well as their function in the hunt. Horses for masters of hounds, whippers-in and other hunt servants, and members of the 'field', all required somewhat different characteristics and abilities to perform their respective functions as did horses for women which had to be specially broken for side-saddle.

Categories of Hunts

Hunting in Ireland during the nineteenth century can be regarded as an natural expression of an ancient rural horse culture, and practiced by a wide range of economic and social classes. There was a marked social structure of hunting in Ireland that extended downwards from fashionable county fox and stag hunts whose members consisted largely of the nobility and gentry classes for whom hunting was in many cases, virtually a full-time occupation. These county packs of fox-hounds could afford to pay a staff of professional hunt servants and grooms, and maintain establishments of high quality hunters and pedigree hounds. The next step down in the echelon of Irish hunting were the less eminent establishments of foxhounds and harriers often called 'Sunday packs' of whom there were a great number. In many cases the master owned the hounds and hunted the hounds himself or they were 'trencher-fed', that is hounds that were not kept in hunt kennels but looked after by individual hunt members and brought to the meet on hunting days. Family

[17] Co. Carlow is also renowned for its huge double banks.
[18] H. Fennell, 'The Carlow Hunt', *Carloviana,* vol.1, No.17, New Ser. pp 13-14, Dec.1968.

members or friends whipped-in[19]. The followers of this type of hunts tended to include medium and small farmers with their families, together with traders and shop keepers from country towns. And there were always the ubiquitous R.I.C. and army officers, as well as the occasional doctor and 'hunting priest'.[20]

The lowest echelon of the Irish hunting population was composed of foot packs with trencher fed hounds that ranged from reasonably well-bred beagles to a 'rag-tag and bobtail' assortment that hunted hares and the occasional fox. These type of hunts were followed principally by small farmers, tradesmen and farm labourers. Virtually all of the hunting in Co. Kerry was of this type.

A non-professional approach was really what made hunting viable in many parts of Ireland. This made Irish hunting something of a community activity among the rural population. The advantage of these small community run hunts whether 'Sunday packs' or foot packs was that they could survive economic hardships such as the Land War of the 1880s far more resiliently than the more fashionable establishments.[21]

Regional Distribution of Hunts

According to the report of the 1897 Parliamentary Commission investigating the horse breeding industry in Ireland 'with few exceptions all the high-class horses' were bred in the southern, eastern, and midland districts of the country. Among these were the superior type of hunters for which Ireland was famous. It is no coincidence that although mounted hunting with hounds was practiced to some extent in virtually every county in Ireland, the area mentioned, together with enclaves in Galway and Down was the heartland of classic Irish hunting.

Dr. Colin Lewis in his definitive work *Hunting in Ireland* cites the earliest date for which a reasonably comprehensive map showing the hunting packs in Ireland can be produced is 1877. Dr. Lewis who based his survey mainly on B.M. Fitzpatrick's *Irish Sports and Sportsmen*, Dublin 1878, notes that 'the easterly concentration of hunts and especially the way in which the bog-covered and upland areas were not hunted is

[19] A list dated November 1877 in Fitzpatrick, shows 47 harrier packs operating in Ireland. The term 'Sunday pack' appears in E. Œ Somerville and Martin Ross, *Dan Russell the fox* (London, 1913), p. 25

[20] Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House* (Dublin 2001), p. 57. Henceforth cited as Dooley, *Big House*, Broadly accurate representations of this type of hunts are to be found in the fiction of Summerville and Ross, e.g. *The Irish R.M.* The present writer hunted with similar establishments in his youth.

obvious.' He also noted that the names of many of the hunts revealed the interest of the landed families and military officers in the sport. Dr. Lewis's map shows forty five packs of harriers some of which were obviously privately owned, four packs of stag hounds, and seventeen packs of foxhounds. However, he admits that there would have



The Ward Hunt, c. 1850. Painting by William Osborne.

been also some additional packs which were not listed. It is clear that the majority of packs hunted hares, at least officially, but some undoubtedly hunted foxes as well. The county with the largest concentration of hunts in the 1870s and 1880s was Cork with one pack of staghounds, four packs of foxhounds, and about eight packs of harriers.[22] The counties of Tipperary and Limerick also had strong hunting traditions. In contrast there was little or no hunting in Clare and Kerry and these counties recorded the lowest numbers of sport horses in Munster. Galway was the prime hunting county in Connaught its leading pack being the Galway Blazers. Down, was the principal hunting area of Ulster whose county pack, the Down Hunt Club founded in 1757 was the oldest hunt club in the British Isles and the county was extremely active in horse related activities. Down also boasts a well known stag hunt, as well as the famous Down Royal race track.

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[21] See pp 268 ff.
[22] The *Irish Times* 15 October 1881, contains a lists of hunt clubs operating in Ireland at that time. Fitzpatrick, pp 268-269, also lists harrier packs. However, these lists are not consistent.

Types of People who Hunted

A German visitor, Prince Von Pückler Muskau, who visited Ireland in 1828, provides us with an interesting account of a day out with a local pack of harriers in the Galtee mountains on 14 October 1828. It is worth quoting in detail :

I was on horseback by six o'clock, on my way to breakfast at Captain S---'s country house, where the sportsmen were to rendezvous for a hare hunt. I found six or seven sturdy squires assembled: they do not think much, but their life is all the more gay and careless...

On our arrival at the appointed place of meeting , the horses were there, but no dogs. There were, however, a great many gentlemen, and instead of hunting hares we now all traversed the fields in every direction in search of the stray hounds. The sort of riding on these occasions is a thing of which people in out country can form no idea. Although most of the fields are enclosed by stone hedges from three to six feet high, and either piled loosely together or regularly cemented, and some of them edged by ditches; or strong walls of earth and stones pointed at the top, from five to seven feet high, with a ditch on one, sometimes on both sides; - all this is not admitted as any pretext whatever for the riders to deviate from a straight line. If I mistake not, I have already described to you how wonderfully the horses here leap; the sagacity is also admirable with which they distinguish a loose hedge from a firm one; one recently thrown up, from one hardened by time. The loose ones they spring over at one leap, - 'clear them' according to the technical expression; but they take the firm ones more easily, making a sort of halt at the top. All this takes place equally well in a full gallop, or, with the utmost coolness, at a foot pace, or with a very short run. Some gentlemen fell, but were only laughed at; for a man who does not break his neck on the spot must look for no pity, but on the contrary, ridicule. Others dismounted at very bad places, and their docile steeds leaped without them, and then stood still, grazing while their riders climbed over. I can assure you I very often thought I should be compelled to follow their example; but Captain S---, who knew the excellent horse on which he had mounted me, and was always by my side, encouraged me to trust with perfect security to the admirable creature; so that at the end of the day I had acquired a very considerable reputation even amongst 'fox-hunters.' Certainly it is only in Ireland one sees all that horses are capable of ; the English are far behind them in this respect. Wherever a man could get through, my horse found means to do so in one way or other, leaping, crawling, or scrambling. Even in swampy places where he sank up to his girths, he laboured through without the least hurry or agitation, where a more lively and timorous horse, though equally strong, would certainly never have made his way. Such a horse on a field of battle would be beyond all price: but only very early and perfect training, joined to the excellence of the breed, can produce such a one.[23]

The hunting field often provided a common ground in which Catholic and Protestant neighbours shared a mutual love of the chase notwithstanding their religious

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[23] H. Von Pückler Muskau, *Tour in England, Ireland, and France in the years 1826-29* (Philadelphia,1833), pp 412, 413.

differences, and in spite of the iniquitous penal law which, for most of the eighteenth century, had prohibited Catholics from owning a horse valued at more than £5 [24]. Like many of the anti-popery laws, this particular piece of legislation seems to have been honoured more in the breach than in the observance as, in the absence of an adequate police force, its enforcement depended on local conditions, and seems to have been invoked only on occasion, the last recorded instance being the case of Arthur O'Leary of Cork in 1773. O'Leary who was a captain in the Austrian army, owned a valuable racehorse which was in danger of being claimed by a Protestant magistrate, Abraham Morris, whose horse he had beaten in a race at Macroom. This caused O'Leary to go on the run, and his subsequent death as an outlaw. This episode was commemorated in the Gaelic poem 'Caoine Airt Ui Laoghaire' which was written by O'Leary's wife Eibhlin and which has survived to this day in oral tradition.[25]

Co-operation frequently took place between Catholics and Protestant neighbours in order to defeat the objectives of this pernicious decree, as in most cases the Protestant gentry wished to stay on good terms with their Catholic neighbours and maintain good social and sporting relations with them. A example of this was the case of the Scarteen 'Black and Tans' a famous pack of foxhounds in Co. Limerick which was reputed to have been in existence as far back as 1691. This pack was owned and hunted quite openly by the Catholic Ryan family during penal times, by the expedient of stabling their high quality hunters with their Protestant friends who declared that the animals belonged to them In fact, It is alleged that the best of Ryan's horses were kept in the stables of the Church of Ireland rector.[26]

The Army

Fox hunting was a way of life for the average military officer stationed in Ireland. Most of these were accustomed to horses and riding from their childhood, and the British army encouraged its officers to hunt as the sport developed 'an eye for country' which was invaluable as campaign training for the cavalry leader in particular. This is summed

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[24] 7 William III, C.5

[25] Eilís Dillon, , 'The lament for Arthur O'Leary', *Irish Universuty Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1971. pp 198-199. Wall, 'The rise of a Catholic middle class in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *I.H.S.*. xi, 1958, p. 103 (n.). Seán Ó Tuama (ed.), *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire,* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1999)

[26] M. Bowen, *Irish hunting,* p. 148.

up neatly in Col. Alderson's *Pink and Scarlet* which stressed to usefulness of hunting as military training, wrote :

> We have one incalculable advantage which no other nation possesses, in that our officers are able to hunt, and than which, combined with study, there is, during peace, no better practice for acquiring the gift which Kellerman naturally possessed.'[27]

Regiments stationed in Ireland, particularly cavalry units, were accustomed to arrange the duties of their officers in such a way as to permit them to go hunting or attend race meetings several days a week. The garrison duties of officers in times of peace normally consisted of parades and inspections which could often be left to non-commissioned officers such as sergeants who were the true professionals in an age when amateurism was rife among officers. Commissions could be purchased in the British army prior to 1871, and the acquisition of one was regarded as one of the perquisites of a gentleman[28]. The right family connections and the ability to cut a dash on a horse were usually more highly rated than competence in military matters.

Many regiments kept packs of hounds, usually harriers, and ran their own point-to-points. From 1842 to 1854 the Dublin Garrison had its own pack of stag hounds. They were known as the Garrison Hounds and kennelled at Dunboyne. This particular hunt had an unparalleled reputation for high jinks and furious riding over the yawning ditches which were characteristic of the flat country of Co. Dublin and Meath over which they hunted. On the outbreak of the Crimean War the Garrison had to give up their hounds due to other commitments, and the hunt was then taken over by a civilian master as part of an amalgamation of several smaller private packs of stag hounds and renamed the Ward Union. It is interesting to note that the second element of the title was not in fact, derived from the amalgamation but from a hostelry in North Co. Dublin called 'the Union' which was a popular meet of the stag hounds.

Women

In 1800 women were a rarity on the hunting field though there were a few exceptional horse women who were quite capable of holding their own with the men across country in spite of the disadvantages of their cumbersome riding habits burdened

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[27] Lt. Col. E.A.H, Alderon, *Pink and Scarlet or Hunting as a School for Soldiering* (London, 1900), p.1, quoting Sir Evelyn Wood, *The Achievements of Cavalry*, p. 39.

[28] The system of buying and selling commissions in the British army was not abolished until 1871. Marquis of Anglesey, *A History of the British Cavalry* (London, 1975), vol. 2, p. 371.

by voluminous skirts.[29] Women's side saddles of the time were not really designed for jumping though some stalwart amazons managed to stay on board by holding on to the



Lady in a side saddle jumping a stone wall. Photograph from *R.D.S. Horse Show Annual 1900.*

back of the saddle with one hand and steadying themselves over fences.[30] However, in 1830 an improved type of side saddle with a third pommel or leaping head was developed making it possible for women to cross country with the same facility as male riders. Side saddles were further improved in design with the introduction of the balance strap about 1860, and about 1875 the more practical 'safety skirt' replaced the voluminous riding habits of earlier days. [31]

The practice of women riding to hounds received a considerable boost with the arrival of Elizabeth ('Sissi') Empress of Austria in 1879 in order to hunt in Ireland. She rented Summerhill House in Co. Meath from Lord Langford[32] and, together with a large retinue, hunted regularly for several seasons with the Ward Union stag hounds and the Meath fox hounds. The titian-haired royal grandmother, was an outstanding horse-

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[29] Caroline Corballis, *Hunting in Co, Kilkenny*, (Gowan, 1999). Henceforth cited as Corballis.
[30] Ibid., p. 52.
[31] Lady Diana Shedden and Lady Apsley, *To whom the goddess: hunting and riding for women* (London, 1932), pp 102-3
[32] Lord Langford was later chairman of the Committee of Agriculture of the Royal Dublin Society and also chairman of the society's Stallion Registration Committee. R.D.S *Horse Show Year Book* 1900.

woman, who normally hunted in company with Captain 'Bay' Midleton, also a brilliant rider, who was ADC to the Lord Lieutenant, Earl Spencer. The pair earned themselves



The Empress of Austria. Photograph from Tschudi, *Elizabeth Empress of Austria.*

an unrivalled reputation for dash and élan in the hunting field.[33] One prodigious feat of the Empress which has entered into popular legend was on the occasion of a hunt with the

[33]M.Bowen, *Irish hunting*, op. cit. p. 179. It must be remembered however, that the Empress was better mounted than most, with a stable full of first class hunters readily available at her Summerhill establishment

Ward Union on 4 February 1879, when the stag which had been 'enlarged'[34] at Batterstown, Co. Meath finished up in the grounds of Maynooth College. The stag arrived in the college grounds pursued by a few tired hounds which were followed in turn by the solitary figure of the Empress who had outstripped the rest of the field. She was soaking wet having passed through a brook, and being unable to get a change of female clothing in the all male establishment, borrowed an academic gown to wear while her habit was being dried. The President and his masters who 'almost to a man...were foxhunters themselves' were captivated not only by the hunting exploits of the Empress but also by her charismatic personality. [35]

As the nineteenth century progressed an increasing number of women were to be found following hounds in Ireland. The great majority of these belonged to the gentry class or well-heeled commercial and professional families. According to Curtis 'the daughters and wives of wealthy brewers, lawyers and bankers often rode to hounds with the ladies of the Big House. Among the more prominent of these were Lady Annette La Touche and Lady Kennedy in County Kildare, Edith Somerville in Co. Cork, the two Gore Booth sisters of Lisadell, County Mayo, and Miss Smithwick of Kilkenny.'[36] It is however, often difficult to quantify the exact number of women that hunted, especially in the early part of the century, as newspaper reports tended to mention only the names of prominent males following the more prestigious hunts. Nevertheless, a report in the *Leinster Express* of, on a meet of the Kildare Hounds, at Moat on 7 December 1889 gives a list of 'the local gentry present' including 17 ladies. The 39 gentlemen mentioned included three members of the clergy of both denominations, three bankers, a doctor, and an army officer. No doubt there were others present whom the newspaper didn't consider worthy of notice. The hunt itself was described in the following terms :

> The large cavalcade trotted briskly from the station to the Moate cover, which was drawn blank ; then on to Ballykane, where a fox was started, giving the field a lively spin across a stiff country to Birtown,

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[34] i.e. released.

