INNOVATIONS IN TRANSPORT IN EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY LIMERICK – THE TURNPIKE ROADS

(Unpublished article)

By

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The growth in trade and industry during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries resulted in increased road traffic as goods and produce needed to be transported to ports such as Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Belfast while imports had to be distributed; this necessitated the development of an adequate road network. Road building and maintenance was in the hands of the parish vestries who used the statute labour system to ensure that new roads were created and the other roads were kept in repair. The parish vestries were supervised by the grand jury of their county, who were responsible for collecting the county cess, which was a localised tax, in order to fund road construction and maintenance. However these two systems proved inadequate to meet the growing demands placed upon the roads and for this reason the turnpike system was introduced into Ireland in the early eighteenth century.

Developed in England during the middle of the 1600s, the concept behind the turnpike system was to compel the traffic to pay for the damage which it caused to the roads; that is, road maintenance and improvements were to be financed by levying tolls upon those who used the roads. This was achieved by placing barriers and gates at either end of the affected section of road and obliging the road users to pay a set amount in order to travel through that section. The length of the road and the size of the tolls were established by acts of parliament. These acts also listed the trustees who were to take responsibility for the maintenance of the roads and the collection of the tolls. The turnpike tolls were intended to supplement rather than to replace statute labour in road maintenance.

The statute labour system had been the mainstay of road maintenance and creation since the early seventeenth century. It required all members of a parish to provide six days labour on their local roads during a certain period, usually between Easter and the end of June. In addition all parishioners who occupied land also had to pay a tax called the county cess which was used to fund the necessary works. The statute labour system was extremely unpopular and '(t)here was no trick, evasion or idleness, deemed too mean to avoid working on the roads'[1]. Thus the grand juries were given the job of supervising the parish vestries in order to ensure that statute labour was adhered to by all members of the parish. Neither the statute labour system nor the turnpike road system was a truly satisfactory solution to road creation and maintenance as it was based on the premise that road conditions were a local concern. It was only when road maintenance became a national matter and when scientific principles were applied to their creation and maintenance that the road system thrived.

The first Irish turnpike act, entitled An *act for repairing the road leading from the city of Dublin to Kilcullen-Bridge, in the county of Kildare,* was introduced in 1729 and initiated a system which was to last 129 years and which provided the basis for the national trunk road system in existence today. This act was taken almost word for word from the English acts and set the standard for all future turnpike acts in Ireland. All the turnpike acts listed those who were eligible to form the trusts, they also specified what tolls could be levied and who was to be exempt. They also specified the length of road which varied from five miles to over eighty miles, although the average was around thirty miles[2]. In addition all turnpike acts were originally intended to be temporary measures lasting between twenty-one and forty-one years.

The first act directly concerning Limerick was passed in 1731; this stipulated that the new turnpike road was to run from Newcastle through Rathkeale and Adare to Limerick city and from here through Bruff and Kilmallock and on to Cork via Ballyhoura, Mallow and Whitechurch. This act was implemented due to ‘the many and heavy carriages frequently passing through the same, are becoming so ruinous and bad, that in winter season many parts thereof are impassible … and very dangerous for travellers’[3]. The act also listed 186 trustees including the bishops of Limerick, Coyne and Cork, the mayors of Limerick and Cork and all other gentlemen who were eligible to serve on the grand juries. As only a quorum of five

[1] Plymley, p.208
[2] Broderick, p.
[3] The Statutes at Large, Vol. 5 p.619

trustees was necessary to implement the act, it has been suggested that the amount of trustees named within the acts was a device to facilitate the passage of the act through parliament[4].

At the first quorum meeting the toll collectors and road works supervisors were to be appointed. Each section of the road was to be dealt with separately; the trustees for the Newcastle to Limerick section were to meet at Rathkeale and the tolls collected on this section could only be used to defray the expenses of this section. The Limerick to Cork section was to be divided at the border, at Ardskeagh, and the tolls collected in each county had to be retained within the county to cover the expenses associated with the road. The trustees for the Limerick to Ardskeagh section were to meet in Kilmallock. As the trusts did not have the necessary funds to build toll houses and erect gates they issued debentures to raise money and those who advanced the money also became the trusts administrators[5]. The act also listed the tolls which were to be charged on each type of carriage as well as the penalties which could be incurred for trying to avoid payment.

