

... EVER SO GOOD OR EVER SO CHEAP...

Joseph Sexton, papermaker

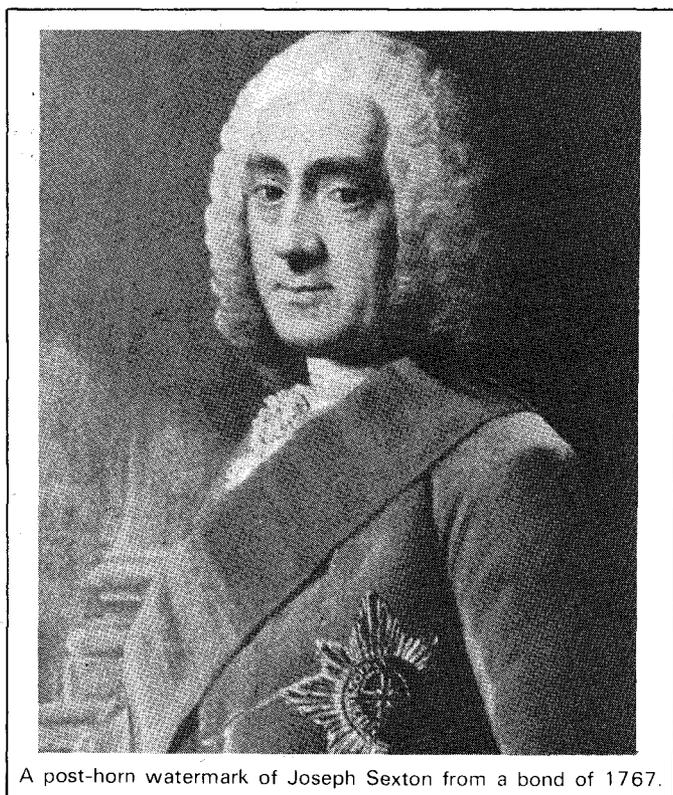
by Alf MacLochlainn

and cheaper; and sacrifice a little present and precarious to future and and permanent profit. Acquire the public confidence in the goodness and reasonableness of your manufacture, and your future will be solid and lasting both to you and your family, if they will travel in your steps... I am, with that esteem, which you deserve from all Ireland, and from all those who wish it as well as I do, Sir, your faithful servant, Chesterfield.



In London, in the year 1752, on the eight of April, the Earl of Chesterfield took his elegant pen in hand to write words of commendation to the Limerick papermaker, Joseph Sexton:

Sir, I am sincerely glad of the reward and encouragement which your industry hath met with. I never doubted but that it would; for, though imaginary merit commonly complains of being unrewarded, real merit, sooner or later, in some shape or other, seldom fails of success. You have already experienced this, and will, I hope and believe, experience it every day more and more. Your paper already wants but very little of equalling the best that any other country furnishes, and I see no reason why you should not bring it soon to such a point of perfection as to supply all the demands of Ireland, and possibly some of England; for at present we import a great deal from other countries. Let me give you one piece of advice, though I believe you want it less than most manufacturers in Ireland: Never think your paper either good enough or cheap enough, be it ever so good or ever so cheap, but always endeavour to make it both better



A post-horn watermark of Joseph Sexton from a bond of 1767.

JOSEPH SEXTON, the recipient of this characteristic Chesterfield letter, was a member of a family long prominent in Limerick. He was a prosperous merchant who, in 1747, began the erection of a paper mill which was complete in 1749. The existence of specimens of his product from this date places Sexton among the three earliest Irish papermakers from whom identified samples survive. (There is, of course, documentary evidence for the existence of other mills at much earlier dates.)

In 1749 there appeared an edition of **Biggs's Military History of Europe**, printed at Limerick, "On Paper made by Joseph Sexton". The copy acquired by the National Library of Ireland in 1932 was a well-thumbed item that had seen good service in its two centuries. One likes to think of it in the pocket of some keen military student tramping the battlefields of the Continent, if not himself engaged in battle, and this is by way of an apology for the state of the copy and the sad condition of its

paper. Only on a folded and tipped-in diagram was it possible to discern Sexton's distinctive countermark: I SEXTON with a crowned harp between the initial and the surname.