[35] Jerimiah Newman, *Maynooth and Victorian Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), p. 220. Clara Tschudi, *Elizabeth Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary,*(London 1906), pp 11,12. Corish, *Maynooth College* 1795-1995, p. 237. *Maynooth College Calendars* for 1879-80, and 1880-1881.

[36] L. P.Curtis Jr., 'Stopping the hunt' in C. Philbin ed. , *Nationalism and popular protest* (Cambridge, 1987), p.335.

where reynard got to earth; thence to the Ninetree hill, where a spanking dog fox was viewed away to Narraghmore wood giving a capital run at a telling pace, from whence the locals faced for home.[37]

The Clergy

Both Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy regularly rode to hounds. However, the status of Catholic priests indulging in fox and stag hunting appears to have been of doubtful legality under Canon Law. The question was whether these pursuits could be classified as *venatio clamorosa* or *venatio quieta* , it seems that the former category could be regarded as 'unbecoming' to the priestly function and could lead to 'scandal', while the latter was regarded as *licet*.[38] Even so, in Ireland where hunting was a way of life among large sections of the rural community, many priests enjoyed a day's sport on the hunting field. Officially, they were supposed to get permission from their bishop [39] It is probable however, that this permission was seldom refused for clerics in traditional hunting areas of the country. It is interesting to note that at the time of the Empress of Austria's surprise visit to Maynooth College in 1879, the President and his masters were described as foxhunters themselves 'almost to a man'. [40]

Hard Riding and Madcap Escapades

An examination of the work of novelists and writers such as Somerville and Ross, Maria Edgeworth, Anthony Trollope and Charles Lever, and so on, as well as the sporting prints of printmakers such as Henry Alken, would suggest that the stereotypical Irish foxhunter was an irrepressible spirit who reveled in daredevil riding and schoolboy pranks. This pattern of behaviour was invariably depicted as admirable and praiseworthy by commentators. Nevertheless, there seems to have been an element of truth behind the fiction in some cases. In many cases, the hunting fraternity seemed to have believed that such a life-style was expected of them and felt compelled to live up to the stereotype. As for the hard riding, W. H. Maxwell commented in 1832 :

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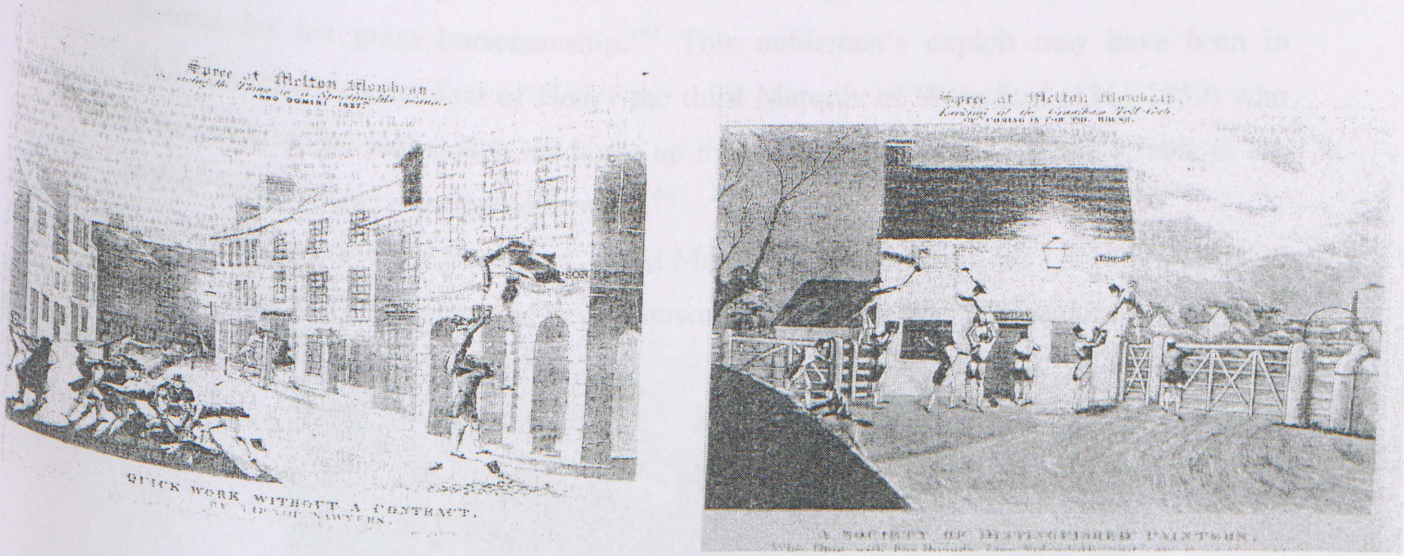
[37] *Leinster Express*, 7 December 1889.
[38] 'Dubius', 'The new code and hunting in Ireland', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol. XII, 1918, pp 333 – 336.
[39] Maynooth *Acta et Decreta* 1900, p. 83. The exact words of the relevant section (81) are '*Prohibemus insuper ne intersint venationibus quae fiunt cum equis et canibus, nisi ob rationes speciales id Episicopus permittat.*'
[40] Newman, *Maynooth and Victorian Ireland*, p.219.

Of the riders, it may be observed that, much as Connaught has been celebrated for desperate horsemanship, no charge of degeneracy will lie against the present race. To the curious in break-neck fencing, I would recommend a sojourn with a Connaught club – or if that should be inconvenient, a visit to the steeple-



Painting the town red, 1837. Prints by Henry Aiken. Welcome, *Irish horse-racing.*

chases on *the plains* or at Knockcroghery would be sufficient – he will there see *six feet walls* especially built 'for the nonce'.[41]

T.W.Webber in his journal, recalls hunting in Co. Laioghs in the mid-nineteenth century : [My uncle] was master of the county hounds for a time, and the country people still tell stories of his riding. The distance of the runs in those days seem to have been much greater than they are now. They thought nothing of swimming the river Barrow in the course of a foxhunt, and there were several notorious riders whom nothing could stop. They rode in pink with high turned collars, tight sleeves, and high stocks…I recollect seeing the white leather breeches and boots which were very hard to get off after swimming in a deep and wide river. The horses were what is now almost impossible to get with plenty of quality and without a drop of Clydesdale blood in their veins…Irishmen knew how to breed big hunters in those days, but they had not been taught by experts with the experience of Ireland sent by the government to muddle and meddle with Irish affairs[42]

There are many credible stories of irresponsible behaviour by prominent Irish hunting personalities of the period whose eccentricities met with general acclamation by the press and public alike. Such a case was Sir John Courtney of Balleymund, Co. Cork, who for a wager of a hundred sovereigns, is said to have ridden his grey hunter up the

[41] W.H.Maxwell, *Wild Sports of the West* (London, 1832), p. 389.

staircase of the Club House Hotel in Kilkenny into the club room of the Kilkenny hunt, jumped a fire screen in the room, and 'then rode downstairs the same way, a feat even more perilous and difficult than the ascent, inasmuch as the stairs are sheeted with brass'. Sir John was reported to have been much applauded for this achievement and 'praised for his great horsemanship.'[43] This nobleman's exploit may have been in emulation of an earlier feat of Henry the third Marquis of Waterford (1811-1859) who some years before had ridden his horse up the same staircase and jumped a table in the dining room before returning downstairs.[44]

Henry de la Poer Beresford, Third Marquis of Waterford (1811 – 1859) popularly known as the Wild Marquis, had been renowned through Ireland and England for his wild



Lord Waterford jumping a gate in a Melton drawing room. Print by Henry Aiken. Welcome. *Irish horse-racing.*

escapades. His family had been renowned for their horsemanship for generations. The twelve-year old son of the first marquis having been killed when jumping his horse over the forecourt railing of the family home, Curraghmore, Portlaw, Co. Waterford.[45]

While still a schoolboy at Eton Lord Henry had made a reputation for himself for indulging in wild pranks. One of the most memorable of these was reported to have been his purloining of the notorious 'birching-block' from the headmaster's study and taking it away to Curraghmore, where it is still preserved.[46] His career as a prankster continued

[42] Ms journal of W.T.Webber now in the National Archives.
[43] *Kilkenny Journal* 6 April 1861.
[44] Corballis, p. 44.
[45] Mark Bence-Jones, *Burkes Guide to Country Houses : Vol. 1 (Ireland),* (London 1978) , p. 98.
[46] Information from Lady Alice Beresford, also *Waterford News*, 19 December 1896.

after he had left school and spent much time mainly in equestrian pursuits and wild revels centred round the village of Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire. Perhaps his most famous escapade was when he together with a number of like-minded companions, originated the phrase 'painting the town red' by daubing the toll-gate and other buildings in Melton with paint during a midnight spree. This was commemorated in a series of sporting prints by Henry Alken dated 1837. They are entitled 'Spree at Melton Mowbray,



Monument to Lord Waterford marking the place where he died while hunting in 1859. From Corballis.

or Doing the Thing in a Sporting-like Manner.' Another escapade of Lord Waterford, similarly commemorated by an Alken print, took place on the occasion of a rowdy party in Melton Mowbray, when the Marquis jumped his horse over a field gate which had been brought in to a local drawing room for the purpose. The print is entitled 'Sporting Exploit

of a Noble Marquis' and the caption reads 'The Noble Marquis *on his celebrated hunter* Don Juan *jumping a five barred gate in a Drawing Room in Melton for a bet of* 100 Guineas *at half past 10 o'clock at night in December with a* Blazing Fire staring him in the Face.'

In 1840 Lord Waterford returned permanently to Ireland and relocating at his family home of Curraghmore which had one of the most magnificent and commodious range of stabling in the country which was capable of housing the Marquis's extensive string of hunters and racehorses. [47] Shortly after his arrival in Ireland, Lord Waterford took over the mastership of the Tipperary Fox hounds, a position which he held from 1840 to 1843. However, he moved the establishment of the hunt to Rockwell Co. Tipperary, [48] in 1841, which was more central for his plan to develop Tipperary as 'the Leicestershire of Ireland'. As his new country was then lacking in foxes, he drew on his Melton experience to provide an extensive programme of covert-planting and re-stocking of foxes in order to improve the quality of the hunting in the area.[49]

Although the marquis was apparently personally popular among the country people in Tipperary, some of his employees were not, and attempts were made to poison the Tipperary hounds, and the hunt kennels were maliciously burned down.[50] After that, he gave up the Tipperarys in disgust. In 1842 he married the Hon. Louisa Stuart, second daughter of Lord Stuart de Rothesay.[51] The following year 1843, he took over the Waterford Hunt where he kenneled the hounds at his own estate at Curraghmore.

During the hard times of the Famine, Lord Waterford succeeded in shedding his erstwhile image as 'the wild marquis' and acquired the reputation of being a benevolent and caring landlord who laid out money lavishly on schemes to provide employment, and did his best to alleviate distress among his tenants. In 1859, the marquis unfortunately met his death through a fall while hunting. At the age of forty-eight, he was still in the prime of life, and an active sportsman. After his death he was described, probably with

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[47] The stables at Curraghmore are described in *Burkes Guide to Country Houses (Ireland)*, p. 97, as 'being dominated by tremendous pedimented archways with blocked columns and pilasters.
[48] Now one of Ireland's leading schools run by the Holy Ghost Fathers.
[49] An old hunting map preserved at Curraghmore shows the village of New Inn as 'New Melton'. S.J.Watson, *Between the flags* (Dublin, 1969), p.48. Henceforth cited as Watson *B.T.F.*
[50] Fitzpatrick, p.46
[51] ibid

some accuracy, as 'kind to a fault, sincere, genial and jovial. He was a nobleman in more than one sense of the word. His funeral was one of the largest ever seen in Ireland.' [52]

An impressive Celtic cross in stone still marks the spot where the accident occurred.