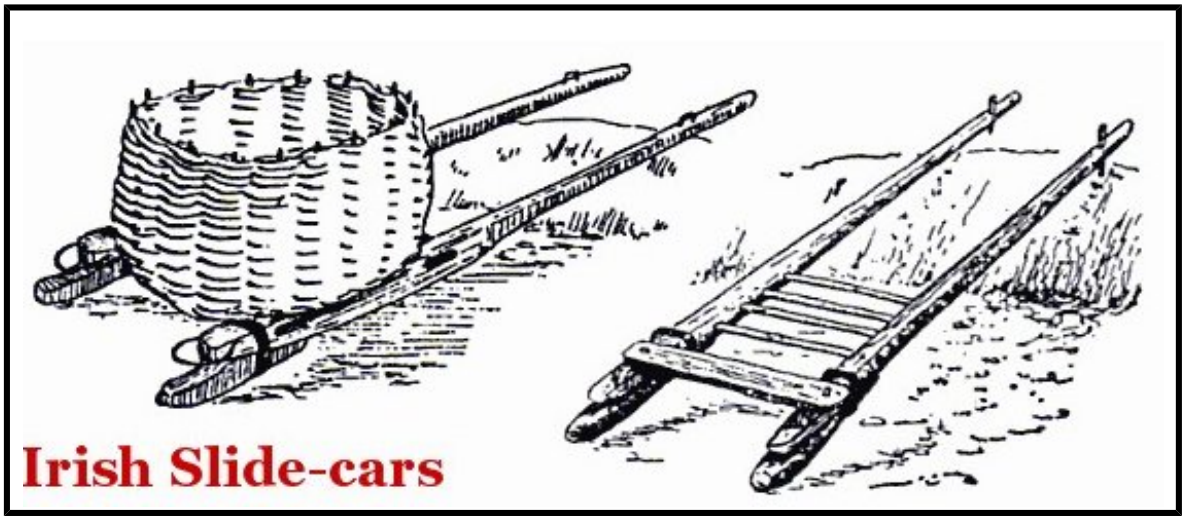
In 1733 a turnpike road was established between Limerick and Ennis, in 1737 another was created between Nenagh and Limerick, in 1755 a turnpike road linked Mallow to Limerick and then continued on to Glin and Kilmeany in county Kerry and in 1767 Listowel was connected to Rathkeal. These are just four of the many acts which were directly concerned with road creation and maintenance in Ireland during the eighteenth century. The turnpike fever which had taken hold of Ireland had resulted in varying standards of roads being built. In order to promote some form of standardisation the Dublin Society issued some general recommendations for road construction in 1737. The Society was mainly concerned with the necessity of laying the correct type of foundation and drainage through the use of suitable gravel and the provision of proper camber. They also advocated different procedures for maintaining old roads and the creation of new roads. According to the Society new roads were more straightforward to create as the correct techniques could be implemented from the onset. Whereas the repair and upkeep of old roads was more expensive and time consuming due to the corrective measures which needed to be employed. The theory behind the Society's advice was correct but what they lacked was a method to compact the road surfaces.

The methods outlined by the Society were to remain the mainstay of road construction until Thomas Telford (1757-1834) and John Loudon Macadam (1756-1836) transformed road

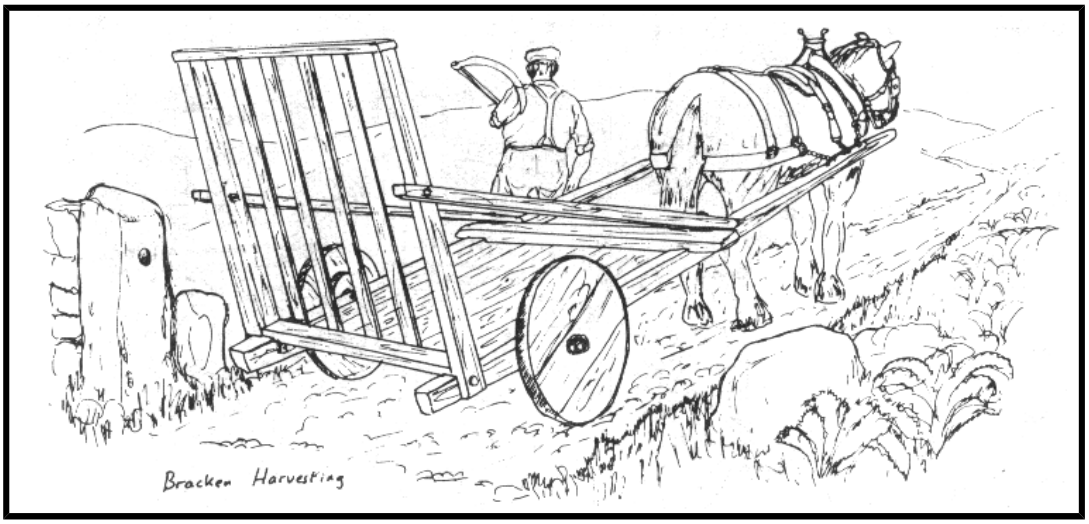
[4] Broderick, p.44
[5] Meghan, 1986, p.23

making techniques in the late eighteenth century. Telford's system of road construction called for the road to be formed from two layers, all placed by hand, in which the size of the stones and the placement of drainage played an intrinsic part. Macadam's technique was to apply a layer of good quality broken stone to an already existing surface and to let the traffic compact the surface. Macadam's main concern was that the road would be made waterproof, something which couldn't be achieved with the traditional technique of digging a trench to build the road in. Waterproofing could only be achieved by ensuring that the road's foundation was above the level at which ground water pooled or if that wasn't possible then through the use of proper drainage. Both Telford and Macadam's techniques were correct and modern construction methods have been developed from a combination of both techniques. However Macadam's surfacing methods were widely adapted and his name became synonymous with road surfaces worldwide.

The type of traffic on the turnpike roads was also a major factor in their condition. In 1729, at the beginning of the turnpike era, the vehicles which were normally used for the transport of goods could be categorised into three types, the slide cart, the truckle cart and the wheel car. The Irish slide cart was a wheel-less vehicle, it had two long straight posts which were drawn or dragged by the drawing horse. At the bottom of each post, the wearing end, was a replaceable shoe. Containers were attached to the posts into which the load which was to be transported was placed. These vehicles were most suitable for use on the land or in mountainous areas as the posts caused a lot of damage to the road surfaces.



The truckle cart may have been a development of the slide car where it was decided to fit the slide car with wheels[6]. The appearance and use of the truckle cart largely depended on the placement of the wheel and on its diameter. This vehicle was quite popular due to the fact it could be used on all types of surfaces including roads, it was also popular in Wales. However its main advantage was that it could be used on hilly terrain, that is, 'it could operate as a true slide car on downward slopes, and that the wheels would work to advantage during ascent'[7].



