

The Limerick boy who set sail for Canada and built a media empire

From Croagh to Ottawa: Christopher William Bunting boarded a ship at the Limerick Docks, just 13 years-old, and ended up a leading figure in the Canadian Parliament

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WHEN Christopher William Bunting was born on 11 September 1837 in Amigan, Croagh, his parents William Bunting and Jane Crowe, could not have imagined where his future lay. In the 1850s, following the death of his father Christopher, his mother Jane and younger sister Wilhelmina boarded the Jessie at Limerick Docks and set sail for a new life in Canada. The Jessie was owned by Francis Spaight and would travel frequently between Limerick and Canada transporting passengers to new lives across the ocean and goods such as lumber and flour back to Ireland.

The Bunting family quickly settled in Toronto where Christopher continued his schooling at St James' parish school. He soon moved into an apprenticeship at the Globe, where at the age of fourteen his first steps into journalism was as a compositor. While there, he rose to the rank of supervisor and contributed some local journalism to the paper. After leaving the Globe in 1866, he worked for several years in wholesale grocery.

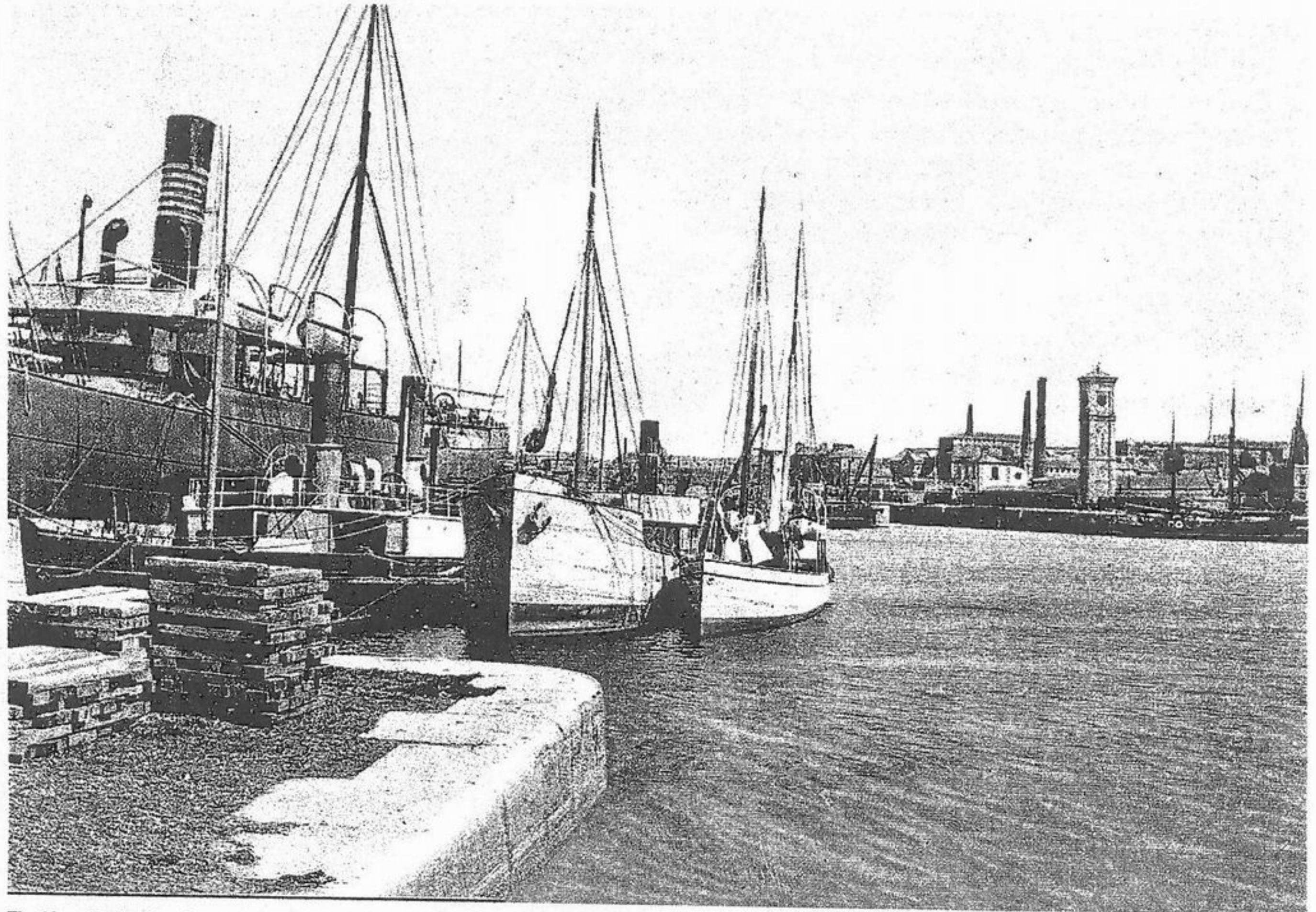
In 1868, he married twenty-four year old Mary Elizabeth Ellis a native of England. They had five sons and a daughter. In 1873, he moved to Clifton (Niagara Falls). It was here that Bunting specialised in importing sugar with his then business partner of Henry W. Bailey.