Rural Crisis and Land Agitation

Little has been recorded about hunting in the year of the rebellion of 1798, though it would seem that a some form of hunting was carried at that time, no doubt because the main events of the insurrection had taken place outside the hunting season. The English sporting writer C..J. Apperly (1779– 1843), who wrote under the pseudonym 'Nimrod', had served in Ireland during the rebellion with a British cavalry regiment, Sir Watkin William Wynn's 'Ancient British Fencibles' which was stationed for over a year at Athy, Co. Kildare during the time of the Rebellion of 1798. Apperly and his fellow officers took full advantage of their posting to indulge in hunting and racing which they apparently carried out quite freely. [53]

The next major upset to effect the sport of hunting in Ireland was the Great Famine of the 1840s, the effect of which varied from county to county. In some cases it resulted in the cessation of all financial support for the local hunt as whatever money was available had to be diverted to famine relief. The Kildare Hunt just managed to survive, while the Queen's Co. stopped functioning due to lack of subscriptions and had to sell their hounds. This hunt was however, revived again in 1854. under a new master with a new injection of money.[54] In Co. Cork most hunting ceased in 1848, with the notable exception of the Carbery [55] which managed to keep going in spite of the difficulties in the area. However, the sport was revived in a few years, and hunting was resumed in most parts of the county by 1854.[56]

Hunting in some areas had suffered little or no ill effects from the Famine. Among these were Meath, Louth, Wexford, and Waterford, where the marquis had succeeded in keeping the hunt going at the same time as providing substantial famine

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[52] *Waterford News*, 19 December 1896.
'Nimrod' (Charles James Apperley) *My horses and other essays,* ed. E.D. Cuming, (London 1928), pp 3,7.
[54] M Bowen,. *Irish hunting*, p. 103.
[55] Longrigg, p. 161.

relief as mentioned above. Oddly enough, hunting had been carried on in Galway during the worst period of the adversity, in a county that was particularly badly affected by the Great Hunger. This was due to the efforts of the master 'Black Jack' Denis, 'a man of no fortune and obscure background' who had founded the Galway Blazers in 1840, and managed to keep them going through the bad times.[57]

An interesting account of hunting being carried on at the time of the Fenian Rising is found in a contemporary hunting diary of the master of a small local harrier pack in Co. Kerry known as the Milltown Harriers. The diary is couched in a terse and laconic style and the entries for February 1867 read as follows:

Feb. 2 Own hounds at Ballybrack. 7 Own hounds at Fieries – Large field. 11 Own hounds at Keelties. Deer hunt. Sport first rate. 13 Out with Knox. Fenians rose and shot a policeman. Came home quick and rode to Killorglin – up late. Milltown police deserted us. 14 Rode Kildoley to Killorglin. Fenians pursued by two corps of 60 rifles. 15 Own hounds at Killorglin. 18 Own hounds at Cloonmore. 21 Own hounds at Drummin. Scent bad. Soldiers out. Cork officers to dinner. 22 Rode to meet the troops. Soldiers to dinner. 25 Own hounds at Drommin. Gallery from Killorglin.[58]

Hunting and the Land War of 1881-1882

In ordinary times hunting was widely accepted by the rural population as part of the natural order of country life, the meet of the local hunt providing an element of excitement and colour for most Irish rural communities. On the arrival of the scarlet coated company with their elegant horses and eager hounds, it was common practice for the locals to down tools at once and follow the hunt across country on foot or on hastily saddled work horses, their presence adding greatly to exhilaration the of the chase. One fact however, which was probably never considered by the bulk of the hunting fraternity was the unpalatable truth *that hunting was only possible with the consent of the local population.* [59]

To say that hunting was a way of life for the Irish gentry would be something of an understatement. It was rather a ruling passion, a complete obsession that was seized upon by the Land League as an opportunity to exploit. While not in principle opposed to

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[56] M.Bowen, op. cit. p. 171.
[57] Longrigg, p. 161. Edmund Mahony, *The Galway Blazers: memoir* (Galway, 1979), p. 7.
[58] Valerie M Bary,., 'The hunting diaries (1863-1872) of Sir John Fermor Godfrey of Kilcoleman Abbey, Co. Kerry'. The *Irish Ancestor*, xi (1979), pp 113-114.
[59] Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 261. Henceforth cited as Dooley, *Big House*.

hunting, a number of individual regional branches of the Land League, wishing to act in retaliation for the imprisonment of some of their leaders, decided to attack what was in



Stopping the hunt, *Illustrated London News,* 24 December 1881.

in effect the principal occupation and amusement of the governing class, and would in this way strike a blow at what was in effect the very *raison d'être* of many of their opponents. It should be stressed however, that this was probably not intended as an attack on hunting *per se*, which had a wide popular following among the smaller farmers, but rather as an attack on *elitism* in hunting. The more prestigious county fox hunts were targeted especially, not only because these were chiefly patronized by their intended victims, but also because fox hunting was the easiest of the forms of chase to sabotage in view of the fact that it depended on locating its chosen quarry by drawing fox coverts which were especially vulnerable to disturbance and easily picketed.[60] A favourite tactic of the hunt saboteurs was to lay down pieces of meat laced with strychnine in order to poison hounds. However, the five packs of stag hounds in the country although

supported by the ascendancy, seem to have been largely unmolested perhaps due to the fact that they were less vulnerable to attack, not being dependent on drawing coverts, as they normally hunted a 'carted' stag, which once released, made his own way across country taking a route that was difficult to predict. Only a small percentage of the harrier packs were affected perhaps because many of the followers of these less pretentious establishments were small farmers. It is however, impossible to establish exactly how many hunt clubs were operating in Ireland at this time, as many of the smaller private packs were unregistered, including one run by the writer's great-great grandfather in Co. Monaghan. A list of hunts operating in Ireland at the time of the Land War was however, printed in the *Irish Times* 15 Oct 1881. It listed five packs of stag-hounds, eighteen packs of fox-hounds, and fifty-two harrier packs. But the list was not comprehensive.

The campaign to disrupt hunting appears to have been entirely a grass-roots movement with little or no support from the Land League executive in Dublin who were reluctant to commit themselves one way or another,[61] and Parnell, who hunted regularly with the Wicklow Harriers, refused to be drawn into the issue.[62]

The campaign against elitism in hunting entered a new phase in late November 1881. Instead of simply obstructing the hunts, Land League activists founded a National Hunting Association and organized their own hunts. These 'peoples hunts' took the form of a large assemblage of League supporters mostly consisting of small farmers and labourers on horses and on foot with guns, who accompanied by a motley collection of dogs of every description, beat their way through coverts and other preserved land belonging to their opponents, and killed any hares, rabbits, and game birds that they came upon. Whenever the magistrates got wind of these activities, they were declared illegal assemblies under the Crimes Act and the police, and sometimes the military, were sent in to disperse the crowd and arrest the ringleaders, which was not always easy to do as they were often led astray by hoax information. However, dwindling support by moderate nationalists for the mass slaughter of game associated with these

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[60] Dooley, *Big House*, p 261.
[61] L.P.Curtis Jnr. 'Stopping the hunt' 1881-1882 : An aspect of the Irish Land War' in C.Philibin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest* (Cambridge, 1987). Henceforth cited as Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt'
[62] ibid., p. 361.

demonstrations gradually eroded support for the 'people's' hunts, and early in 1882 they ceased the constitute a major factor in Land League actions against their opponents.[63]

Aftermath of the Land War

Virtually all of the eighteen packs of fox-hounds as well as several of the harrier packs operating in Ireland suffered serious disruption due to the success of Land League activists in sabotaging their sport during the season of 1881/1882. However, subsequent to the release of the political detainees whose incarceration had been in effect the *casus belli* of the popular protest against hunting, most of the packs which had been effected had recovered sufficiently to carry on as normal by the middle of the decade. Nevertheless, there had been some notable casualties, the most prominent of which was the Curraghmore Hunt – the private pack of Lord Waterford which had been the object of an unusually violent attack by an armed mob in Co. Tipperary, an action which had resulted in the permanent suspension of the hunt and Lord Waterford's decision to move to Leicestershire in order to continue his hunting activities.[64]

The Ormond in Co. Offaly had likewise forced to cease operations and sell their hounds in 1881, but nevertheless had succeeded in re-establishing themselves after two seasons of dormancy, after which they even succeeded in enlarging their territory by taking over the country of the then defunct South Westmeath in 1889.[65] The Muskerry in Co. Cork was another pack which was compelled to disband for a number of years due to agrarian protests. The hounds were sold in 1881, and all hunting ceased in their country until 1883 when the military garrison at Ballincollig undertook to hunt the country. For some years the pack continued to be managed by a succession of cavalry regiments stationed in the town until the hounds were finally returned to civilian management in 1889.[66] Other hunts similarly affected were the Queen's Co.[67] and the West Carbery, the Co. Cork pack associated with the Somerville family. This hunt had actually suspended operations before the Land Ward anti-hunting agitation had commenced due to what

[63] ibid ,pp 381-386.
[64] Fitzpatrick, p.
[65] M.Bowen,*Irish hunting*., p. 139.
[66] ibid., p. 125.

Edith Somerville of 'Somerville and Ross' fame described as 'political troubles and bad times generally'. The West Carbery was revived again in 1891 by Aylmer Somerville, and the mastership taken over in 1903 by his sister Edith who became the first female MFH in Ireland. [68]

One of the residual effects of the anti-hunt protests of Land League activists was that in future hunts had to become more circumspect with regard to those over whose land they hunted. L.P.Curtis quotes a sentence printed at the bottom of a notice giving the 'Hunting Appointments' for the Kildare fox-hounds and the Newbridge harriers in the *Leinster Leader* 18, 25 November 1882 : *Gentlemen are most earnestly requested not to ride over New Grass, Corn, or Turnips.*[69] It is interesting to note that such stipulations have become standard in most communications from hunts in Ireland to this day.

In many areas there was loss of employment and other economic spin-offs concomitant with the disruption to hunting, and a major blow to the social aspect of the sport was the decision of the Empress of Austria to cancel her annual hunting expeditions to Ireland. However, a more lasting effect of the Land League's anti-hunting campaign was the genesis of a small degree of residual hostility to the sport which was to surface from time to time until the early years of the twentieth century.[70]

The Social Aspect of Hunting

Hunting dominated the social scene in rural Ireland during the period under review as much of the social life of the gentry centered round the county hunt clubs.[71] These clubs had evolved from the private packs of a century earlier and were often quite elaborate institutions with their own premises and club houses which usually contained extensive wine cellars where members could dine regularly. Some hunts even maintained several club houses in different parts of their hunting country which members could use

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[67] Colin Lewis, *Hunting in Ireland*, (London 1975), p. 57.
[68] Curtis, 'Stopping the hunt',. p. 352 n.
[69] ibid. p.390.
[70] An example of this was the Ormond which suffered intermittent interference to its operations by Land League activists until as late as 1908. M. Bowen, op. cit., p.139.
[71] The historian K.T. Hoppen noted an overlap of membership between the membership of the Limerick Hunt and that of the Limerick gentleman's club. K.T.Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland 1832-1885* (Oxford,1984), p.119

when they were in the area. The structure and organization of these clubs varied a lot according to their particular circumstances and physical location. Many of them had their own distinctive hunt uniforms designed to encourage a feeling of exclusivity and corporate pride among members. For example, the uniform of W. B. Ponsonby's Bishop's Court Hunt was a blue coat with black velvet cape lined with buff, blue and buff waistcoat, and yellow buckskins. The buttons were embossed gilt with the emblem of the hunt, a fox's head with the monogram B.C.H.[72] The same uniform was later



Lady Constable hunting with the Queen's County hounds in the 1870s. Oil painting by Dickonson.

adopted by the Kildare Hunt Club which had been formed by the amalgamation of several private packs including the Bishop' s Court Hunt and 'Squire' Tom Conolly's Castletown Hunt. The Kildares however, changed the colour of their hunt coat in 1808

[72] Lord Mayo and W.B. Boulton, *A history of the Kildare Hunt* (London, 1913), pp 41-2.

from the original blue of the Bishop's Court Hunt to the more fashionable scarlet which had become popular in England.[73] It is interesting to note that the contemporary uniform of the Duhallow Hunt was similar, with 'a blue frock with black cape and the Duhallow Hunt button and a blue and yellow striped waistcoat'. The colour of the hunt uniform was also later changed to scarlet in conformity with the custom in Britain.[74]

Other Activities Associated with Hunting

Most hunts, even the small unpretentious ones, were accustomed to hold an annual Hunt Ball that was the major social event in the life of many country areas. Male hunt members were accustomed to wear the official evening dress of the hunt, which was usually red for fox-hounds, and green for harriers with silk facings in the hunt colours, while ladies wore their best ball gowns.

Another important event in the hunting calendar was the annual point-to-point race that normally took place in the spring or summer. During the nineteenth century, this contest was confined to horses that had regularly followed hounds, and enabled members of the hunt to pit their fastest hunters against each other over fences in friendly rivalry, as well as being an excellent school for future steeplechasers.[75]

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[73] M.Bowen, *Irish hunting,* p. 85.
[74] Maj. James Grove-White, , 'Extracts from old minute book of Duhallow Hunt 1800-1809' , *Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeology Society*, 2nd Series, vol. ii, no. 14. pp 49-59.
[75] The subjects of point-to-pointing and steeple-chasing will be more fully covered in the chapter on racing.