Welsh Truckle Cart

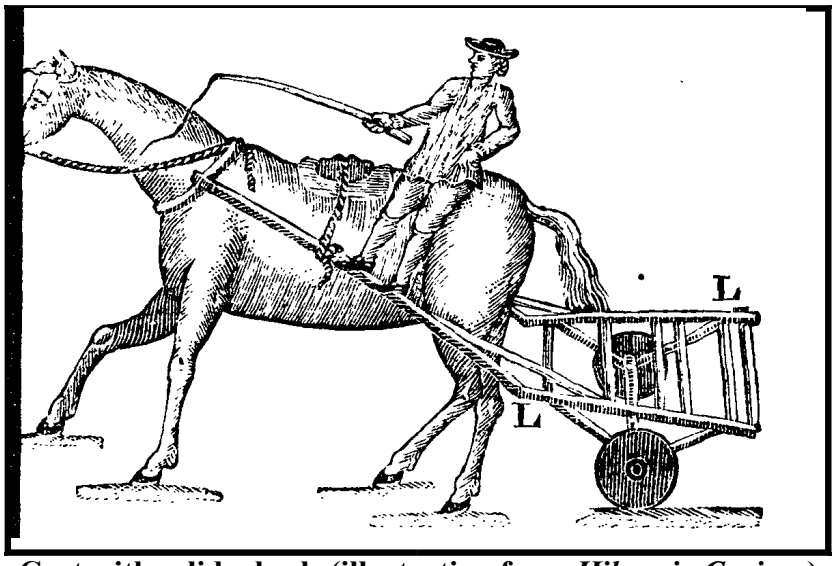
The wheel car was a small cart with solid wooden wheels, described as 'little more than a tray on a pair of small solid wheels'[8]. The axle was firmly fixed to the wheels and rotated with them.

Different variations of these carts existed in different locations due to variations in the terrain, the availability of materials, the local transport requirements and the skills of the builders. The one factor that all three carts had in common was that only one horse was needed to draw them. In 1766 Colonel William Roy wrote that 'there is no country whatever where there are more or in general better roads than in Ireland' which he believed was due to the fact that they were 'entirely free from heavy carriages. Those chiefly made use of in the country being only small cars or sledges drawn by one horse or two at most'[9].

[6] Broderick, p.63
[7] Broderick, p.63
[8] Herring, p.115
[9] O'Dalaigh, p.116

De Latocnaye describes his experience travelling in an Irish wheel car from Waterford to Dublin in 1796:

> 'Their car is a species of low cart on wheels two feet in diameter, made out of one or two pieces of wood, attached to a great axle of wood or iron turning with them. This singular construction seems to be well fitted for carrying heavy loads but not for the country work in which they are commonly employed. I take it to be a farmers invention'[10].



Cart with solid wheels (illustration from *Hibernia Curiosa*)

Vehicles for public hire first appeared in the cities with the earliest stagecoach recorded as travelling from Dublin to Athlone, Drogheda and Kilkenny in Watson's Almanac of 1738. The Almanac also lists a stagecoach running from Dublin to Limerick from as early as early as 1751, although Lenihan states that there was no 'public mode of conveyance between Dublin or Limerick, or any other two cities in Ireland'[11] until after 1760.

The LIMERICK Stage Coach ſets out from the Hog in Armour in James's-ſtreet, on Monday at 7. Returns in the Summer on Saturday.

From *The Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack* (printed by John Watson) 1738

Maurice Lenihan wrote that the Great Frost of 1739, which lasted for forty days and resulted in the deaths of an estimated 400,000 from famine and sickness also 'had an adverse effect even on the turnpike roads, which had become for some time such bad speculation for those

[10] De Latocnaye, p.14
[11] Lenihan, p. 477

who had engaged in them, that they gave no return'[12]. The creditors realised that they could not recoup their losses within the twenty-one years stipulated within the acts and they petitioned parliament for an additional thirty-four years. In 1745 an extension was granted for the Limerick section of the Limerick to Cork turnpike road along with a fifty percent increase in the tolls themselves. Lenihan also recorded the average returns of the turnpike roads for the nine years previous to 1741. The Bruff or Limekiln turnpike returned an average of £62 per year; the Ardskeagh Turnpike returned an average of £85 per annum; the Blackboy turnpike averaged £185 per year. However he goes on to say that once all the expenses were deducted that only a very small profit was realised[13]. In order to illustrate this point he includes the returns from the main Limerick turnpike road, the Blackboy, for one week in June 1742.

	£	s.	d.	Per Week	£	s.	d.
Coach and six horses, ...	0	1	0	... 2 ...	0	2	0
Do. and four do.	0	0	6	... 2 ...	0	1	0
Chair and one or two horses, ...	0	0	3	... 30 ...	0	7	6
Waggon of four wh.	0	0	1				
Carriage of two wh. and more than one horse	0	0	3				
Cart or truckle, one horse, ...	0	0	1	... 120 ...	0	10	0
One horse, riden by one or more, ...	0	0	1	... 240 ...	1	0	0
Every backload, ...	0	0	½	... 480 ...	1	0	0
Cattle, per score, ...	0	0	10	... 100 ...	0	4	2
Calves, hogs, sheep, and lambs, per score ...	0	0	5	... 200 ...	0	4	2
					£3	8	10
For 52 weeks, or a year, ...				£178 19 4			
				15 0 0			
To pay				10 0 0			
				£203 19 4			

This is an important record as it offers a snapshot of road transport for this particular time and place while also showing that the use of a vehicle for travel was still very limited and that the main mode of passenger transport was on horseback.

