

NEWSLETTER

Tel: 096 31809

www.northmayogenealogy.com

Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com

Email: northmayo@gmail.com



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The Post Man

and how his role has changed

Cover image: Tom Watson, Ballyvary, delivering mail in Dangan More in 1950
(Image from the *Story of Mayo* by Rosa Meehan)

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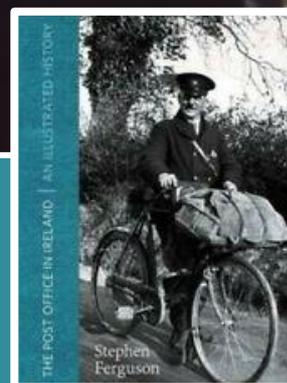
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BOOK OF THE WEEK

The Post Office in Ireland

by Stephen Ferguson

€25 (+postage)



Buy from Reception or online from the North Mayo Heritage
Centre ebay bookstore

THE POST MAN – How his role has changed

We are all too familiar with the envelope popping up on our devices signalling a notification of some sort. But, let us ponder on the unimaginable ... the days when the only means of communication with the outside world was via the local postman!

The Postman or “*Fear on Phoist*” played a vital role in Ireland from the early days of the Irish Free State, facilitating communication long before the widespread use of the telephone. Employed by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs (P&T), postmen constituted the largest sector of the civil service.

The postman held a position of great respect within the community, having passed the Postman’s examination before being employed. Once employed, strict rules, published in the Rule Book for the Rural Postman in 1921 (and used up until 1950), were adhered to. One such rule stipulated that the postman was forbidden to wear private badges except for trade union badges, a pioneer pin and An Fáinne Nua (Irish language proficiency symbol).

Another rule stipulated that intemperance in general would endanger their retention in the service. Postmen could not live so far from the post office as would prevent him from attending punctually at the scheduled hours. In addition, they were to carry a spring balance for weighing parcels and were required to wear the P&T uniform. 166 rules in total governed how the postman was to perform his duties.

His daily routine involved an early start in all weathers to collect and sort the post, travelling with due care and diligence, often having to trek to remote homes in poor terrain.

He delivered a lot more than letters, bringing news from around the parish on deaths, births, marriages, landlord troubles etc. – a link to the wider community.



Postman’s cap badge 1960s–1980s. (Image from An Post Museum and Archive)

It was not uncommon for him to avail of hospitality in various houses on his route and enjoyed traditional snacks such as tea, bread and jam. His mode of transport would have been a high nelly bicycle with his postbag crossed over his body and another hanging from handlebars.

On occasion, he brought “messages” such as food or other supplies to help older folk and accepted letters for posting. The ringing of the bell on his bike signalled his arrival up many boreens down through the years. The local postman knew a lot about everybody based on the post they received. Sadly and all too often, he delivered news of a death or some misfortune in the form of a telegram.

Many people have memories of the postman delivering the famous American Letters throughout the parishes. These letters contained money sent from America by family members who had emigrated. These letters were vital to assist families living on small farms with little other means and often contained the fare for another family member to travel to America.

The postman’s mode of transport has evolved in that brightly coloured post vans now zoom through every little village and town.

The term “postman” can now be “postwoman” and the rigid uniform is replaced with more practical attire.

Modern technology is impacting on the duties of the postman in that emails tend to replace traditional letters. Nevertheless the role of the postman is still of huge importance. Despite the hardships involved and the bite from the odd dog, postmen loved their jobs.

A postman’s retirement greatly impacted the whole community. Ireland’s longest serving postman James Cashin, upon retiring in 2018, after 51 years service, stated: *“I loved it. I really loved meeting people, especially the older people..... it’s all part of the job.”*

Mike Sheehan, a West Cork postman, after serving for 41 years, was believed to have worn out 22 bikes, 96 pairs of tyres, 240 pairs of brake pads and cycled the equivalent of 10 times around the equator just doing his job.

Sources:

www.anpost.com
www.rtearchives.ie
www.Irishcentral.com
www.Independent.ie

Callow School Reunion
The Story of Mayo by Rosa Meehan



Pat Conwell’s first year in his job with his brand new bike in 1938. (Image from Callow School Reunion)

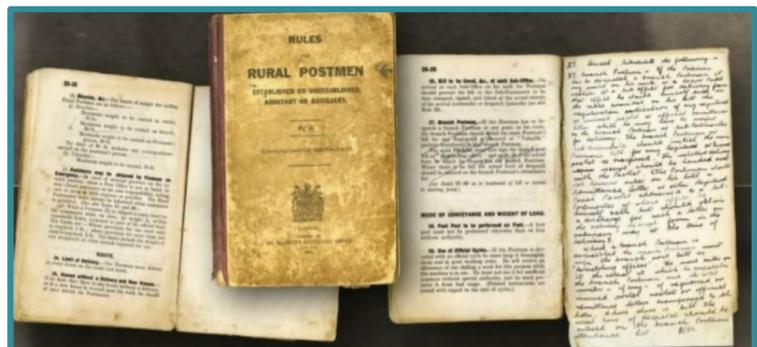
Brief history of the townland of CALLOW / CULLAGH (Caladh, meaning a holm).

Located in the south-west of the parish of Killasser. It contains 1,242 acres, 0 roods, 2 perches*, including 77 acres, 3 roods, 12 perches* of water. The property of Francis Evans, Dublin, and is let to 54 tenants at will, to some in farms at £4 10 shillings to £8 per acre, to others by the acre at from 17 shillings 6d. to 20 shillings per acre yearly.

Soil, bare and rocky, producing oats and potatoes. Bog plenty. Co. Cess, 2 shillings 6d. per acre. Three families are Protestant; the remainder, Catholics. Lough Beg and Derreenadooey with a portion of Lough Callow are in this townland. There is here a Catholic Chapel, built in 1811 and capable of accommodating 350 persons. There are, also, 12 forts in this townland. Prevailing Names – Durkan, McNulty and Coughlin.

* There are 40 perches in a rood, and 4 roods in an acre.

Extract from Ordnance Survey Namebooks of 1838



The Rural Postmen Rule Book. (Image from An Post Museum and Archive)