Chapter Nine

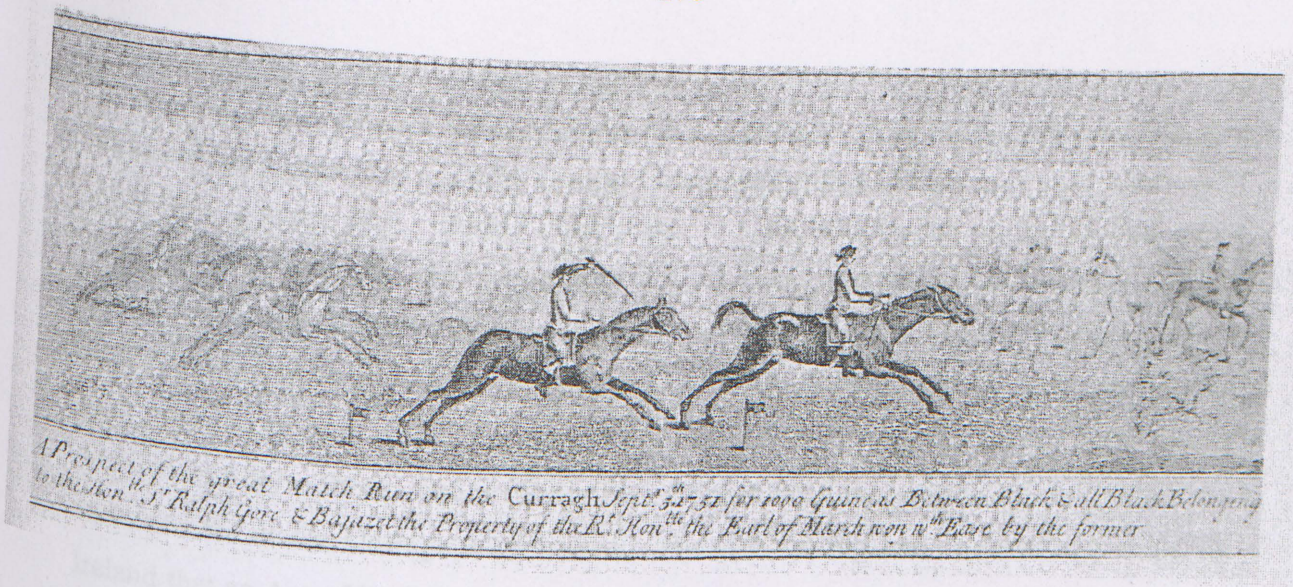
Racing

Approaching the Subject

The love of horses and horseracing has been for centuries deeply embedded in the Irish national culture. As such, the sport of racing in Ireland has been unusually well recorded and chronicled, by the *Irish Racing Calendar*, the official publication of the governing body for racing in the country, the Irish Turf club, which recorded all aspects of horse racing in Ireland from 1790 to date in minute detail. In addition, there have been a host of popular books, virtually all of which have concentrated on such aspects of the sport as the results of famous races, the exploits of well known horses and personalities of the Turf, and so on. While such details cannot be entirely left out, the intention of the present writer is to focus more on the broader issues of racing, such as the habitual character and disposition of the sport as well as its social and economic significance for the Irish horse-world of the nineteenth century.

Background

Formalised racing probably derived originally from the practice of individuals, in a horse culture such as that which had existed in Ireland from time immemorial, pitting their horses, one against another in friendly rivalry, in order in order to test their respective merits. However, racing developed on separate lines in England than it did in Ireland. In the former country, influenced by the wealth and commercial organisation generated by the Industrial Revolution, racing had already acquired elements of business efficiency by the early nineteenth century when the sport had became a popular diversion among whatever elements of the newly created urban working population that had a little money to spend on leisure activities. It was of course always popular among the wealthy middle classes who were its natural patrons. Under these circumstances, horse racing in England attracted investment by entrepreneurs in the form of purpose built race tracks, facilities for spectators in the form of stands, specialist catering, and so on. On the other hand, horse racing in Ireland was still underdeveloped commercially and remained primarily a diversion for the gentry. Nevertheless, it provided a popular free spectacle together with the opportunity for a spree, for the rural community, many of whom had no



Eighteenth century Irish racing print from Welcome,*Irish horse racing.*

disposable income and were unable to make wagers or otherwise contribute to the event financially, or in any other way except to provide a colourful and vociferous background to the proceedings.[1] It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that horse racing in Ireland began to acquire the same commercial importance that it held in Britain.

Horse Racing is divided into two main categories, (1) Flat racing, where the horses don't have to jump obstacles while racing, and (2) Steeplechasing, where they do.

Section One - Flat Racing

Attempts to regulate the sport of racing were made as early as 1673 when Sir William Temple, MP for Carlow, petitioned the Earl of Essex, Lord Lieutenant of the time, for Irish horse breeding to be put on a proper footing, and racing in Ireland to be organised in a similar manner as racing in England had been by the establishment by Charles 11 of Newmarket as a centre for English racing . Temple suggested that :

To this purpose there may be set up both a horse fair, and races to be held at a certain time every year for the space of a week; the first in the fairest green near the City of Dublin, the latter in that place designed by your Lordship in the park, for some such purpose. During the week, the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday may be the races; the Tuesday , Thursday, and Saturday the

[1] Race meetings together with fairs performed an important social function for the Irish peasant providing him with an opportunity to meet his friends, get drunk, and brawl. Prince Von Pückler-Muskau gives an interesting account of Galway races in 1828 where he described with distaste the drunkenness and shillelagh fighting that went on at that event.

fairs may be held. At each race may be two plates given by the King , one of thirty pounds, and the other of twenty (besides the fashion) as the prizes for the first and second horse; the first engraven with a horse crowned with a crown ; the second with a coronet, and under it the day of the month, and the year. Beside these plates, the wagers may be as the persons please themselves, but the horses must be evidenced by good testimonies to have been bred in Ireland. [2]

This scheme was implemented, and from that time onward King's Plates became a regular feature of racing on the Curragh in Co. Kildare. These plates were confined to Irish bred horses and run under a carefully laid down set of rules which were further codified In 1717. There were no fewer than a dozen such races, each worth 100 guineas contested for at the Curragh each season. By 1739 racing had become so popular in Ireland that an Act of Parliament was passes making it illegal to run for any plate of less value than £20.[3] King's Plates continued to be a feature of Irish flat racing until the middle years of the twentieth century when they were finally discontinued in 1954.

In the early days of racing in Ireland the sport consisted mainly of more or less extempore 'matches' between individuals that usually carried large sums of money in wagers. These often proved contentious, and in the absence of any national governing body for the sport, disputes often had to be settled by litigation or in extreme cases by that ultimate arbiter – the duelling pistol.[4]

In the middle years of the eighteenth century a 'Society of Sportsmen' was set up to provide mediation in disputes but it seems to have met with limited success in that respect. The Society petitioned the Earl of Harrington (Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, 1746 – 1751), for an additional King's Plate to be run for at the Curragh in April. The words of the petition reflect the regard for the contemporary importance of the thoroughbred as well as its future potential as a breeding animal:

> A good breed of saddle horses is much wanted in this Kingdom and, if properly encouraged, would be of public service by enabling us to supply the great demand from abroad for hunters, road horses and those used by the gentlemen of the army. [5]

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[2] Sir William Temple, *An essay upon the advancement of trade in Ireland.*(Dublin ?,1673), pp 24-25.
[3] 13 George II, 1739.
[4] Michael Cox, *History of the Irish horse* (Dublin, 1897) , pp 112-114.
[5] Tony Sweeney, 'The racing scene – a historical review' in Noel Philip Brown, *The horse in Ireland* (London , 1967), p. 31

The English Jockey Club

There is evidence to show that the Jockey Club founded in a coffee house in Newmarket sometime about 1750[6] gradually assumed the function of formulating rules and settling disputes for English racing. At first, its authority appears to have been confined to racing at Newmarket. However, in 1757 a dispute at the Curragh was sent to the English body for arbitration.[7] From that time onward on, disputes were regularly referred to it from Ireland in the absence of any definite authoritative governing body for racing in the latter country.[8] There is however, evidence that a so-called Jockey Club with Sir Ralph Gore as president existed in Ireland as early as May 1758 when the a meeting of the society was advertised for 9 June at the 'Rose and Bottle' in Dame Street, Dublin. The exact function of the Irish Jockey Club is unclear, but it probably had some relevance to Irish racing. D'Arcy suggests that the meeting may have been connected with the foundation of the Coffee House in Kildare.[9] This venue was later to become the headquarters of the Irish Turf Club, the future governing body for racing in Ireland. A receipt dated 1763 in the name of Tom Conolly for a subscription to the [Irish] Jockey Club has been preserved . It is signed by Thomas Wingfield who on his death in 1787, was recorded as having been for many years 'Clerk of the Jockey Club'. [10]

The Irish Turf Club

The lack of any firm national governing body to regulate racing in Ireland was finally remedied by the establishment, possibly as early as 1784, of the Turf Club on the Curragh which was intended to perform a similar function for Irish racing as the Jockey Club did for the English Turf. [11]

The Rules and Orders of the Irish Turf Club, 1790 which met in the 'Coffee Room'on the Curragh first appeared in Volume 1 of Sharkey's *Irish Racing Calendar* which was published the same year and were reproduced in each succeeding annual

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[6] Its precise date of origin is uncertain.
[7] W. Vamplew, *The Turf – a social and economic history of horse racing* (London, 1976), p. 79. henceforth cited as Vanplew.
[8] Fergus D'Arcy, *Horses, Lords and Racing Men – The Turf Club 1790 – 1990*, (The Curragh, 1991) p. 2. Henceforth cited as D'Arcy
[9] D'Arcy, p. 3.
[10] S. J. Watson, *Between the flags.* (Dublin, 1969), p. 23. Henceforth cited as Watson, *BTF.*
[11] D'Arcy, p. 1.

volume. They deal with such matters as the election of new members of the Coffee House which had to be proposed by an existing member, and be balloted for, when at least twelve members had be present. Three black balls led to exclusion.[12] Three members of the Turf Club were to be appointed stewards with the authority to regulate the sport of racing in Ireland, and to mediate in all disputes relative to racing, initially only on the Curragh, but later extended to include race meetings in other parts of Ireland as well. A widespread practice which was causing concern at the time was for unscrupulous person in the racing world to secretly watch private speed trials or to suborn a stable employee for details of a race horse's 'form' for the purpose of laying a wager or some other reason. Any person found guilty of this offence by the stewards was : not to be employed by any member of the Turf Club in any capacity whatsoever, nor shall any horse, &c. fed or rode by him, or them, or in the management of which he, or they, are concerned, be suffered to start for Plate, Match, or Subscription, and the names of the persons found guilty of these offences shall be exposed in the *Racing Calendar*, and inserted in a paper to be fixed up in the Coffee-room at Kildare, and in the Stand-house at the Curragh.[13]

Other regulations were concerned with such matters as the laying of wagers, the payment of forfeits, the examination of horses to determine their ages, and the weights carried by the riders.

Strangely enough, the early editions of the *Calendar* also included ' Rules for Matching and Fighting Cocks'. The sport of cock fighting was an activity which had been associated with the racing fraternity since the reign of Charles II. It had become customary to hold 'mains' of cocking in the early morning before racing on the Curragh. Dennis Bowes Daly's lawn at Athgarvan had been a popular venue for this activity.[14] However, as part of a general amelioration of attitudes to cruel sports, cock fighting declined in popularity, and its regulations were dropped from the *Racing Calendar* in 1819.

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[12] There were 167 members of the Turf Club listed in the first volume of the *Calendar* in 1790 Their names provide an indication of the wide spectrum of Irish society interested in racing at the time. The list included members of the Irish peerage headed by the Duke of Leinster, together with the leading members of the gentry including Tom Conolly and the Hon. Arthur Wellesley (the future Duke of Wellington). There were also a number of military officers, clergymen, several tavern keepers, and one woman – Mrs. Finn, who was listed as a printer in Kilkenny.

[13] *Irish Racing Calendar*, 1791, p. xxxix.

[14] Guy St. John Williams, *The racing lodges of the Curragh* (Kildare, 1997), p.56.

In its early days the Turf Club was asked occasionally to adjudicate in certain non-racing activities which were nevertheless, regarded as being associated with the world of the Turf. One of these was prize fighting. Dan Donnelly the celebrated local prize fighter had fought the pugilist Hall On December 1814, and the disputed decision had been referred to the Stewards of Irish Turf Club. The following year on 13 November 1815. Donnelly defeated George Cooper an Englishman, battering him so badly that he subsequently died. Donnelly's sponsor was a Captain Kelly who kept a racing establishment at Maddenstown, Co. Kildare. The contest took place in a natural arena, known to this day as 'Donnelly's Hollow'[15] near Arthgarvan Lodge on the Curragh, the home of Dennis Bowes Daly who practised an extreme 'Corinthian' lifestyle. He had served seven terms as Senior Steward of the Turf Club between 1793 and 1813, and Ranger of the Curragh between 1788 and 1789.[16]

Type of Horses used in Flat Racing

The English or Irish thoroughbred was universally considered the perfect horse for flat racing.[17] This animal, the acme of equine perfection, had been specially bred for over two hundred years to developed unrivalled qualities of speed and stamina over measured distances, making it the fastest land animal developed by man for the purposes of sport, and the ultimate equine racing machine. It was the oldest of the 'improved' breeds in the world, and the first to be registered in a stud book of its own which has been maintained since the early days of its development. This makes it possible to check individual blood lines back to the very beginning of the breed which has a limited range of colours. Bays, browns, and chestnuts predominate though greys and blacks sometimes occur.

The thoroughbred has been developed for the single function of speed sustained over moderate distances together with a capacity for jumping. The speed attained by the modern thoroughbred can slightly exceed 40 miles per hour for short distances under a

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[15] Lord Walter Fitzgerald, 'The Curragh: its history and traditions', *Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society*), 1899, pp 25 – 29.

[16] Lord Walter Fitzgerald, 'The rangers of the Curragh', *J.R.S.A.I* vol. xxvii, 1897, p.372.

[17] However, at some of the minor fixtures there were events for half-bred horses, hunters, and occasionally, even ponies. The reason for this was that, in the absence of transport facilities horses had to be walked to meetings, and would consequently restrict competitions mainly to local riders. Vamplew, p. 17. Horse drawn racehorse transport vehicles were known after 1850. One was offered for sale in the *Leinster Express*, 26 May 1855.

mile which appears to approach the approximate limit of physical possibility for a running horse. However, as an ultra-specialist in racing and jumping, the thoroughbred is physically unfitted for many other equine tasks such as draught, etc. It is however, eminently suitable for interbreeding with other equine breeds which can be improved by the qualities of speed, stamina, and nobility of spirit which comes with an infusion of thoroughbred blood.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the English and Irish thoroughbred is conventionally traced to the mating of English racing mares of unknown ancestry with three Oriental stallions, and all the thoroughbreds in the world are descendants of this foundation stock which consisted of the Byerly Turk imported into England in 1689 and was traditionally said to have been used as an officer's charger at the Battle of the Boyne.[18] The second great foundation sire was the Darnley Arabian which was brought to England shortly after 1700. The third was the Godolphin Barb which was imported about 1730.[19]

It was the descendants of these original stallions however, that set the seal of excellence on the thoroughbred race. Particularly eminent among these were three outstanding sires, *i.e.* Eclipse, Machem and Herod. Eclipse foaled in 1764 and the most famous of the thoroughbred foundation sires was a great grandson of the Darnley Arabian and one of the great race horses of all time. The second influential sire, Matchem who was foaled in 1748, was a grandson of the Godolphin Barb. The third, Herod was a great-great-grandson of the Byerly Turk. However, he seems to have been the least esteemed of the three.