Over the course of the eighteenth century both public and private vehicles had become much more numerous, this is highlighted by Arthur Young's observation in September 1776 that,

> 'Between 1740 and 1750 there were only four carriages in and about Limerick ... Four years ago there were above seventy coaches and post-chaises

[12] Lenihan, p.355
[13] Lenihan, p.335

in Limerick, and one mile around it. Now 184 wheeled carriages; 115 two wheeled ditto'[14].

The majority of these travellers would have used a guide-book to find their way from place to place. These guide-books, such as *The Gentleman's and Citizen's Almanack*, also known as Watson's Almanac, was published in Dublin from 1733 until 1810 and included maps, routes and itineraries alongside lists of the towns and the distances between them. The most popular of these was the Taylor and Skinner work, *Maps of the Roads of Ireland*, which was first published in 1778. This book contained over two-hundred pages of road maps all fully engraved with shading for the hills and the names of the principal landowners in the areas. Books like *The Post-Chaise Companion;* or *Travellers Directory through Ireland*, first published in 1784, was compiled from Taylor and Skinners work, and gave a topographical description of Ireland along with the circuits of the grand juries as well as a list of the roads and post-towns. It also included the distance of each place from Dublin castle and was a must have for discerning travellers of the time.

The emergence of the post office influenced the development of the roads through the creation of mail-coach roads and by breathing life into some turnpike roads through the payment of tolls. The mail coach service from Dublin to Limerick started in 1791; the Limerick coach left every night at 7.45 pm from the Royal Mail office at the Hibernian Hotel on Dawson Street and another coach left first thing in the morning[15]. The awarding of mail contracts resulted in the contractors developing an interest in the repair and maintenance of the turnpike roads. This in turn developed into a desire to control the actual roads so that any profits would accrue to the contractor.

[14] Young, vol. 1, p.294
[15] Maxwell, p.295

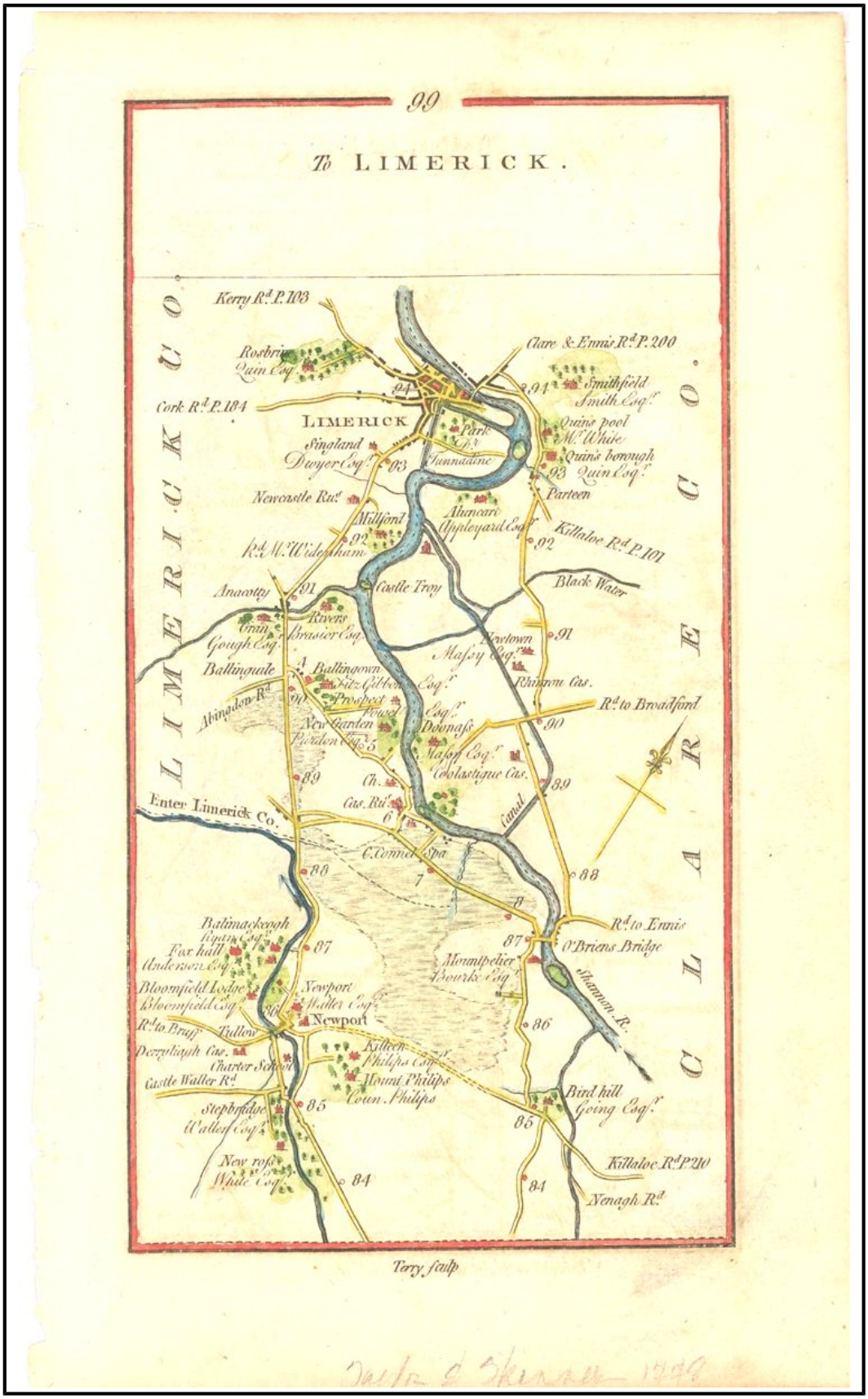


Illustration from *Maps of the Roads of Ireland* (first published 1778)