In the same year, 1749, Sexton presented to Parliament a petition for support of his undertaking, stating: "Your petitioner has, with great labour, for two years last past, and at the expense of a thousand pounds sterl. and upwards, erected a double paper mill within the Liberties of the city of Limerick aforesaid on a river supplied with a sufficient and perpetual flow of water, by which the mill may, at all seasons whatsoever, work without any interruption: That, to perfect the said double mill, he has therein erected a compleat water engine for the constant supply of pure spring water, in order to work always therewith, any quantity of paper to a just and equal degree of whiteness: And, that your petitioner actually makes all sorts of writing, printing and brown paper, as good in their kinds as any whatever, whereof he has specimens to lay before your honours.

"Your petitioner is sensible that your honours are thoroughly apprized of the great national advantages that must arise from the manufacture of paper within this kingdom; the saving of large sums of money annually paid to Holland and France for this commodity, the employment of numbers of the industrious poor of this kingdom in the gathering of rags, and in the various branches of the manufacture itself; as also of the happy consequences, which in time may be justly expected from a parliamentary encouragement of this branch of trade in this nation, viz. making such quantities of good paper as might enable this kingdom in its turn to export it with advantage to foreign markets, particularly to old Spain, for the supply of the American dominions of that monarchy..."

The petition concludes with conventional paragraphs beseeching the favour of Parliament's bounty for the petitioner's large family and is approved by numerous officials

and gentlemen of Limerick and the vicinity.

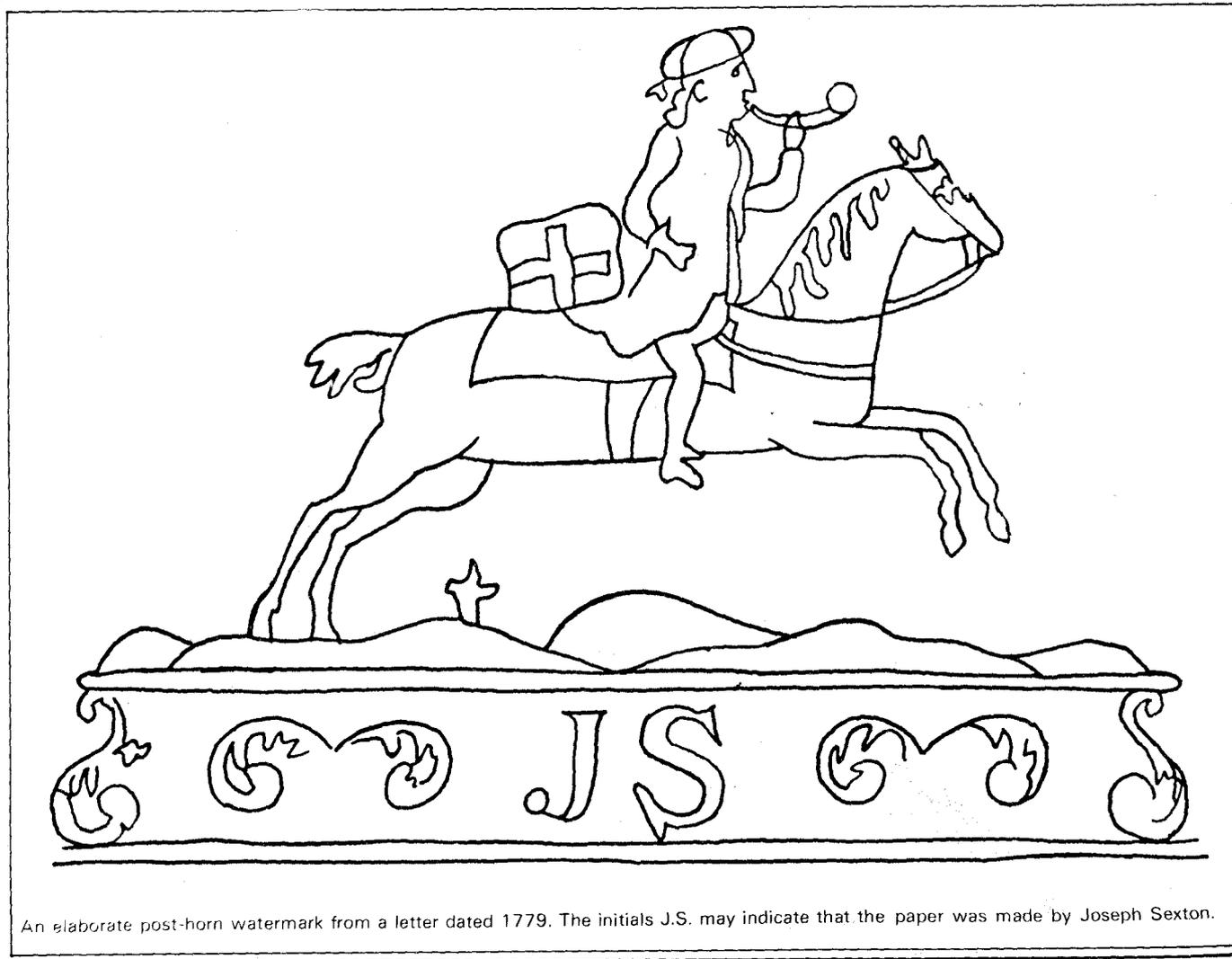
Apparently, great legislative bodies moved no more rapidly two hundred years ago than in more recent times and it was not until 1751 that Sexton's appeal for support reached the floor of the House of Commons in Dublin.