The thoroughbred horse had been in a state of continuous development since its foundation in the early years of the eighteenth century due to selective breeding and expert management together with a good deal of luck. It has been estimated that the breed has increased in height an average of one inch each 25 years from 1700 to 1850. The early race horses resembled their Middle Eastern ancestors in size and appearance, and few of them exceeded 14½ hands in height. The three original foundation sires were all less than 14½ hands, the size of modern children's ponies. However in time, larger

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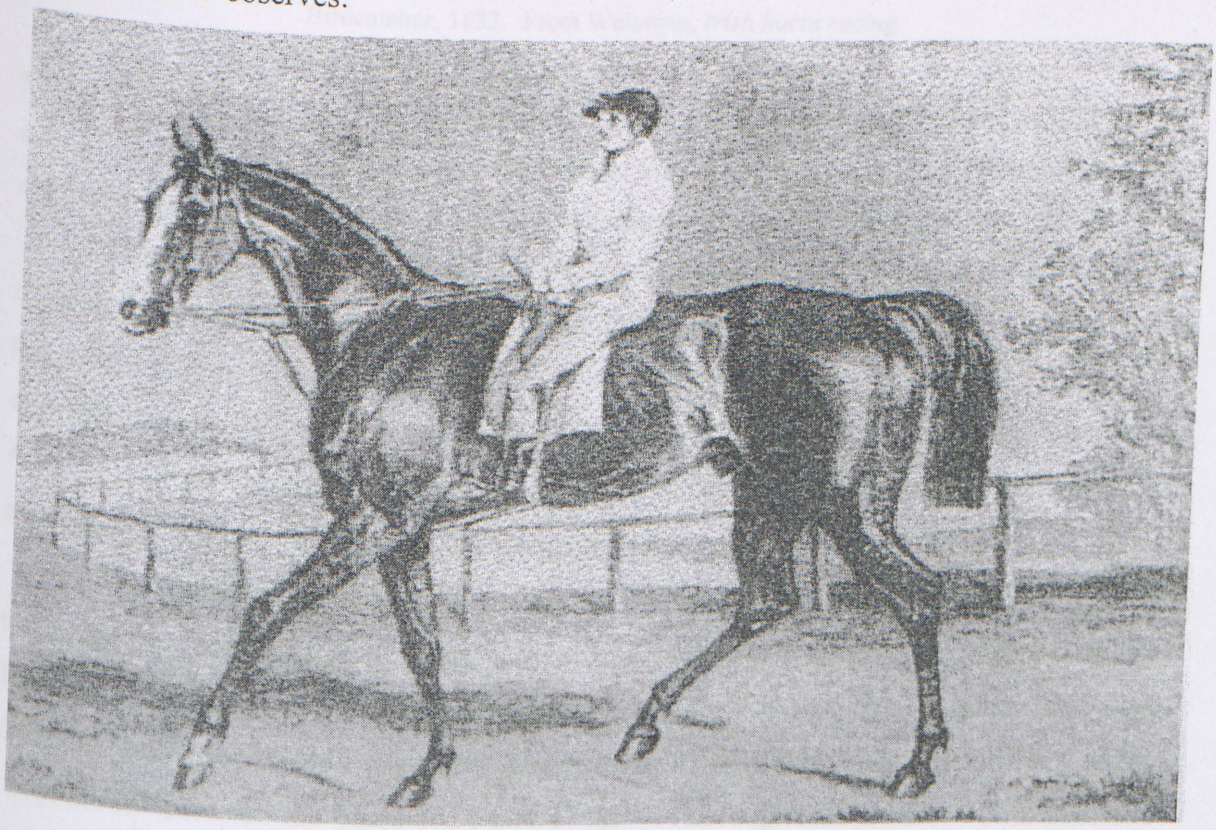
[18] Lady Wentworth, *Thoroughbred racing stockand its ancestors*, (London 1938), p. 208.
[19] R.S.Summerhays, *Summerhays' encyclopaedia for horsemen*, (London 1959), p. 302.

horses were developed and greater speeds were attained on the race course. J.H.Walsh writing in 1873 observes:



Harkaway, 1834. From Welcome, *Irish horse racing.*



Birdcatcher, 1833. From Welcome, *Irish horse racing.*

My belief is, that the present English racehorse is as much superior to the racehorse of 1750, as he excelled the first cross from Arabs and Barbs with English mares, and again as they surpassed the old English racing hack of 1650.' Along with increased height went size and stamina.[20]

The introduction of shorter races and lighter weights in the early part of the nineteenth century gradually influenced changes in breeding policy which tended toward the creation of an animal qualified to win at short distances, without regard to the strength and stamina required for long distances and heat races. By 1850, thoroughbreds had reached their modern development of about 15 ½ or 16 hands in height, sometimes as much as 17. Animals of 15 hands were considered small.

The thoroughbred had been introduced into Ireland very shortly after its emergence in England. Among the earliest importers of the developing breed were Sir Edward O'Brien, Lord Antrim, and Lord Portmore who brought in thirty two and distributed all over Ireland what Cox describes as English thoroughbred stallions of the 'best blood' between the years 1724 and 1743.[21] Thoroughbred horses – both stallions and mares -continued to be imported from England, as well as bred in the country where certain areas rich in limestone pasture , such as the Curragh of Kildare, were found to be ideal for the raising of thoroughbred horses. By the middle of the eighteenth century more than a hundred imported thoroughbred stallions were at stud in the country.[22]

One of the most outstanding Irish race horses of the nineteenth century was Harkaway (1834) bred not in the classical horse breeding region of east Leinster, but unusually, in Co. Down by the legendary Tom Ferguson a linen merchant with an interest in horses. Harkaway won the Goodwood Cup in England in two successive years as well as other major races, his exploits on the racetrack earning him the popular title of the 'Irish Eclipse'. Other outstanding race horses of the period were Birdcatcher (1833)[23],

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[20] J.H. Walsh, *The horse in the stable and the field* (London, 1873), p.73. Henceforth cited as Walsh.
[21] Cox, p.98. No reference given.
[22] Noel Browne, *The horse in Ireland* (London, 1967)., p. 14.
[23] According to T.W.Webber's unpaginated ms journal written at the end of the century, 'Birdcatcher, who was chestnut ' was of stouter build than the modern racehorse, & raced for longer distancea and heavier weights than nowadays.'

and his full brother Faugh-a-Ballagh (1841) who won the St. Leger in 1844 making him the first Irish bred horse to win an English classic.

Flat Racing – Old Style

Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century flat races in Ireland were run over courses up to six miles in length between the months of April to November.[24] They consisted largely of more or less extempore 'handicap' matches between individuals riding up to weight horses of four years or older. The races were usually divided into four separate 'heats' at intervals of thirty minutes and when two horses tied for first place the result was known as a 'dead heat'.[25] In the early days of flat racing some events were confined to genuine hunters who though they actually ran on the flat, were required to demonstrate their expertise across country by jumping fences in a qualifying round.[26]

Though eighteenth century thoroughbred racehorses had not yet achieved the stature of their mid-nineteenth century posterity, they had qualities of stamina and endurance that were reportedly lost in the latter. The earlier generations of animals were frequently obliged to carry weights of eight to twelve stone over the long distances raced at that time, while their descendants were faster, and accustomed to race over shorter distance carrying less weight [27]

In the early days, Royal plates of £100 each were given for four year old horses carrying 10 stone, 4lbs. , five year olds carrying 11 stone, 6 lbs., as well as six year old and upwards carrying 12 stones. These were decided in four mile heats with the first two miles being taken at little more than a walking pace. The use of heats had the effect of obtaining a full day's racing from a limited number of competitors. 'The winner of an event was the first entrant to win two heats : this could often require four or even more races.'[28] This type of activity was not really conducive to flat racing as a spectator sport.[29] However, this was not really relevant in Ireland where, unlike England,[30] the sport was still largely confined to the gentry classes. In Ireland however, the Royal plates

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[24] Watson, *BTF*, p. 15.
[25] ibid.
[26] ibid. pp 16-17.
[27] Anon. *On the condition of our saddle horses* (London, 1858), pp 14,15.
[28] Vanplew, p. 18.
[29] ibid.. pp 23-24.

were inducements to breeders of thoroughbreds to produce horses of size and substance and keep them. Even though the type of racing practised before the first quarter or so of the nineteenth century imposed a great strain on horses that were predominantly stallions and inevitably caused them to break down. Nevertheless, they could then be put out to stud.

Although it was normally highly unusual for women to participate in such a robust activity as racing the *Irish Racing Calandar,* records 'an unusual match' which was run at Loughrea on 30 September 1805 when a Miss Ouzley riding a grey gelding named 'Deceiver' beat 'Lord Howe' ridden by the well known sportsman Gyles Eyre of Co. Galway. The contest was described as 'a most capital race, and won by the lady's extraordinary jockeyship.' It is an extraordinary tribute to Miss Ouzley's equestrian skill, bearing in mind the drawbacks of the cumbersome sidesaddle and riding habit worn by women at that time.[31]

An expression of the increasing professionalism of the sport in Ireland was the further codification of the rules of racing together with the opening of several 'enclosed' racecourses in the neighbourhood of the Capital. The first of these was Baldoyle which held its inaugural meeting on 19 and 20 March 1860. In 1888 it was joined by Leopardstown which had been modelled on Sandown Park in England.[32]

The introduction of shorter races and lighter weights in the early part of the nineteenth century gradually introduced changes in breeding policy which tended toward the creation of a race horse qualified to win at short distances without the need for the strength and stamina required for longer distances and heat races. This development was not however, met with universal approbation by Irish breeders, many of whom regarded the smaller, lightly built animals that were bred for speed rather than stamina, as unsuitable stock for breeding hunters and other types of half-breds which required the latter attribute in abundance.

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[30] ibid. p. 18

[31] *Irish Racing Calendar*, 1805, p.61. Gyles Eyre of Eyre Court, Co. Galway was an outstanding horseman and had been master of the East Galway Hunt from 1791 to 1829. He was said to have been practically illiterate, and was Charles Lever's model for the fictional 'Charles O'Malley'. See B.M.Fitzpatrick, *Irish sports and sportsmen* (Dublin, 1878), pp 127-128, and Bowen, *Irish hunting*, p. 70.

[32] *Racing Calendar*, 1888.

In 1817 the Stewards of the Turf Club instituted the O'Darby Stakes [33] which was run on Wednesday 11 June at the Curragh in the hope that it would rank in importance with the English Derby. There were thirty runners, and the *Irish Racing Calendar* described the race as follows : The O'Darby Stakes, 25 gns. P,P, for 3 yrs old, colts 8st. 7lb. fillies 8st. 2lb. – Post on the Flat ; the second horse received 50 gns. out of the Stakes [34].

Unfortunately, the O'Darby Stakes did not prove a permanent success and the race was discontinued in 1834.

Irish racing received a considerable social upgrade by George IV's attendance at the Curragh races during his royal visit to Ireland in 1821. The king was himself, a keen follower of the Turf, and a member of the English Jockey Club. When he was still Prince of Wales his horse had won the Derby in 1788. Consequently, he had eagerly accepted an invitation by the stewards of the Turf Club to attend a special race meeting arranged in his honour on September 1 at the Curragh to coincide with his visit to Ireland. Preparations for the royal visit were without precedent, and the course was thronged with all classes of the population. A fully furnished 'stand house' decorated with red carpeted stairs, elaborate hangings, and a chimney piece of black Galway marble, had been prepared for the King's reception. The royal visitor was accompanied by a large retinue including leading members of the Turf Club, and escorted by a contingent of the 7th. Hussars.[35] One of his first actions on taking his place in the royal stand was to present Mr. Maurice Prendergast a retiring steward of the Turf Club with a gold mounted whip to be run for by a jockey annually at the Curragh.[36] One thing that marred the occasion however, was that the Guest of Honour was badly affected by diarrhoea and had to keep retiring to a special toilet facility thoughtfully provided by his godson the Duke of Leinster.[37]

In the 1850s and 1860s the standard of both Irish and English race horses suffered a decline in form analogous to that which had affected Irish hunters at the same

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[33] No doubt a humourous rendering of an Irish equivalent to 'the Derby'.
[34] *Irish Racing Calendar* 1817, pp 24,25.
[35] The *Freeman's Journal*, 3 September 1821.

[36] This gold whip was raced for until recently.
[37] Watson, *B.T.F.* p.39.

period.[38] Part of the problem was that many Irish owners of promising horses found it just as convenient to enter for the richer prizes offered by the Derby or Oaks in England as for races in their own country.[39] This was due to the better facilities for transport of horses that had been offered by railways and steam boats as the century had progressed. At the same time racing on the Curragh had gone into comparative decline with a reduced number of races and smaller fields.

The Turf Club with its interest in keeping up the standard of Irish racing, addressed the problem. Realising that there was no simple answer, the 1866 triad of stewards, namely the Earl of Charlemont, the Earl of Howth and the Marquis of Drogheda, came up with the suggestion of introducing a new high status race to be run on the Curragh. This was the origin of the Irish Derby that was first run on Wednesday 27 June, and intended to boost the standard of Irish racing. There were thirty runners, and much to the disgust of the Irish racing fraternity, the race was won by an English horse, Selim, owned by a Mr. J. Cockin.[40]

In spite of the best efforts of the Turf Club, the early winners of the succeeding events in Ireland for the next few years, was a series of English horses who came over to Ireland in order to take advantage of the loss of class of the local runners. The stewards of the Turf Club attempted to counter this by passing a ruling that any horse that had won £500 in any one year was barred from competing again that year. As this measure proving ineffective in stopping the English 'raiders', the stewards issued a further ruling that in future no horse could complete in Royal plates, Lord Lieutenant's plates or the Royal whip unless it had been trained for the previous six months in Ireland.[41] However, the lack of form of the Irish horses proved to be only temporary and in time the standard improved to a satisfactory level.[42]

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[38] See Chapter 9. The blame for the depressed state of racing in England was ascribed by Lord Derby to the fact that 'the number of men of station and fortune who support the Turf is gradually diminishing, and that an increasing proportion of horses in training is in the hands of persons in an inferior position, who keep them not for the purposes of sport but for the purposes of Gambling. *The Times* 11 July 1857.