The origin of this privatisation of the roads was a petition by John Anderson and William Bourne, partners on the Naas-Limerick mail-coach contract. The petition resulted in both Anderson and Bourne being given full control over the management of the Naas-Limerick section of the road. They also granted a loan of £27,000 to the trustees, for repairs, in exchange for the right to all tolls collected for the subsequent thirty years. In addition Anderson and Bourke were also given the power to levy a fine of five shillings per horse on any vehicle which was carrying more than nine passengers which gave them a monopoly on passenger transport. Indeed, John Anderson pioneered cheap passenger travel and prepared the way for Charles Bianconi's endeavours in the early nineteenth century.

Privatised turnpike roads such as the Naas-Limerick road showed that it was possible to operate a turnpike road without incurring a huge debt and to even make a profit. The main difference between the privatised turnpikes and the non-privatised turnpikes was that those in private hands needed to operate efficiently while reducing costs and keeping the road in a good enough condition to encourage traffic to use it.

In his history of Limerick, Lenihan describes the method used for travelling between Limerick and Dublin, in the early eighteenth century, before passenger transport became the norm. When the day to leave was decided upon, a notice containing the particulars was posted in the coffee house in Quay Lane. Those interested in travelling added their names to the notice. The journey took approximately five days unless the weather caused further delays and the same team of horses was used throughout[16]. Lenihan then goes on to explain that the Limerick stagecoach also began about this period, 1760, and that a Mr Buchannan of Thomond Gate was the originator. However as we have already seen Watson's Almanac of 1751 advertises a coach to Limerick, so perhaps Lenihan is referring to Limerick being the starting point rather than the destination for the journey. This coach would travel through Irishtown over Balls bridge to English town then over Thomond bridge to Killaloe before continuing on to Dublin in a journey which took four days.

Lenihan's *History* also proves an excellent source for the changes which took place in carriage design. The coach used for the Limerick to Dublin journey was very large and heavy in construction with a convoluted harness system. However the speed at which it travelled, in comparison to earlier vehicles, resulted in it being nicknamed 'the Fly'. This was eventually replaced by the 'Balloon coach' which had a lighter frame and a less complicated harness

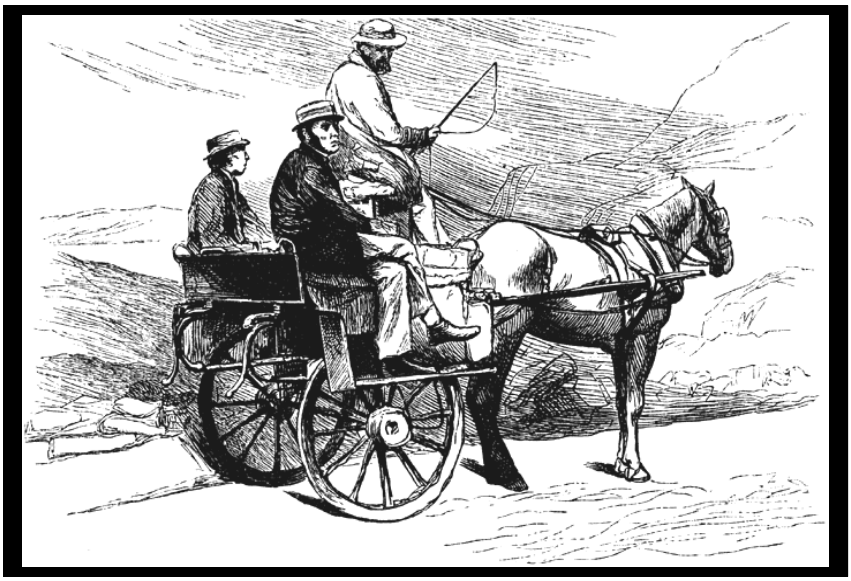
[16] Lenihan, p.478

system which allowed for the relays of horses to be harnessed and waiting when the coach arrived at the different stages. These improvements, implemented over a period of twenty years, resulted in the journey being reduced to three days[17]. Changes in the route taken also impacted the travel time, towards the end of the century the coaches would travel to Dublin via Nenagh rather than Killaloe which took around two days although it could be accomplished in one if the coach started early and arrived late.

The closing decades of the eighteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the amount of passenger carriage and travellers could choose from the stage-coach, the gig, the chaise, the jingle and the noddy[18] and, as previously mentioned, after 1790 the mail coach. The most popular type of chaise was the chaise-marine which was 'a common carr with one horse'[19]. The noddy was an old cast off one-horse chaise or chair

> 'with a kind of stool fixed upon the shafts just before the seat, on which the driver sits, just over the rump of his horse ... whose situation on the shafts obliges his motion to be conformed to that of his horse, from whence ... they have obtained the name of the Noddy[20].

