

World Poultry Congress's visit to Robert C Barton, 1930

If more Irish politicians retired into public life and devoted the time and energy given to politics in helping some Irish industry or creating new industries, Ireland would be a changed country in a few decades¹

In July and August, 1930, Robert C Barton's poultry farm at Drummin was the subject of several articles in *Irish Times* (31st July with photos, below) and the *Wicklow People* (2nd August), where it was described as the largest and most advanced in Ireland.

As the large amount of detail is really only of interest to Irish poultry historians, only a brief synopsis is given here. Two years previously Barton began the enterprise with the advice of Dr Fred Elford, Experimental Farm, Ottawa and President of the World Poultry Science Association. There were two sections: hatching, rearing and preparation of table birds, and outdoors.

The central focus of the first was the incubator with 16,000 egg capacity, which ran at a constant temperature of 86-90°. Each batch of eggs was numbered and dated and traceable to their original suppliers, principally Major Barrow, Castlebellingham and Mr Stuart, Laragh Castle.

The main shed's (originally the stables) capacity of 20,000 (no sunlight or open air – innovative for the time) was divided into age group compartments. Newly hatched chicks were reared in batteries of 120, one top of one another and individually supplied with food and water via water pipes, which connected all buildings, while the central store distributed food by chutes. They were transferred from six weeks to a 4,500 room, then to a 6,500 room, then upstairs (no artificial heating) where 5,000 awaited 'finishing' at 12 weeks. Another 5,500 immature birds were in an adjoining room.



One of the houses and some of the birds on Ireland's biggest poultry farm, near Glendalough, County Wicklow.

¹ *Irish Independent*, 4th August, this was praise for Barton in the introduction to the article covering the visit

When killed, they were plucked by two mechanical pluckers, finished by hand, prepared, packed, stamped with Drummin Farm and taken daily by lorry to Dublin. Sussex and Rhode Island breeds were the ideal table bird. Hygiene was strict; their medicine chest only had three bottles of the simplest remedies. Their annual average loss was 10%.

An American-oil-heating system complemented electricity and excess power went to the sawmill. About 4-5 tons of food was consumed weekly; the waste went to the extensive piggeries. It was serviced by day and night staff (80 in total) who appreciated the heat in the winter; electric air fans kept them cool in the summer.

The outdoors farm was in various sections, 2,000 each were at two age stages with cockerels penned in separate enclosures. The older were trained to roost in trees during daylight and were brought inside in the evening. When fully reared they were brought into a laying house where artificial light extended laying time. The trap-netting system, designed by Barton, used to collect eggs was a major international innovation; it reduced labour costs by 25%, two persons could deal with 2,000 hens. One person, with a trolley, opened each cage took out the bird and egg, replaced the bird, and weighed the egg for a running tabulation of efficiency by pedigree; 300 eggs per year was not uncommon.

Elsewhere there were 1,600 Canadian Pekin ducks and 200 geese, all hatched via the incubator, with artificial streams and ponds to supply water. According to one Canadian this “beat everything they have at Glendalough House”.²

Turnover was about one million table birds and as many eggs per year. In 1930 the output was already 27,000 hens, 3,500 ducks, and 225 geese. Even with competition from small farmers who lived near the capital, Barton was unable to meet the demand and had no thoughts of export. He believed that there was “a wonderful future before the Irish Poultry farmer, who will not shirk hard work, unceasing vigilance and acquiring of a thorough knowledge of husbandry methods”.

Dr Fred Elford said in the two years the farm had made wonderful headway “where you have fairly good climatic conditions and are right up against your own market in Dublin. There are not many places where this mode of farming could be adopted, because I understand that most of the poultry are kept on small farms, but here you have an example of what is possible by the adoption of up-to-date methods, coupled with good management and absolute cleanliness.” He concluded “I have been in more than thirty countries and have never seen better chickens than those raised in Mr Barton’s batteries”.

² Apparently foxes were not a problem, but there doesn’t seem to have been any preventive measures

This was good news for the Department of Agriculture whose policy was to impose quality control measures, via inspection and licensing, to boost egg exports and had passed the Agricultural Produce Act (Eggs) in 1924 with amendments in 1930.

The reason for the sudden media interest was due to the 4th World Poultry Congress in London; Ireland had a national stand, which was attended by senior officials of the Department of Agriculture and exhibitors and received considerable media coverage as of public interest³. On its conclusion there was an 11-day organised tour of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, which included a two day visit to the Irish Free State, as guests of the Irish government, where they visited the Munster Institute, Cork, and Glendalough House with side trips to Killarney and Glendalough.

At this time the Cosgrave government was very pro-active in inviting delegations to Ireland with well-organised hospitality as part of its foreign relations policy. Minister of Agriculture, Patrick Hogan, said in his welcome to the delegation in Cork, “I met Mr. Elford in Dublin in 1929 when he reminded me of this congress and invited us to participate. We did not need much persuasion. We regarded it as a clear duty to do so. This is, to a great extent, a country of small farms, small capital and big families”.

This was probably the high point of generous Government hospitality prior to the impact of the Great Depression, there is no sense in the newspapers reports that this was an agricultural issue, it wasn't mentioned. By and large Ireland was affected negatively later than more developed countries largely due to its traditional agricultural self-sufficiency.