[39] *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, April 10, 1869.

[40] *Racing Calendar* 1866, pp 102-104.

[41] John Welcome, *Irish horseracing* (London, 1982), pp 54,55 Henceforth cited as Welcome. Also the appropriate *Irish Racing Calendars*.

[42] *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, April 10, 1869.

Earlier in the century a policy of breeding lighter, faster horses had been introduced to cater for a new style of 'Corinthian' racing which was more spectator-friendly. These new style races made use of animals that were bred exclusively for speed rather than stamina. They carried lighter weights and were run over shorter distances than previously. In addition, a system of handicapping gave animals of moderate ability a greater chance of winning. While this development undoubtedly augmented the excitement and uncertainty of the sport for spectators and gave punters an increased opportunity to win or lose money by betting on the racing, it was not universally popular among many owners and trainers who favoured the old system by which the best and fittest horse won.

The abandonment of breeding thoroughbred horses capable of carrying the considerable weights over the long distances necessitated by the Royal plates of the previous century was regarded by many as a retrograde step which would lead inevitably to the disappearance of the old weight carrying type thoroughbred stallions with their qualities of endurance and stamina which sired not only great race horses, but also half bred hunters, officer's chargers, and first rate carriage horses for which there was a huge international market. They feared that the newly developing type of light weight thoroughbred sires were less suitable for breeding hunters, and other half bred horses of the same quality than the former. Consequently, many traditionalists advocated the abandonment of the new type of racing, and the restoration of the old system of weight for age Royal plates for four year olds over distances of four miles or longer.[43]

In 1878 the greatest racehorse produced in Ireland during the second half of the nineteenth century was bred by George Low at Burton, Athy, Co, Kildare. This was Barcaldine, one of the few Irish horses with a reputation that could rank equally with Birdcatcher and Faugh-A- Ballagh in the 1830s and 1840s. Barcaldine was unbeaten in eleven starts in Ireland. Unfortunately he had to be sold due to the financial difficulties of his owner and was sent to England where he won a number of important races, and later sired the winners of both the Derby and the St. Leger meeting on 19 and 20 March 1860. [44]

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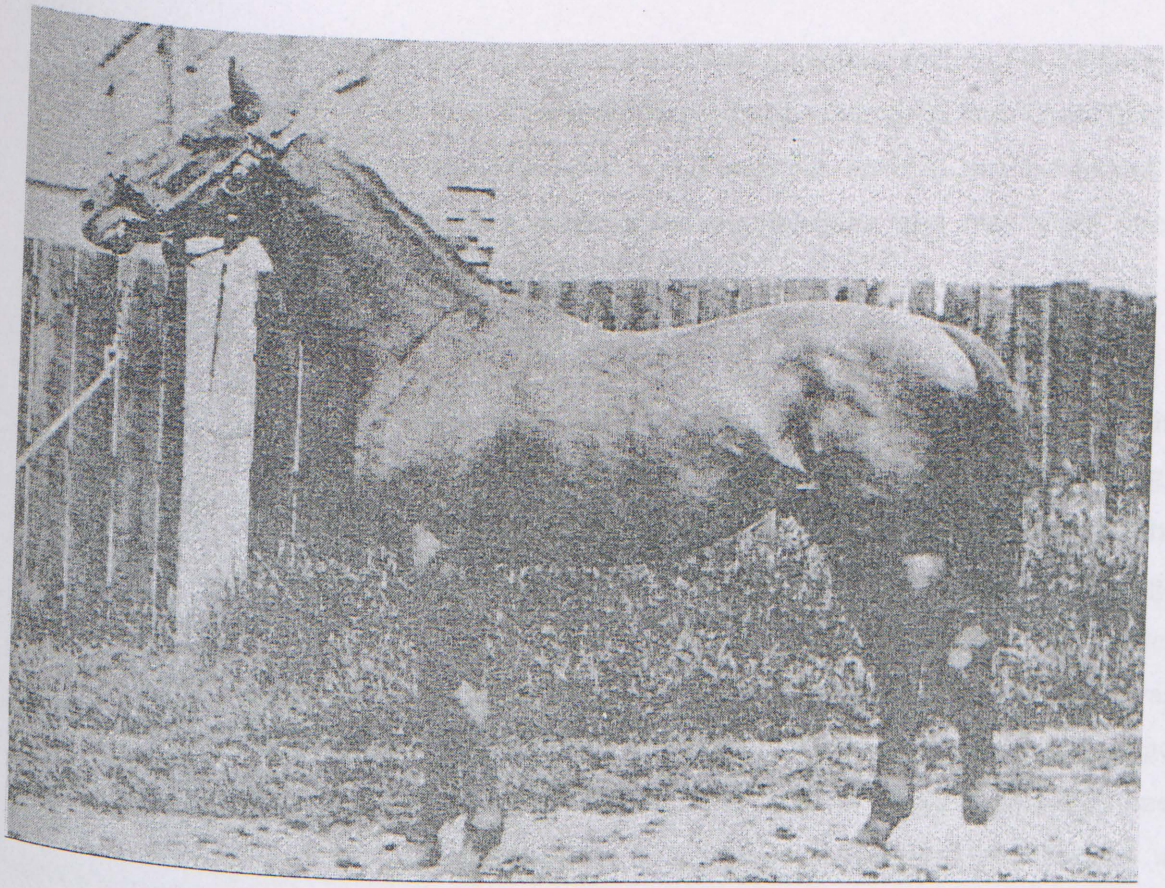
[43] *Report of the horse breeding committee of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland*, 1868, p. 26.
[44] Welcome, pp 63-70 ; Sweeney, 'The racing scene-a historical review', pp 43-44.



Barcaldine, 1878. Photograph from Welcome, *Irish horse racing.*

Flat Racing versus Steeple-chasing

Flat racing was in fact, better adapted to the increasingly commercial and organised racing scene which was increasingly the norm in nineteenth century England, rather than in Ireland, where a strong hunting tradition had inclined the racing public to favour the more robust racing form of steeple-chasing which was in origin a spin-off from hunting, and required the negotiation of obstacles across natural country.

Many of the Irish racing fraternity regarded the custom of racing two-year-olds on the flat as particularly cruel. An scathing article in the *Irish Farmer's Gazette* 14 September 1878 reported that in England, the more commercialised form of racing designed to cater for punters from the cities, encouraged the running of two-year-olds that were brought to 'forced maturity' by artificial means. Their immature bodies were often unable to stand the strain, and they commonly broke down, suffered from premature ageing, and were useless for breeding. This was anathema to the mainly rural Irish

hunting and racing fraternity, the majority of which had a genuine feeling for the horse.[45] However, by the end of the century more scientific training methods in both Great Britain and Ireland, together with the increased value of bloodstock ensured that the racing of two-year-olds was carried on under more humane conditions, and they were rarely expected to exceed five furlongs on the track.[46]

Steeple-Chasing

Steeple-chasing – the sport of racing over obstacles, originally developed in the early eighteenth century as an offshoot of hunting via the unofficial sport of 'pounding'. This was itself an expression of the devil-may-care antics commonly found on the hunting field. Pounding matches consisted of two individuals testing their own courage and the jumping abilities of their respective horses often after a hunt, by riding over increasing large obstacles in difficult country until a winner emerged and the loser was ridden into the ground, in which case the latter was said to have been 'pounded'. Large wagers were frequently ventured on the outcome of these matches, and the most fearsome obstacles attempted. The sport of pounding soon spread to England and became a popular activity with the hunting fraternities of both islands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

A variation of this type of competition was for the mounted competitors to set off across hunting country from a specific starting point to a determined finishing point, each choosing his own line. The first to arrive at the finish was deemed to be the winner irrespective of the number of falls and other mishaps he might have encountered on the way. As church steeples were among the most prominent landmarks in the countryside, they were often chosen as objectives, and the term 'steeple-chase' was coined for these impromptu events. The first recorded instance of the term being used was in connection with the famous cross-country match in Duhallow hunting country in Co. Cork between Mr. Edmund Blake and Mr. O'Callaghan run in 1752 from Buttevant Church to the spire of St. Leger Church four and a half miles away.[47]

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[45] *Farmer's Gazette*, 14 September 1878.
[46] Jos. Osborne, *The two year olds of 1899, how bred, and by whom trained* (London, 1899)
[47] This episode is commemorated by a well known set of sporting prints.

Though the sport of racing across country across obstacles was regarded as a particularly Irish activity, it was not long before steeple-chasing caught on in England where it seems to have been called 'steeple-hunting'[48] or 'steeple-racing'. However, it was often regarded by racing purists particularly in England, as an 'illegitimate' or 'bastard' form of racing.[49]



Steeplechase early nineteenth century. Painting by Henry Alken.

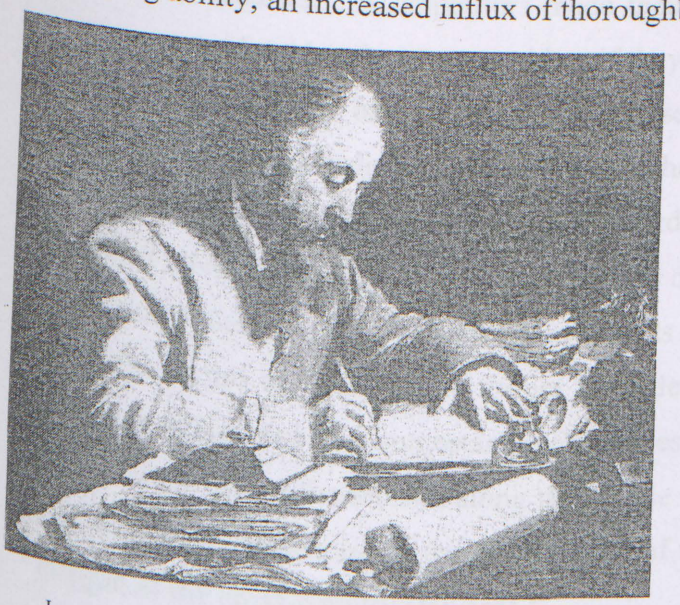
Type of Horses used in Steeple-chasing

Steeple-chasing was, in its origin, a spin-off from hunting. From the beginning, the horses used for steeple-chasing in Ireland were ordinary hunters and jumping ability was considered to be just as important as speed, if not more so. One of the most successful chasing mares of the nineteenth century, Irish Lass, was discovered by Henry Osborne of Dardistown Castle, Drogheda, in England pulling the Shrewsbury Coach in 1827. He bought her for 40 guineas and trained her as a hunter and steeplechaser. She

[48] Welcome, p.15.
[49] This attitude persisted until as late as 1870, see Sweeney, p.45.

not only proved successful as a racehorse but produced a foal – Abd-el-Kadir who was the first horse to win the Grand National at Aintree two years in succession in 1850 and 1851.[50]

As later generations of steeple-chasers were expected to be able to negotiate a variety of formidable natural obstacles across country at greater speed combined with jumping ability, an increased influx of thoroughbred blood was deemed desirable in order



Lord Waterford at Curraghmore From Welcome.



George Henry Moore. Photograph from D'Arcy.

to cope with the increased number of professionally laid out jumping tracks. A description of what was considered to be the ideal 'chaser in the latter part of the century appears in Walsh's *The Horse in the Stable and the Field* which was published in 1873:

...the steeplechase is now almost entirely carried out by means of thoroughbred animals. It is found that many horses which are too slow when tried as two or three-year-olds over our ordinary [flat] courses, and therefore discarded from the racing stable, are able to beat all others over a country, either with hounds or in the steeplechase...undoubtedly the first hope of a slow racehorse is that he might yet become a good, and therefore fast hunter or steeplechaser... All that is wanted is a racehorse of sufficient power to carry eleven or twelve stone, and with temper and courage to make him take to jumping...

The thoroughbred hunter is similar in external form to the steeplechaser, but in him 'good manners' are still more requisite. So also when a high weight is to be carried a stronger frame is required than for the eleven or twelve stone of the steeplechase course.[51]

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[50] Watson, *B.T.F.* pp 62, 63. See also relevant editions of the *Racing Calendar*.
[51] Walsh, pp 94,95.

Steeplechases in Ireland continued to be run over natural hunting country until quite late in the nineteenth century. Riders in Ireland were allowed a great deal of latitude as to the course they should follow, the general line of the race being indicated in a haphazard fashion by men with flags placed in ditches along the course. The natural obstacles they had to negotiate often included rivers, five foot walls, yawning ditches, and similar features. . Competitors made their own way across country and it was of course a considerable advantage to riders if they were able to walk the course in advance in order to choose the best route for their horses. They rounded a flag at a designated point on the course before heading back to the finish which was usually a roped off passage through the crowd. Mounted stewards and hunt servants with whips were stationed along the course in order to keep it as clear as possible for the competitors. The spectators which consisted principally of crowds of vociferous peasants, often constituted a further hazard to riders as the former were determined to see their favourite win and often showered the other contestants with stones. In addition, friends of fancied horses would often station themselves along the course out of sight of the stewards, in order to knock holes in the fences for the convenience of their friends, or interfere with rivals out of sight of the cross-country stewards.[52]

A story is told concerning 'Black Jack' Dennis master of the Galway Blazers from 1840 to 1849. Dennis, whose exploits as a horseman have passed into local folk legend, was reported to have been riding in a steeplechase on the east bank of the Shannon during the period of a particularly turbulent election. Not only was he pelted with stones during the race, but on approaching the last fence – a five foot stone wall, he found that an ass and cart had been pulled in front of it. Dennis put his horse to it and cleared the lot with a prodigious leap of some thirty feet.[53]

Irish steeplechase riders tended to regard the specially constructed fences of the 'enclosed' steeplechase tracks in England as 'unnatural', and considered them more dangerous than their own natural fences:

> In ordinary hunting the sportsman can choose his own ground and avoid those perilous leaps which might endanger his own life and that of his horse, but in these steeplechases the most formidable obstacles are

[52] Welcome, pp 31-3.
[53] B.M.Fitzpatrick, *Irish sport and sportsmen*, (Dublin 1878), p.133.

artificially placed in the course which the horse must necessarily take, and the almost certain result is the death of some of the noble animals thus wantonly urged on to their own destruction.[54]

Irish apprehensions concerning steeple-chases in England would appear to be to some extent justified when one considers Charles Apperley's account of the sport in that country:

...let us look at steeple-racing in all its bearings and repulsive forms. In the first place, its cruelty : we have no right to call upon an animal to perform for us more than his natural powers in high condition enable him to do, without extreme danger to his life, or at least, great temporary suffering. Think of the number of excellent horses that have been sacrificed to to this, miscalled, diversion !...