In the meantime, in 1750, he had been awarded a premium of forty pounds by the Dublin Society "for introducing the most complete mill for making white paper". That learned and philanthropic body had begun its sponsorship of the papermaking industry a couple of years earlier with a campaign to encourage the collection of rags, and their purchase and delivery to papermakers.

The petition, like all appeals for subsidy, was referred to a committee, which reported favorably that Sexton deserved encouragement. The matter was referred to the Finance Committee and finally two hundred pounds was awarded to the patient industrialist. This grant was presumably the occasion of Chesterfield's message of congratulation. The petition itself was handsomely printed, with a pro patria mark and an I SEXTON with crowned harp countermark.

If we feel that two hundred pounds was scant reward from the government for his enterprise, we should bear in mind that it was the sum usually granted to industrial applicants for help, and further, that two years later Sexton was granted an additional five hundred pounds from the same source. Assistance from government, then, and the small prize from the Dublin Society had furnished him with almost 75 percent of his stated initial invested capital.

The Liberties of the City of Limerick, an old administrative area, extended a good deal beyond even the modern boundaries of the city. The Sexton home and mill were at Ballyclogh, between three and four miles northeast of the city, near the present main road to Dublin. The river of whose unfailling supply of water the petition spoke so highly was the Mulcair, famous



An elaborate post-horn watermark from a letter dated 1779. The initials J.S. may indicate that the paper was made by Joseph Sexton.

among sportsmen in modern times for its fishing potential.

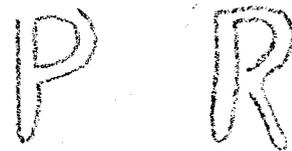
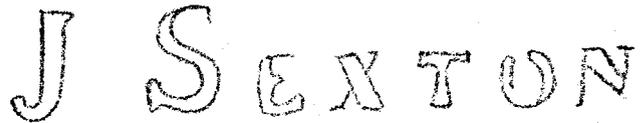
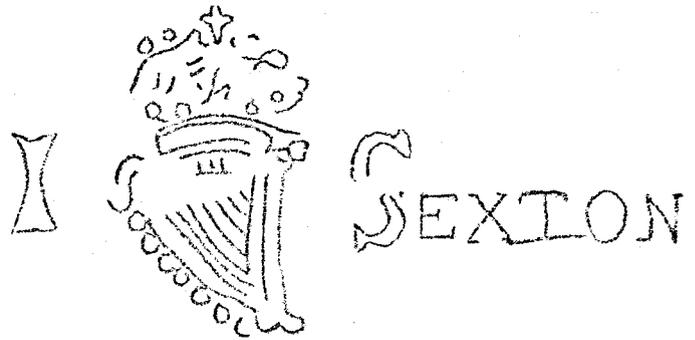
Not so many miles away, at Castlough on the shores of Lough Derg, the lower of the great lakes of the Shannon system, was the home of the Parker-Hutchinson family. Family papers and papers from the Castlough estate are now in the National Library of Ireland and the collection contains many documents from the period in which we are here interested. As is usual with such domestic collections of loose papers, the Parker-Hutchinson muniments are a valuable source of specimens of locally produced paper. We find amongst them many pieces from Ballyclogh and specimens as well from Ballysimon, a neighboring mill on another Shannon tributary.