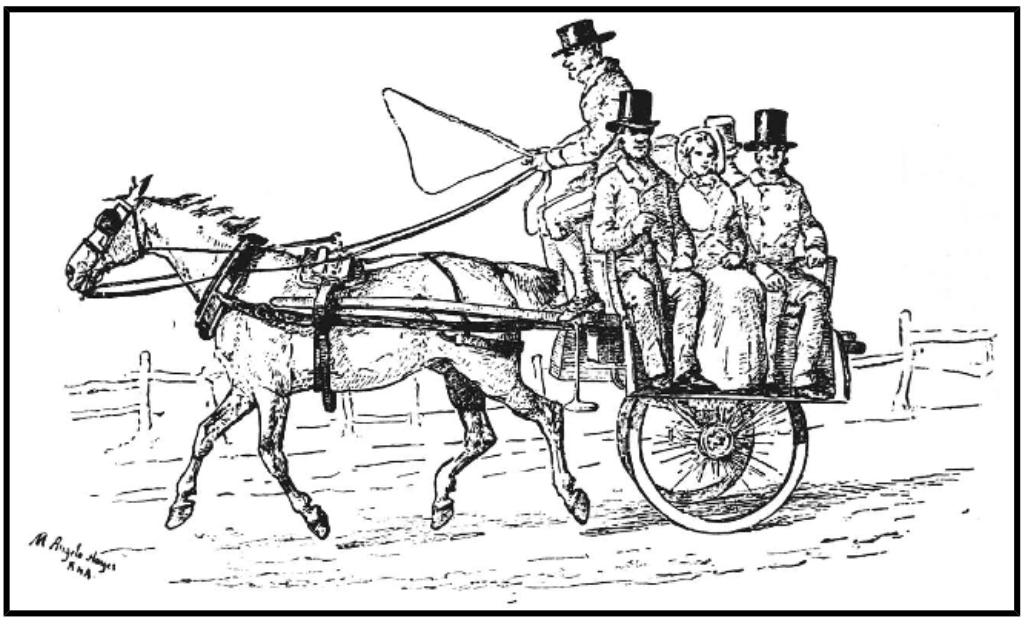
The jingle car was simply an inside jaunting-car with iron struts supporting a canvas roof[21]. The Irish jaunting car was a light, horse-drawn, two-wheeled open vehicle with seats placed lengthwise, either face to face or back to back.



The Irish Jaunting Car

[17] Lenihan, p.478
[18] Herring, p.116
[19] Bush, p.24
[20] Bush, pp.23-4
[21] Herring, p.116

These were the most frequently used passenger vehicles until Charles Bianconi introduced his 'Bians' in 1815. The' bian' was a two-wheeled six-seater car drawn by one horse and capable of travelling at seven miles an hour. The passengers were seated on each side facing the hedgerows and were separated by a well in which luggage was carried[22].

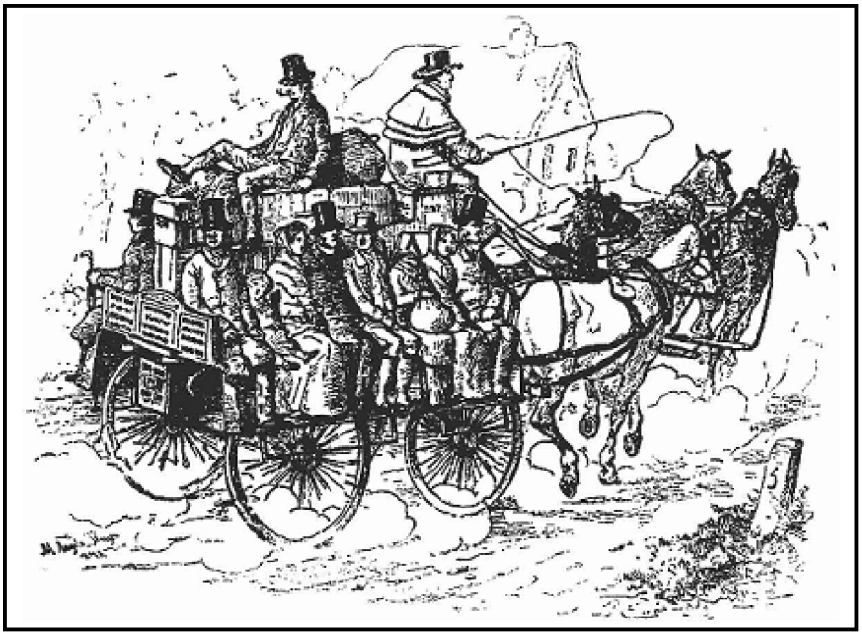


The original 'Bian'

The first Bians ran between Clonmel and Cashel, although initially they weren't very successful and Bianconi had to create some competition for himself in order to ensure a steady supply of customers. He did this by arranging for a second carriage to travel the same route but at a slower time so that people chose his bian and within the space of a few months his scheme had become firmly established. So much so that he added other routes and by the end of 1815 he had established connections between Clonmel, Limerick and Thurles. By 1821 he had expanded his services to Waterford, New Ross, Enniscorthy, Wexford and Cork. Along with an increase in the routes he travelled Bianconi also increased the size of his cars by developing the long car a four wheeled car which was drawn by four horses and could carry nineteen or twenty people including two on the luggage well and one beside the driver. Bianconi's service was unique in that he did not follow the main traffic routes but crossed between them, joining provincial towns at a time when all traffic was centred on Dublin[23]. In 1865 Lenihan records him as having over 900 horses which travelled over 4,000 miles daily

[22] Nowlan, p.88
[23] Nowlan, pp.84-5

and passed through twenty-three counties. He had fifty four-wheeled carriages, with two and more horses, travelling 1,930 miles; and sixty-six two-wheel one-horse cars travelling 1,604 miles[24].