Then what said Mr. Haycock, the ...celebrated Leicestershire yeoman, one of the best sportsmen and horsemen of the day ? 'In the last steeple-race which I rode,' said he, 'I saw three horses lying on the ground in the same field, and one sitting up like a dog with his back broken ! I have made up my mind never to ride another.' [55]

Apperley writing in the early years of the nineteenth century, considered the principal cause of these horrific injuries to English 'chasers to have been the speed at which they were ridden at newly constructed fences with 'perpendicular sides and one or more ditches'. The horse's 'hind shins necessarily strike the farther side, and thus are their backs broken by the shock to the frame.' [56]

Irish steeple-chasing was given a considerable boost in 1840 with the return to Ireland of Henry third Marquis of Waterford whose exploits in the hunting field we have already covered in the previous chapter.[57] He had been one of a group of fearless horsemen including some notable Irishmen who were members of the Old Club at Melton. Other Irish members of the coterie included George Henry Moore, his brother Augustus, and Val Maher.

Lord Waterford is reported to have ridden his first race at Aylesbury in 1834, and in the same year to have matched his horse Cock Robin for a substantial wager over four miles of natural country near Market Harborough against the formidable Captain

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[54] Welcome, pp 16,17. Watson , pp 46,47.
[55] C.J. Apperly, (pseud. 'Nimrod'), *My horses and other essays* (London, 1928), pp 106-7.
[56] Ibid..
[57] Lord Waterford had also a considerable reputation as a big game hunter, having made several trips to America to shoot bison, and to Africa to shoot lions. *Waterford News*, 9 September 1939 He is alleged to have brought back a live lion to Curraghmore. See Fitzpatrick, p.280

Becher[58] who was riding the Irish bred Vivian which was said to be one of the best steeple-chase riders in England at the time. The captain's skill in choosing the best line had given him an advantage, and he just managed to beat the marquis by two lengths.[59]

On his relocation at Curraghmore in 1840, the marquis immediately set about creating a replica of Melton Mobray in his own county as the leading centre for hunting and racing in Ireland. The same year he rode his own horse The Sea in the Grand National.[60] Waterford's passion for the English 'shires' is reflected in a hunting map dated 1841 which is still preserved at Curraghmore. It describes the village of New Inn on the road between Cahir and Cashel as New Melton. On 27 October 1842, a steeplechase called the New Melton Stakes was run at Roscar near Cahir. Co. Tipperary,on land owned by the marquis. [61]

Lord Waterford became one of the great influences of Irish racing, as rider, owner, and administrator, his famous racing colours of light blue jacket and black cap headed the list of members racing colours in the *Racing Calendar* from 1841 onwards. Eglinton Park was one of his favourite venues, and he won three three-mile steeplechases there in one day.[62] He had been appointed a steward of the Turf Club in 1841 and continued in that post until his death in 1859.[63] Lord Waterford's horses were regular runners in the Aintree Grand National from 1840 until his untimely death out hunting in 1859. Sadly, the ultimate accolade of winning this, the greatest of all British steeplechases evaded him though his horse Sir John ridden by the Curraghmore stud groom Johnny Ryan, finished third in two successive years, 1850 and 1851.[64] 1853 was an extremely successful year for the Curraghmore stables with winnings totalling £1,664, 10s. In 1859, the year of his death, Lord Waterford headed the list of winning owners in Ireland with £2,344 to his credit.[65]

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[58] Becher's name is immortalised by 'Becher's Brook' at Aintree where he suffered a spectacular fall in the first Grand National in 1839.
[59] *Waterford News*, 19 December 1896.
[60] Welcome, p. 38,
[61] Dooley, *Big House*, p. 59.
[62] *Waterford News*, 29 September 1939.
[63] See the list of Turf Club stewards in D'Arcy, pp 347,348.
[64] Fitzpatrick, pp 290 and 292..
[65] *Waterford News*, 19 December 1896. Fitzpatrick,p.295.

It is a fitting compliment to Lord Waterford that the *Steeple Chase Calendar* first issued in 1845 by Henry Wright of the Haymarket, London should have been dedicated to him. The *Calendar* was an attempt to regularise the sport of steeple-chasing in both England and Ireland on similar lines to those already set out for flat racing, and included ten suggested rules for its governance. It is interesting to note that according to the proposed code steeplechase riders were implicitly classified into two categories – 'gentlemen' and others. The former term was defined in rule 8 as:

> to apply or allude only to persons generally received in society as gentlemen ; Members of the London leading Clubs, Fox-hunting or Racing Clubs, Officers in the Army or Navy, Solicitors, Medical Men, or others so considered by position and profession, and who do not and never have been in the habit of receiving remuneration for riding, either directly or in form of travelling expenses, or in any other indirect manner. [66]

This set of tentative rules was later used as the foundation for the official regulation of the sport in both Great Britain and Ireland. A definitive code called 'The Irish National Hunt Steeple-Chase Rules' was drawn up in 1864 and published in 1866.[67]

A landmark moment in the development of Irish steeple-chasing in the 1850s was the establishment of Fairyhouse and Punchestown as the two premier venues for the sport. These events were organised by the two premier Irish hunts, the Garrison Stag Hounds and the Kildares, respectively, both being active sufficiently near Dublin to play a significant role in the social life of the Capital. The Garrison Hounds (later The Ward Union Hunt) had previously held their annual steeple-chase at Ashbourne, but had transferred the event to Fairyhouse in 1851. This venue had been used previously for the running of the 'Citizens' Plate' which appears to have been an early version of a point-to-point. The race had been organised by an association called the Dublin Citizen's Club for 'horses the property of members…regularly hunted during the previous season.'[68]

The first event to be held by the Garrison Hounds over the Fairy House course was the Irish Grand Military Steeple Chases run over about three miles across country, 'for horses *bona fide* the property of Officers on full pay or on the staff'.[69]

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[66] Watson, *B.T.F.* pp 58-60.
[67] *Racing Calendar* 1866, pp lxv – lxxxv.
[68] ibid. 1850, p.41.
[69] ibid 1851 , pp 39-42



Punchestown, c. 1880. Print illustrated in Welcome.

Punchestown racecourse is blest with a natural gravel under-soil which enabled racing to take place there in all weathers, and the Kildare Hunt had been accustomed to hold its annual steeplechase on the site since the mid-1840s. However, the first mention of the venue in the sporting press was on 1April,1850. The principal event on that day was the Hunt Cup 'for horses the property of members of the Kildare Hunt, ridden by the same according to the original Articles.' over a natural course of about three miles roughly indicated by flags. The winner was Mr. T. De Burgh's chestnut mare Medora. There was also a farmer's and selling race.[70] There was as yet no stand-house, the administrative organisation being housed in tents.[71]

It was not until four years later that the first two day meeting was held on the site on 6 and 7 April, , 1854. The principal races on the first day consisted of the Kildare Hunt Steeple-Chase, which was confined to horses belonging to members of the Kildare Hunt, which were required to be 'in their possession one month before the day of running', and

[70] ibid 1850, pp 14-16.



The Corinthian Cup, Punchestown, 1854. Painting by Michael Angelo Hayes.



The Conyngham Cup, Punchestown, 1872. Oil painting by J. Sturgess.

[71] *Irish Times*, 17 April 1868.

none of these studs were specifically intended for the breeding of cavalry horses. The army obtained their remounts from private breeders and dealers in the open market. In 1871 their authorized purchase prices were as follows :-

Heavy cavalry and heavy artillery, £32 ; light cavalry, £25 ; pack horses, £15.[114]

The Irish Farmer's Gazette reports that : some years since' an Austrian colonel 'purchased in two or three years about 150 mares, the best of the old Irish blood, for Austria. He would not buy half-bred English mares, however good looking, because he could not depend on their back blood, and was afraid of their throwing back to the cart or under-bred horse, and so being soft and slow and therefore bad.[115]

Italy

Witnesses interviewed by the 1897 Commission reported that Irish horses were being bought for the Italian army. However, the latter were not interested so much in ordinary troopers as in better class thoroughbreds or near-thoroughbreds which could be used as officer's chargers, especially five year old mares. Their main Irish agent was John Widger who supplied about 350 or 400 horses annually at £50 to £100 each.[116]

At Ballinasloe fair In 1866, 'Colonel Castellengo attended by an interpreter sought to effect the purchase of some chargers for the King of Italy. For the horse which was purchased on the previous day by Mr. Magrane for £270 he offered £320 which was declined.[117]

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[113] Gless, p.88.
[114] *I.F.G.* 25 March 1871
[115] ibid.
[116] 1897 Commission, questions 10018 – 10026.
[117] *I.F.G.* 13 October, 1866.



Royal Meath who won the Conyngham Cup, Punchestown, 1889. Photo from the writer's family papers.

the Corinthian Cup for 'horses the property of the Kildare Hunt, the Kildare Street Club, the United Services Club, or the property of Officers quartered in the Dublin district' On the second day the main events were a race 'to be ridden by Officers of the King's Dragoon Guards, and a Farmer's Race for a prize of twenty sovereigns given by the Officers of the Newbridge Garrison.[72] A temporary wooden stand erected for the convenience of spectators. Races at Punchestown were further reorganised in 1861 at the instigation of the Marquis of Drogheda who had succeeded Lord Waterford as the doyen of the Irish Turf. Permanent stands were built and enclosures laid out, the course being left largely in its natural condition. the members of the Kildare Hunt held their annual meeting. From then on the popularity of Punchestown as the premier venue for steeplechasing in Ireland increased under the direction of the Marquis of Drogheda and Lord St. Lawrence. The different hunts throughout Ireland forwarded subscriptions and the 'Kildare' became the 'National' Hunt'.[73] The following year in 6 and 7 April, 1862, the National Hunt Steeplechase was run over a new course known as the Conyngham Cup Course which included the 'big double' near the 'Herd's Garden.' for the first time.

[72] *The Racing Calendar* 1854, pp 23-29.
[73] *Irish Times* 17 April 1868.

This famous fence has become a regular feature of every Punchestown Spring meeting until the present day.

The standing of Irish steeple-chasing in general, and Punchestown in particular was enhanced greatly by the attendance of the Prince and Princess of Wales at the two day Spring Meeting held on the 16 and 17 April 1868. This royal patronage gave a similar endorsement for Punchestown as a major event in the Irish social calendar, as the visit of George IV had done for flat racing at the Curragh nearly fifty years earlier.

The royal couple attended by a large entourage, had entrained on April 16, at King's Bridge Station using the same royal carriages that had been built specially for Queen Victoria by the Great Southern and Western Railway in 1849. The train arrived at Sallins Station in Co. Kildare about half an hour later, where the royal party was met by a detachment of mounted police who escorted their numerous carriages on the short drive to the race course where special stands had been erected for the accommodation of the royal visitors. According to reports in the press, the whole area including the roads in the vicinity, was crowded with vast numbers of spectators of all classes, together with 'five or six thousand vehicles' which consisted of 'aristocratic drags, breaks, and waggonettes' which had 'got unaccountably mixed up with antiquated jingles, shandridans, and odd-looking unnamed conveyances a century old, vamped up for the occasion,'[74]

The royal visit to Punchestown of 1868 was an important factor in the revival and popularising of steeplechasing as a major national sport in Ireland. In 1869 a leading article in a popular newspaper claimed that a larger percentage of the Dublin and Irish population attended Punchestown than the English did the Derby. In addition, gambling was less important in Ireland than at English race-meetings, and Irish race-goers tended to be more interested in racing for its own sake than as an opportunity for gambling. [75]

Point-to-Points.

`Point-to-points which originated in the second half of the nineteenth century as a type of more or less extempore races organised by individual hunt clubs for the benefit of

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[74] *Irish Times*, 16 and 17 April 1868.
[75] *Irish Farmer's Gazette*, 10 April 1869.



"Red Coat Race". Early nineteenth century. From Welcome.

their members and local farmers over whose land they hunted. They took place during the spring or summer and provided an opportunity for hunters to have an outing when the hunting season was finished. Point-to-points which were originally called 'Red Coat' races in Ireland as competitors normally wore hunt uniforms rather than racing silks, were steeplechase-like races run over natural fences. Competitors being required to ride horses that had been hunted regularly during the previous season, and had to produce a certificate signed by the master to that effect, in order to enter for the race. Point-to-points were regarded as good training grounds for steeplechasing proper.