A bond of 1767 shows a post-horn watermark subscribed H I BERNIA, with the countermark J SEXTON. Both this watermark and the crowned harp previously mentioned clearly place Sexton's watermarking practice in the tradition of the general title "The Hibernia Watermark". Sexton's choice of the harp emblem may in part have been occasioned by its use in the device of Thomas Slator, his Dublin competitor.

Joseph Sexton died in 1782, "having amassed a considerable fortune", says one historian, but earlier in the same year he had assigned an interest in his mill at Ballyclogh, then in the possession of Michael Sexton and others, to Patrick Ryan, a shop-keeper of Limerick City. Thus in documents among the Parker-Hutchinson papers later than 1782 we find the marks PR and P RYAN.

A most interesting document is a case stated for counsel's opinion, which can be dated from internal evidence to about 1795. It consists of six folios, and as far as one can tell without elaborate analysis (beyond the resources of this writer and impermissible in view of the respect due the document), all made of the same stuff. Two of the leaves bear the mark LIMERICK superscribed S; two of them bear the initials PR; one is unmarked; one bears an elaborate post-horn mark with the initial S. And in a letter of 1779 we find this same elaborate mark with initials JS.

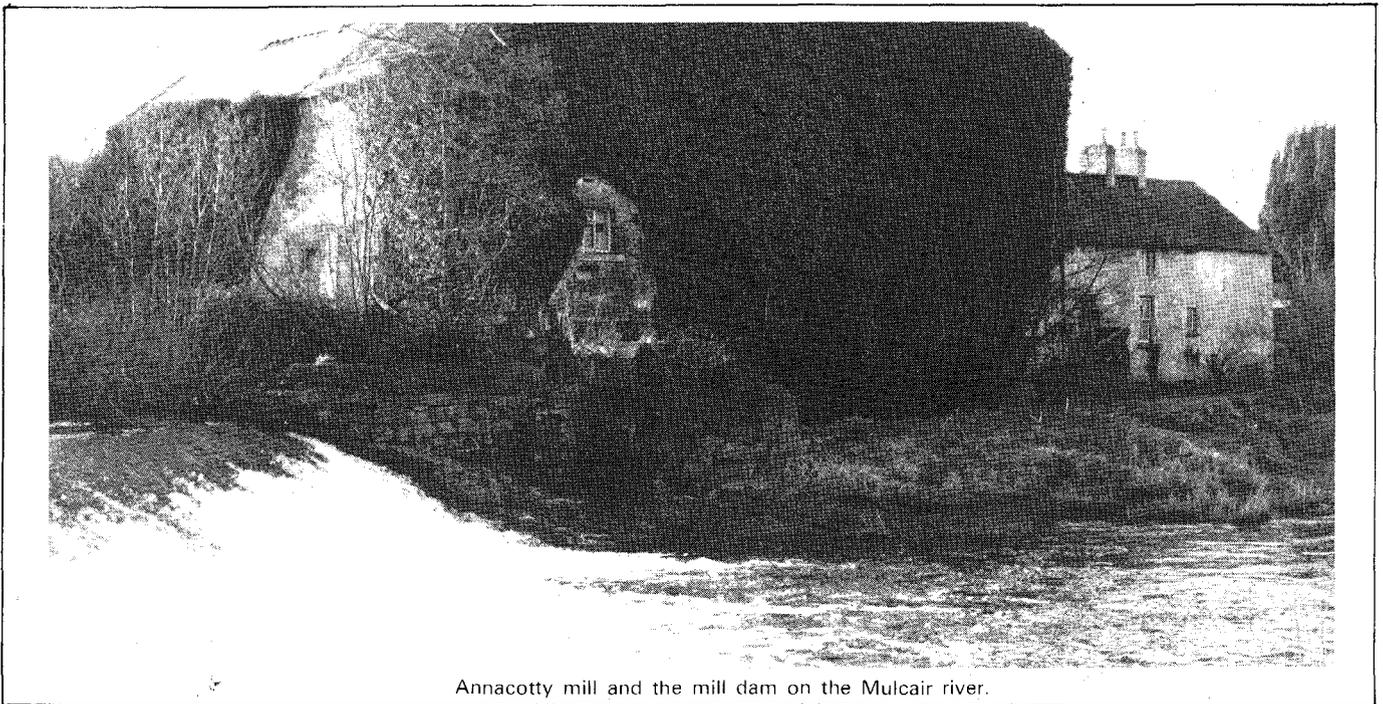
One is naturally tempted to assume that all of these marks come from the mill at Ballyclogh but unfortunately this attribution requires slight reservation. The neighbouring mill at Ballysimon, sometime property of one Samuel Dickson, was, at least in 1780 and 1781 in the possession of one David Sheehan and it is not impossible that the initial S in the marks mentioned should relate to him. Further, we should refer to the Sullivan family of Cork, prominent papermakers in that area. The mark J SULLIVAN, of which JS could be a variant, is to be found in other Parker-Hutchinson documents, so we can feel certain that the variety of paper found among them was not