The long car

The Bian's themselves were very distinctive as they were painted yellow and crimson with a serial number and a list of the towns the cars visited painted on the back of each car[25]. However as they were open cars passengers were unprotected from the weather so they were issued with large oil-cloth aprons which covered their knees and chests. They used their own umbrella's to protect their heads and the seats were wooden slats covered by cushions in order to promote drainage. They were also unusual in that travelling in a bian didn't have any of the social stigma which was usually associated with travelling on the outside seats of a coach.
The improvements in transport were matched by the improvements made in Limerick itself during the last decades of the eighteenth century which illustrates both the growing prosperity of Limerick and the damage which had been caused by the Williamite siege[26]. Although some advances had been made early in the century with the reclaiming of land outside of the West Watergate and the construction of the Mardyke quay along the Abbey River, it was only with the dismantling of the city walls in 1760 that development began in earnest. In 1762 a bridge was built to join the English town to the new Georgian housing development which was to

[24] Lenihan, pp.443-444
[25] Bianconi, p.67
[26] Herbert,

become Newtown Pery. This was a humpbacked bridge with steep inclines that proved dangerous in frosty and icy conditions[27] and it was eventually replaced in 1846 by Mathew Bridge. Ferrar records that in 1764 a quay was made from Ball's bridge to the canal and in 1767 a quay, known as Sir Harry's Mall, was built between Balls Bridge and St Francis's Abbey as well as a road which linked the New Bridge (now Mathew Bridge) to Newtown Pery . He also records the creation of a road from the New Square, near St John's Church (now John's Square), to Mungret road or Boher Buy and the widening of the route from Ball's Bridge over to the Quay by demolishing a row of houses which were built upon it and which obstructed the increased traffic. The date on which the original Ball's Bridge was constructed is unknown, local tradition states that it was built by Baal who was converted to Christianity by St Patrick at Singland during the fifth century[28]. However it has also been speculated that as the bridge was reputed to be owned by the Earl of Shannon whose family name was Boyle that 'Boyle's Bridge' could have been corrupted to Baal's Bridge or Ball's Bridge[29]. Archaeological evidence and dendochronological dating of the oak facing on the one of the piers suggests that the bridge may have been erected in the early thirteenth century[30]

While these improvements to Baals Bridge increased access between the Englishtown and Irishtown somewhat, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the merchants were demanding adequate port facilities and complaining about the poor access to the city from the county Clare side[31]. In order to address these problems the architect James Pain was commissioned to survey Thomond bridge in 1814, however it would be twenty years before he would be able to rebuild the bridge as it was necessary to build another bridge between Limerick and Clare in order to facilitate trade. In 1823 Parliament established the Limerick Bridge Commissioners who were formed from the leading representatives of the mercantile community and from the most prominent members of the landed interest. The commissioners were to oversee forty-seven projects including the rebuilding of Baals bridge and Thomond bridge and the creation of Wellesley bridge and Athlunkard bridge. Wellesley Bridge (now Sarsfield Bridge) was built by Alexander Nimmo, the Scottish engineer, and was completed in 1835 after eleven years of construction. It was named Wellesley Bridge after the Lord Lieutenant and it opened up a new westerly route into Clare and connected the city with its hinterlands in east and north Clare. Athlunkard bridge was begun in 1824 and completed in

[27] Lee & Jacobs, p.269
[28] Hill, p.37
[29] Joyce, p.16
[30] Lee & Jacobs, p.281
[31] Lee, & Jacobs, p.271

1830; along with the creation of the bridge the commissioners were also responsible for the creation of the roads which would connect it with Newtown Pery. The new Athlunkard street opened up a direct route into Newtown Pery via Bridge Street and the New Bridge (Mathew Bridge) which bypassed the traffic congestion caused by the quays[32]. Baal's Bridge, a four arch bridge was unable to cope with the increasing traffic and it was demolished and replaced with a single arch bridge designed by the Pain brothers in 1831.

Two other types of transport were being developed in conjunction with the turnpike road system, the non-turnpike road network and canal system. Both of these systems were in competition with the turnpike roads though in practise they were often complimentary to each other. Non-turnpike roads were to be built 'in straight lines from market town to market town'[33]. In 1739 the grand juries were given the power to acquire the land needed to build the new non-turnpike roads. Compensation was payable for the acquired land but as this was arbitrarily decided upon by the grand juries it caused hesitation amongst the larger land-owners. However it was soon discovered that building roads yielded 'a more profitable crop than farming' [34]. The non-turnpike roads were often in much better condition than the turnpike roads as recorded by Arthur Young for whom the term turnpike was 'synonymous for a vile road'[35]. However corruption was rife amongst the grand jurors and it soon became apparent that in some cases these roads were being to suit the larger landowners amongst their members or for their friends who wished to have private avenues built at the public's expense[36]. Although not all grand jury members or large landowners were corrupt and indeed several of them built non-turnpike roads out of their private funds. The era of canal building began in Ireland in 1715 although little work was carried out and it was not until 1729 when the Commissioners of Inland Navigation was established that real progress was made. The canals will be dealt with in a separate section.

Although the turnpike system had originally been envisaged as a supplement to the statute labour system for road maintenance it eventually came to replace it and statute labour was completely abolished in 1765. The Irish parliament was the first to abandon this unpopular system as it continued in England until 1835 and the French corvee system was only completely ended by the 1789 revolution[37]. However the abolition of statute labour was badly

[32] Lee & Jacobs, p.273
[33] Irish Statutes, Vol. 6, p.619
[34] Broderick, p.75
[35] Young, p.127
[36] Lecky, vol.3, p.398
[37] Broderick, p.84

handled in Ireland. Firstly, the act concerning it was passed in two parts; the 1759 act exempted ordinary labourers from the six-day labour requirements as they 'are generally considered to be so far burthensome to the poor and for that reason have not in many places been put in execution'[38]. This resulted in an even greater financial burden being placed on the tenant farmers who had still had to provide statute labour on the roads. Prior to this legislation the maintenance of roads had been the responsibility of the parish vestries, under a voluntary, if unpopular, scheme in which all men offered six days labour a year[39]. This change, in conjunction with the introduction of the land enclosures act, led to growing unrest and to the emergence of an underground movement which became known as the Levellers or Whiteboys.