Red Coat races were from the first regarded as amateur events by the racing establishment and as such in need of regulation. Consequently, rules for their direction were included in the Irish National Hunt Steeplechase Rules for 1891:

A Red Coat or Sportsman's Race Meeting is one at which there are only four races, all of which are hunter's steeplechases to which not more than £20 is added (Farmer's races excepted), and are confined to horses the property of members of, or subscribers to, a specified hunt; or of farmers residing within the

limits of that hunt. The programme of the meeting must receive the sanction of the Stewards of the I.N.H.S. Committee prior to the date of closing. Such sanction shall only be granted on payment of a fee of £1, and on satisfying the Stewards of the I.N.H.S. Committee that such meeting is to be held under the management and control of some specific Hunt Club, and that a *paid* licenced Clerk of the Course and Scales has been appointed. [76]

Gambling

Race course gambling by the general public in Ireland, is poorly documented for most of the nineteenth century, though some idea of its operation can be gleaned from English examples. It does seem however, that racing in Great Britain was more commercialised than in Ireland during this period.[77] The sport was popular with the emergent urban working class in Britain who had some money to wager, whereas in Ireland the race going public consisted almost entirely of the rural under class who had little or no disposable income.[78] One commentator writing in 1896 in c.1860, could only remember one bookmaker attending the Southern meetings thirty-five years previously. He was named Mullins.[79]

Race course betting was, at least in theory, strictly controlled by government legislation in a number of Acts dating from the early eighteenth century onwards.[80] Aimed principally at the sport in England, they were intended to protect the improvident urban poor from squandering their resources. Similarly, an Act of 1853 outlawed the use of betting houses or bookmakers offices that were mainly confined to England, were seen as a great evil for the working classes.[81] Those who specialised in small wagers were then compelled to operate illegally on the street if they wished to continue trading outside the race track, though they were permitted to ply their trade legitimately at the event itself, no doubt on the principle that anyone who could afford to go racing could afford to gamble. On the other hand, government legislation permitted gentlemen in both Great Britain and Ireland to wager considerable amounts of money on horses that they did either privately among themselves, or in specialist clubs. Gambling debts were not recoverable by law,

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[76] *Racing Calendar* 1891.
[77] Vamplew, pp 215-7.
[78] Watson, *BTF*, p. 72.
[79] Harry R. Sargent, *Thoughts upon sport*, (Dublin, 1898), p. 134.
[80] Wray Vamplew, *The turf: a social and economic history of horse racing* (London, 1976), p. 200.
[81] 14 July 1853, 16 & 17 Victoria.

though their repayment was regarded as a matter of honour by the racing fraternity, and more than one suicide resulted from the inability to pay gaming debts.[82]

The Irish Turf Club had issued their own *Rules of Betting* with 18 articles in the first issue of the *Racing Calendar* in 1790, which was extended in 1890. My this means, the governing body of Irish racing maintained a tight control over race course betting.[83]

Economics of Racing

The Irish racing industry in the nineteenth century was yet to achieve the economic importance that it did in the following century and still consisted largely of the sale of horses and the employment of workers and tradesmen who serviced the sporting aspect of the horse world. It was closely bound up with hunting as the same individuals usually indulged in both activities. Certain professions however, which were exclusive to the sport developed during the course of the century. These included professional jockeys, and racehorse trainers who had their origins in the training grooms employed by the larger racing establishments or 'lodges' as they were called locally on the Curragh. The function of these training grooms had been to feed and exercise the race-horses under their care and sometimes ride them in races as well. Many had acquired a good deal of skill and expertise in their jobs, so it is not surprising that some were enterprising enough to launch out as trainers in their own right.[84] The earliest mention of a specialist race horse trainer on the Curragh that the present writer could find is in an advertisement printed in 1791. It is as follows:

To the Noblemen and Gentlemen of the Turf : John Hanlon, begs leave to inform them that he has commodiously fitted up the Stables lately held by Timothy Kelly, Ballysax ; for the reception of race horses, the most private place about the Curragh, for training. Hanlon has laid in a stock of old hay and oats, and assures those Gentlemen who please to favour him with their commands, that every care and attention will be paid to horses, &c. sent to him to train, if convenient: , to send grooms. [85]

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[82] An example is given in Vamplew, op. cit., p. 202 when in 1836 the Hon. Berkley Craven shot himself rather than face the disgrace of being unable to settle a gambling debt. See also ibid. .pp 204,205.
[83] Darcy,*Horses, lords and racing men,* p. 180.
[84] Guy St John Williams, *The racing lodges of the Curragh*, (Kildare, 1997). Fergus D'Arcy, *Horses, lords and racing men*, (The Curragh, 1991).
[85] *Irish Racing Calendar*, 1791, p. 195

Conclusion

There is no major evidence that the horse was ever indigenous to Ireland as a wild species, but was imported by man, sometime in the remote past. This process of bringing in horses from abroad has been ongoing for many centuries. Incidentally, many parts of Ireland are particularly favourable for the raising of horses, and imported horses irrespective of their original strain or breed, gradually become moulded by the unique climate, environment and geology of the country, and in a few generations develop characteristics that are distinctively Irish.

Of these, certain breeds developed an international reputation for excellence. Among them could be counted the mediaeval hobby, the Irish thoroughbred that was developed during the early eighteenth century, and the Irish half-bred hunter that was a cross between the thoroughbred and the best elements of the indigenous workhorse breed.

During the nineteenth century and earlier, natural horsepower occupied much the same position in Irish life and culture as the internal combustion engine did in the twentieth. It was not for nothing that the earliest motorcars were called 'horseless' carriages. All classes of the Irish rural population had a special relationship with the horse that may be traced back in part, to an atavistic tradition of an ancient horse culture which might have once existed. This romantic, almost mystical, attraction for the horse took the form of an interest in racing and hunting among the peasantry, and could explain the 'horse-madness' which occurred among nineteenth century small-holders who kept horses on tiny plots of land against all economic sense. This 'horse-madness' did not extend to small farmers in Ulster who took a more pragmatic and business-like attitude to keeping horses.

It has been the argument of this thesis that in Ireland during the period under review, the horse has acted as man's principal auxiliary in such operations as agriculture, military affairs, transport, commerce and industry, urban development, sport, and much else. He brought these technologies to the stage where the internal combustion engine was able to take over many of these functions in the early twentieth century. As the economic historian F. M. L. Thompson, wrote in 1976, 'it is important to remember that the horseless carriage was so named not solely through failure of linguistic imagination, but also because the motor was first and foremost a horse substitute.'

The thesis investigated the socio-economic attitudes of various strata of the population to the horse, with the conclusion that horse ownership was highly valued by all classes , sometimes contrary to good economic sense. The use of the horse in agriculture and rural life was studied in Chapter Three, the favoured draught animal on the smaller farms being in most cases, an indigenous workhorse of mixed ancestry. The latter was often poor, undernourished, and cruelly treated by his owner, particularly at the beginning of the period under review. In many cases the reason for the inferior quality of the animal was the use of unsuitable mares for breeding, combined with the inability or unwillingness of their owners to pay for the services of suitable stallions.

However, as the nineteenth century progressed, the general standard of work-horses in the country improved with the introduction of further imported strains from Britain and elsewhere. The latter were in a few generations, subjected to the same homogenising processes mentioned above, and like earlier imports developed 'Irish' characteristics over a period, and formed the basis for the later Irish Draught breed which had developed by the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The continued use of ancient agricultural practices such as the use of wooden ploughs and block wheel cars of archaic design well into the nineteenth century was also discussed, as was the survival of the ancient practice of ploughing by caudal traction in certain districts of the country.

Chapters Four and Five investigated the use of public, private, and commercial horse-drawn transport in town and country respectively. The use of types of public transport vehicles, some of which were peculiar to the Irish capital, was noted. These included the quaintly named 'noddy' although this type of vehicle had virtually disappeared from Dublin by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its near contemporary on the streets of the Capital, the 'jingle' continued to be used in Cork and elsewhere after it was replaced in Dublin by the London type 'growler' about the middle of the century.

As the century progressed, the jaunting car derived from the block-wheel car increased in popularity both as a hackney vehicle and a private conveyance. It became universally recognised as the national vehicle of Ireland, in spite of its obvious unsuitability for the rainy climate of the country. The introduction of horse-drawn

omnibuses and trams to the Capital as public transport was also discussed, as well as the use of various types of commercial vehicles. The ongoing Irish tendency to favour two-wheeled carts rather than four-wheeled wagons was noted.

The use of private carriages in town and country was the preserve of the affluent, the vehicles being mostly of similar type to those used by the same class in Britain, with the notable exception of the jaunting car which was also commonly in private as well as public use.

Chapter Five is concerned with rural and inter-regional transport, both public and private. The hitherto neglected subject of the 'Irish Roadster' - the specialist riding horse for travelling, is discussed. The most popular types of private carriages for use in the country is also covered.

Most of the public transport vehicles used in Ireland, such as stage and mail coaches, post-chaises etc., were similar to those used in Britain. However, the Bianconi 'long-cars', which were derived from the jaunting car, and unique to Ireland, provided economical travel for all but the poorest classes for the greater part of the nineteenth century.

The work of the agricultural improvement societies in promoting the horse industry in Ireland is discussed in Chapter Six. The most influential of these was the Dublin Society, later the Royal Dublin Society, whose role in the development of the modern Irish horse breeds could hardly be exaggerated. The R.D.S., which was the first organisation of its type in the world was, from its foundation in 1731, instrumental in improving all aspects of agriculture and animal husbandry in Ireland. Included among its activities was the encouragement of the native breed of horses, which had generally declined in quality since the demise of the hobby over the previous century.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Society granted premiums for the importation of good specimens of the English Black Horse (the Shire), and the Suffolk Punch, in order to improve the indigenous workhorse stock. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the same organisation, often acting in co-operation with such organisations as the Farming Society, and the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland, organised agricultural shows which included classes for workhorses. Financial prizes and medals were awarded for excellence. In 1868, the R.D.S. held their first Dublin Horse

Show, which introduced the sport of Show Jumping to the world. From that year on, the Horse Show has been an annual event at which prizes and medals have been awarded for the best type of entries. Premiums have continued to be awarded by the Society, and at the end of the century, a registration scheme for stallions was set up, a function that was transferred to the newly established Department of Agriculture in 1900.

The horse-breeding programme instigated by the Congested Districts Board during the 1890s, together with the boost in exports of Irish cobs from the West of Ireland to South Africa for the use of mounted infantry in the South African War, was also considered in some detail.

The lucrative trade in Irish horses for military purposes to Great Britain and a number of European countries in the nineteenth century, was studied in Chapter Seven. The animal regarded as most suitable for cavalry and artillery remounts was the Irish half-bred hunter, a breed developed during the eighteenth century by putting thoroughbred stallions to good quality workhorse mares. The breeders of this type of horse were generally the minor gentry and the more prosperous and substantial farmers who bred quality hunters for sale and for their own sport. The best of these could command good prices in England and elsewhere as hunters, while the lower grades could be sold as army remounts or 'troopers'.

During the period under review, large numbers of the horses required by the British army were purchased in Ireland. Until about 1850, it had been the normal practice for commanding officers of cavalry and artillery units stationed in Ireland, to personally arrange for the purchase of horses for their regiments in the open market, usually horse fairs, with an upper price limit set by the Government that was often inadequate. From around the time of the Crimean War, military purchases of horses were usually carried out by civilian agents appointed for the purpose of supplying remounts to individual regiments. In 1887 the purchasing system of horses for the British army was centralised with the setting up of special Remount Departments in Ireland and Britain.

In addition, agents acting for other European armies purchased military remounts in Ireland, frequently outbidding British buyers. These included France, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, and Russia, all of who had slightly different requirements. For example, France mainly purchased troopers to make up

losses occasioned by the Franco-Prussian War, while Belgium, Holland, and Denmark sought similar types of remounts to those required by the British. The main need of Germany, Austria, Italy, and Russia was for thoroughbred stock for the purpose of improving their existing indigenous breeds traditionally used for military purposes.

The last two chapters of the thesis are concerned with hunting and racing respectively. In Ireland these activities had the character of both social phenomena and popular national sports. During the nineteenth century hunting was probably the pre-eminent equestrian activity in Ireland where it was followed by a much larger class range of the rural population than in Britain in which country it was often tarnished by a rather elitist image. Hunting in Ireland was for many in Ireland, a way of life with very old roots, perhaps owing something ultimately derived, partially from an atavistic hunter-gather life style, and partially from an ancient horse-culture with aristocratic overtones. It is interesting to note that even with the anti-hunt protests that characterised the Land War of 1881-82, the Land League activists having effectively stopped hunting in much of the country, immediately indulged in it themselves with their 'People's Hunts'.

There is evidence that horseracing in various forms was practised in Ireland from very ancient times. However, racing in its modern form that is now one of the most popular sports in Ireland, appears to have been a spin-off from hunting during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It originated in unofficial 'matches' between individuals wishing to demonstrate the respective speed and ability of their hunt-horses, and from the beginning the activity was particularly associated with the Curragh in Co. Kildare. Racing as it developed from the eighteenth century onwards, is divided into two main categories – flat racing where the contestants are pitted against each other in a race around a level track without obstacles, and steeple-chasing where the horses have to negotiate a series of jumps as well as a trial of speed. The latter that was derived more directly from hunting has always been popular in Ireland, and Irish bred horses have tended to dominate the sport in Great Britain.

Point-to-pointing, previously known as 'red-coat' racing, was also developed from hunting during the early part of the nineteenth century. It originated as a means of extending the sport after the end of the hunting season.

With regard to the effect of the Great Famine on horse usage and breeding, many landowners, even the smaller ones, found that the abundant supply of cheap manual spade-labour on which they had previously relied to work their farms was declining due to the post-Famine emigration and other reasons. Consequently, they tended to place more reliance on natural horsepower to fill the gap. This tendency was reinforced by the fact that horse-drawn farm machinery had become more efficient and technologically advanced during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Exhibition of 1853 being especially influential in this regard.

Another consequence of this increased dependence on horse-usage by the smaller farmers was their tendency to start breeding from their own mares. Horse breeding had always been an activity associated with the gentry and more prosperous farmers, and it was due to their scientifically directed efforts that the existing reputation for excellence of the Irish horse was based. Unfortunately, when the smaller farmers started to breed horses, many of them lacked the necessary skills in horse management. This led to a serious decline in the general standards of the Irish breeds that has been noted in several of the previous chapters. All varieties of horses in Ireland suffered deterioration especially during the middle years of the century. This was eventually rectified by remedial action by a number of agencies including the R.D.S. and the Department of Agriculture.

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