Countermarks of Joseph Sexton and Patrick Ryan.

always purchased from the nearest local source.

It seems more than likely, however, that these S marks are from Ballyclogh. Even if they are not, Sexton remains the most important papermaker of his area. One historian states that his mills produced 30,000 reams annually. (But another states that several mills in the area together produced annually 20,000 reams).



Annacotty mill and the mill dam on the Mulcair river.

We have no evidence that there was any close association between Sexton and the Earl of Chesterfield during the latter's brief tenure of the office of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1745 and 1746. Chesterfield's letter to Sexton may have been no more than the conventional reply of a benevolent aristocrat to a client's appeal for patronage. Nevertheless it is sound advice to a papermaker at any time or place.

"Never think your paper either good enough or cheap enough, be it ever so good or ever so cheap, but always endeavour to make it both better and cheaper... acquire the public confidence in the goodness and reasonableness of your manufacture, and your fortune will be solid and lasting".



Ballyclough (or Balliclogh) mill.

P R
 LY SIMON
 P R
 S
 LIMERICK

Countermarks of Patrick Ryan, the mill at Ballysimon, another of Ryan, and one which may be of the Ballysimon mill when it was in possession of David Sheehan.

In 1749 a paper mills was opened at Ballyclough, Annacotty, within the Liberties of Limerick by Joseph Sexton. He had previously been the owner of a bleach green in the same place. This was the first paper mills in Munster, and remained the only one until 1763. The following was the advertisement announcing the commencement of the mills:-

"Whereas Joseph Sexton of the City of Limerick, Merchant, has at a great expence built two-Paper-Mills within the Liberties of said City; one of which is employed in making writing and printing paper, the other in brown pressing and whited brown paper; and for perfecting this valuable manufacture actually employs the best hands from England and elsewhere. He expects in a short time to produce as good paper of all sorts as any imported into this kingdom; of his printing paper the present is a specimen ... will pay from 1d. to 3d. per pound for rags ..." Munster Journal. 15th May, 1749.

In January 1750, he announced that the first supplies of writing paper were available:-

"Joseph Sexton ... has the pleasure to acquaint the publick that he can now compleately answer the expectation given in a former advertisement by large quantities of Writing Paper made at his Mills lately erected within the Liberties of this city and now ready for sale.

"That the perfection with which he has brought this valuable manufacture has been honoured with the approbation and encourage-

ment of the Dublin Society".

In 1751 Sexton received a government grant of £200 towards his industry, and in 1753 he received a further £500.

Sexton continued to manufacture paper at his mills until his death on 24th of June 1782, and most of Andrew Welsh's publications were printed on his paper. Lenihan states that he manufactured 30,000 reams yearly, but of course this is a preposterously over-rated figure. He was married to a daughter of Henry Long, a Limerick printer.

In 1785 the mills were offered for setting, and in November 1813 they were owned by Peter Arthur.

In 1816 they were owned by Paul Cudmore who manufactured "writing paper, tea paper and whited brown paper of any size and pasteboard". Cudmore offered them for sale in July 1821.

In 1824 the mills were owned by James Ryan, in 1840 by John Garvey, and in 1861, when they ceased to function, by Patrick Cudmore.

Other Limerick paper-manufacturers were Pat Waters of Bank Place, in 1824, and in 1840 Daniel Brennan of leverstown Mills, John Mullins of Rosbrien Mills, and T. Garvey of Ballingoola Mills. The latter mills was closed in 1861.

(Limerick Printers and Printing" by Robert Herbert, Limerick City Library, 1942).