These agitators first came to light in Tipperary although they eventually spread along the line of the turnpike road from Clonmel towards Cork via Clogheen, Ballyporeen, Kilworth and Rathcormac and towards Doneraile before spreading into the counties of Limerick and Kilkenny. It has been suggested that the involvement of tenant farmers shows that the 1759 road act was also one of the most likely causes of the outbreak of whiteboy activity as under the terms of this act the tenant farmers were obliged to provide carts at their own expense for the road works and to also pay an extra county cess in order to provide replacements for the newly exempted labourers[40].

The repeal of statute labour for day-labourers led to the questioning of the necessity of many of the road works schemes being carried out by those who were left bearing the substantial financial burden. The 1765 act abolished statute labour for all while also reducing the red tape surrounding the procedures for obtaining money for road works by formalising the presentment system. The act also repealed all previously existing road legislation concerning the grand jury and parish vestry systems of road maintenance. The turnpike roads which had been entitled to statute labour from adjacent parishes lost this assistance. This loss added to the financial worries of many of the turnpike trusts. It also initiated a period of intensive road building amongst the landowners as they took advantage of the presentment system. To fund road building and maintenance a corn bounty was introduced by the Irish Parliament on the inland carriage of corn from all parts of the country to Dublin. The corn bounty was to have a major influence on the turnpike roads due to the resultant traffic increase.

[38] Irish Statutes, Vol.7, p.669
[39] McBride, p.318
[40] Broderick, p.85

The turnpike roads were seen as directly benefitting the lands close to their routes; rents on these lands could be greatly increased and commerce increased in the towns and villages. However the bypassing or diversion of a road away from a town could have a detrimental effect on both the commerce and status of a town. The 1731 Newcastle-Limerick-Cork turnpike road originally passed through Bruff and Kilmallock and bypassed the small town of Charleville. When a new grand jury road was built to make the journey shorter between Cork and Limerick in 1837, Kilmallock was bypassed and the new road was rerouted through Charleville. As a result Charleville grew in size and its trade and commerce increased. By comparison Kilmallock, which had been a strategic military site in previous centuries, declined in trade, the town decreased in importance and many of its building were left to decay. Indeed it was described as 'a mass of ruins ... a picture of fallen grandeur'[41] by Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall on their tour of Ireland in the early 1840's.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century there was a wide variety of transport available for both passengers and goods. There were river navigations and canal systems; river and estuarine steamboats such as the Lady of the Shannon that plied between Limerick and Kilrush. There were several types of roads including turnpike roads run by the turnpike trusts, the privatised turnpike roads, and the mail coach roads as well as many cross roads and minor roads. In 1832 the roads had improved so much that the Limerick mail coach could travel at almost nine miles an hour[42], a great improvement on the four days travel time to Dublin in the mid-eighteenth century. However the era of the turnpike roads was almost at an end, the introduction of a new type of transport, the railway system, in 1834 sounded the death knell for the turnpike roads. In 1837 a select committee was formed to inquire into the monopolies held on the privatised turnpike road. Monopolies such as the Limerick-Naas turnpike, which had tolls of an ‘unusual character’, were seen as an imposition on travellers, a deterrent to the growth of passenger transport and as an impediment to free trade. This inquiry, in conjunction with the results of the 1836 Drummond Commission, which had completed the first comprehensive survey of road traffic in Ireland, advocated the adaptation of the railway system and demonstrated the inadequacy of the turnpike system for encouraging the growth of trade and the transport of goods.

The railroads were in direct competition with the turnpike roads, they were often built on or beside the turnpike roads and they competed for the same business. This is illustrated by the

[41] Hall, Vol.1, p.358
[42] Broderick, p.203

Limerick-Charleville turnpike road whose traffic was greatly reduced with the opening of the Waterford and Limerick railway in 1848. The spread of the railway system also coincided with the Great Famine and both had a detrimental effect on the turnpike roads. The Famine caused a severe decline in the amount of market garden produce to be transported, as well as a reduction in the potato market, and the railways captured the majority of the remaining goods transport. Several of the privatised turnpike roads reverted to public management in 1848, one of which was the Naas-Limerick turnpike. Within the next decade all of the privatised roads had reverted to public management and the turnpike status of many roads had been allowed to lapse. Then in 1858 legislation decreed that all turnpike roads would lose their status and be handed over to grand jury management. The trustees were required to sell off the toll houses and toll gates and give the proceeds to the grand juries. The Newcastle-Limerick-Charleville road was one of the roads which lost its turnpike status on the 5 April 1858.

The poor conditions of the roads in the early eighteenth century had created the need for the turnpike roads as Ireland needed a cheap and efficient transport system in order to become economically viable. Turnpike roads were also a response to the substantial increase in passenger traffic. However, road building and maintenance require extremely large sums of money, much greater than the amounts which could be raised at the toll gates. This was one of the main reasons for the eventual failure of the turnpike system. Toll evasion also played a large part in the non-profitability of the turnpike roads as did the chronic bad management and financial fraud which had plagued the turnpike roads since their inception. Although the turnpikes provided the backbone of present trunk transport system the fact that they were not standardised and that each trust operated as a separate entity, even on through-routes such as the Newcastle-Limerick-Cork road, severely hampered their cost-effectiveness and their efficiency.

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