In 1877, he once again returned to the world of publishing. That year he entered into partnership with John Riordon and became co-owner of the Toronto Mail. Though Bunting wrote editorials infrequently, he always maintained a close supervision over the news and editorial departments.

While growing his newspaper empire Bunting also entered politics and in 1878, he was elected to the Canadian House of Commons as a Member of the Conservatives. He was one of the Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's important advisers. His widow mother and unmarried sister were living with him until at least 1881.

He was defeated in the 1882 election after the Liberals were returned to power. Bunting attempted to lure members from the Liberal caucus. He was implicated in a plot of bribery in 1884. He left the country in May for two months to avoid testifying before a judicial inquiry. In criminal proceedings, which concluded in April 1885, Bunting and his co-conspirators were found not guilty.

From 1887 onward The Mail, which had previously vocally supported the Conservative party distanced itself from political ties to the party. It began to make calls to resist French and Catholic influence



The Limerick Docks where the last stop for Christopher Bunting before he left Limerick in the 1850s, never to return

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in the country. It also added support for commercial union with the United States and endorsed prohibition of alcohol.

By the federal election of March 1891, the opportunities to effect an electoral revolution in Canadian politics along the lines of Anglo-Protestant ascendancy had slipped away.

That autumn Bunting initiated negotiations to reach an accommodation with the Conservative government in Ottawa and these were renewed in 1893. They culminated in another business triumph for Bunting. On 7 February 1895, he secured the purchase of the Empire, possibly for as little as \$30,000. Retaining control of the renamed Daily Mail and Empire, Riordon and Bunting rationalized the morning market for newspapers in Toronto and formed a new, official Conservative journal in a single stroke.

By the end of 1895, after the major coup of his career Bunting began to

fall ill. He died at his Queen's Park residence in Toronto of Bright's disease at the age of 58 and died on the 14 January 1896. Christopher's sister Wilhelmina outlived him by just over a month, passing away on February 28, 1895 of pneumonia.

It would take six months before the news of his death was reported in the local press in Limerick. Even then, it was by way of a letter to the Limerick Chronicle from China.

"To the Editor of the Limerick Chronicle. Canton, China, June 15th, 1896.

Sir—I frequently see in your paper notices of Limerick men who have been successful abroad. The following is from the Toronto Mail and Empire, a paper that claims for itself a position and influence second to none on the great American Continent: "The death of Mr Chris Wm Bunting on January 14th of the present year, caused a feeling of intense sorrow throughout the entire community, in which he had been for so many years recognised as one of the foremost business man and most honourable citizens.

His commanding abilities, not less than his uniform courtesy and kindness to all with whom he came in contact had earned for him a royal portion of friendship and af-

fection. During a long and arduous career he has been enabled to make for himself a name for integrity, honour, and liberality, which will long live in the hearts of not only those related to him by blood, but of all who possessed the privilege of an acquaintance with him.

The story of his life is the story of a man, who was built not to follow, but to lead, and to follow whom was a pride to those who worked under him. Mr C. W. Bunting understood the business of a journalist in a most complete manner. He had learned the practical part of the printing business as a boy, and possessed a varied and extensive experience of commercial life.

On taking hold of the Mail in 1877, Mr Bunting gathered around him a staff, the members of which were as devoted to him as they were to the interests of the paper. Entering the Parliament of the Dominion in 1878, he displayed political ability, and added to his large store of political knowledge.

He was a very able speaker, possessing an easy flow of language, a fine voice, and a magnificent presence. He took a deep interest in educational movements, he was widely read, a lifelong student of literature, and knew his Shakespeare as few

knew it. His literary Judgement was of a high character. As a respected member of the Masonic Order, his memory will long be cherished, while his interest in civic affairs displayed intense loyalty to honest government, and a desire to see Toronto take a foremost position among Canadian cities. Mr Bunting left Limerick in the early fifties with his mother and sister, in the good ship Jessie, of Limerick, Captain Dan Gorman. They had very little money and only such friends as they made for themselves.

He had only a small amount of education, yet by perseverance he educated himself, made friends, and was honoured by his fellow citizens.'

He had many relatives in Limerick, but I do not think he was known to the present generation. The writer saw him off on his voyage, and has never seen or heard from him since, but although long absent from Limerick he loves the good old city, and is proud to hear of a friend and relative being so successful in a far country. Yours truly, Stephen Wm Goggin. Master S.S. 'Honam.'

As for the author of this letter, Stephen William Goggin, he passed away in Hong Kong on July 23, 1900 at the age of fifty-seven.