This was a busy time, two weeks previously 200 delegates from the Inter-Parliamentary Union Congress. London, came for a three day trip and were at a government-hosted dinner at the Mansion House, two receptions at Leinster House and the Vice Regal Lodge where Governor General, James McNeill, held a tea party in their honour with 2,000 guests; then treated to tours of the National Museum and St. James's Gate brewery followed by day trips to the Boyne valley, with tea in Stackallen Castle, and Glendalough. The latter, accompanied by Richard Mulcahy, Minister of Local Government, senior TDs from all parties and the Speaker Dr. Michael Hayes; heard a lecture by Prof R A Stewart Macalister in English and French and Dr Adolf Mahr in German, visited the ruins, had lunch in the Royal Hotel and then went to Woodenbridge, when they were joined by De Valera. They had tea in the Hotel, no doubt, to renditions of Thomas Moore.

At the same time about 90 New Zealand farmers were visiting as part of a European fact-finding mission – Smithfield Market, the Agricultural Farm Glasnevin (dairy farm, piggeries, plant research), Munster Institute, Lord Daresbury's Loobagh herd at Mount Coote, Killmallock, and T A Clark's Aberdeen Angus herd at Farran, Cork; hospitality was hosted by the Irish Free State National

³ See appendix for list of Irish Free State delegates, some of whom appear in the text

Committee and Department of Agriculture. They had level-two hospitality: senior departmental officials and agricultural instructors, but no government ministers.

The Glendalough House visit was covered by the national media⁴ in a sober fashion; the following account from the *Wicklow People*⁵ is informal and probably a more accurate portrayal even if the national stereotypes might make one wince.

Sixty Countries Represented - Visit of Poultry Experts to Mr. R C Barton's farm

Last week details were given of a visit of our representative to Mr R C Barton's great poultry farm at Drummin, This week, it is with pleasure the visit of over 300 poultry experts to see for themselves what a go-ahead Irishman can accomplish in scientific poultry production. Those 300 visitors included 293 of the delegates to the World Poultry Congress in London last week, who were touring the Saorstát over the weekend at the invitation of the Department of Agriculture, and the remainder were the most prominent officials of our country's agricultural department.

I have seen Spaniards – and jolly fighting sailor ladies, too – Italians, apart from ice-cream merchants, Japanese, who are all as much alike as peas, Americans, with their unmistakable swank and bluster and questions, the Teutonic features of the German, the vivacious gestures of the Frenchman, and painted doll-like appearance of the French girls, etc. But it was the first time I saw typical, pronounced, educated samples of so many nationalities bunched together, particularly under the branches of good fellowship and camaraderie.

In that 300 of a group were officials and poultry keepers from nearly 60 distinct nationalities. The big, sombre, be-whiskered Russian; the stout, bubbling, dark Italian; the tall talkative Yanks, full of inquisitive questions drawled out so tantalisingly, with his gold teeth flashing at every grin; the German; the Czecho Slovakian, full of that spirit which has turned a down-trodden people into an industrial people in a decade; the Australian and New Zealander, full of enthusiasm; the Canadian, so keen to learn; the Englishman, superior, indifferent, careless; the Japanese so courteous, so self-effacing; the Danish ladies that tried hard to speak their English; the Dutch ladies that did not wear the patched skirts; the French girls, who presented the perfect peach-like faces; the Spaniard and Argentinean, so much alike in swarthy, and unassuming in their manners – one could look around and pick them out with almost faultless accuracy.

With my little party from Wicklow that included Miss Codd, the poultry instructress, back from her London visit, where she had been an official delegate to the World Exhibition and Congress; Mr G P

⁴ *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, 4th August

⁵ 9th August

Byrne, secretary of the County Committee of Agriculture; and Mr E McGowan , agricultural instructor. I was ‘first in the field’ and received the greetings of the genial giant Mr Kehy that able steward on whom Mr Barton relies with every confidence

Mr R C Barton strode out from his library, into his lovely garden, and extended to each of us that warm hand-clasp, that genial smile, which characterises him: and cordially invited indoors to rest while awaiting the delegates. We met Prof Tweedy and Miss Tweedy, Miss Byrne⁶, the extremely efficient secretary to our host, and were introduced by Mr Barton to his kinswomen.

The big charabancs⁷ rolled up, and the ‘motley gathering’ was one by one disembarked on the gravel drive opposite the stately mansion. Their first glance was for the beautiful house, the second was to try and focus on the owner – the owner of such a mansion, whose chickens they had come to see, the owner who was a farmer! And surprise when they saw that typical aristocrat, stepping forward to extend the heartiest of Irish greetings to one of Ireland’s loveliest estates. They stared around them, commenting quite audibly, particularly the outspoken Americans, “Fancy a poultry husbandman residing in such a place”, said one old lady. Yes, fancy an American admitting surprise about anything!

They did not see in that smiling face, the aristocrat turned practical worker, the leader of men in armies leading Ireland in agriculture, or the politician whose name is written in indelible ink and memory on Ireland’s first International Treaty of Peace, turned to the more homely, and, perhaps, more beneficial purposes! One cannot present in such a commentary the inborn grace and gentlemanliness with which the ‘poultry keeper’ moved among his guests, with a word here, a handshake there, a smile and welcome for all.

Big Mr F J Merrick, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture; and equally big Mr W F Prendergast, inspector; Dr J H Hinchcliff, director of agriculture, with eyes for all that went on around him, and the deepest bass voice one ever listened to; Mr T J O’Connell, chief inspector; Mr B Fitzsimons, representing Mr Hogan, Minister, who recollected good old days in Bray; Mr D J McGrath, who so wonderfully organised the Free State section of the exhibition in London, and was disappointed in the end by being unable to attend himself; Mr F M Walshe, Mr R G Whelan, Mr T J Gallagher, and other officials of the Department, came and went, making the guests feel at home, giving them information, leading them to the places of interest, introducing them to Mr Barton, to Mr Robinson⁸, etc.

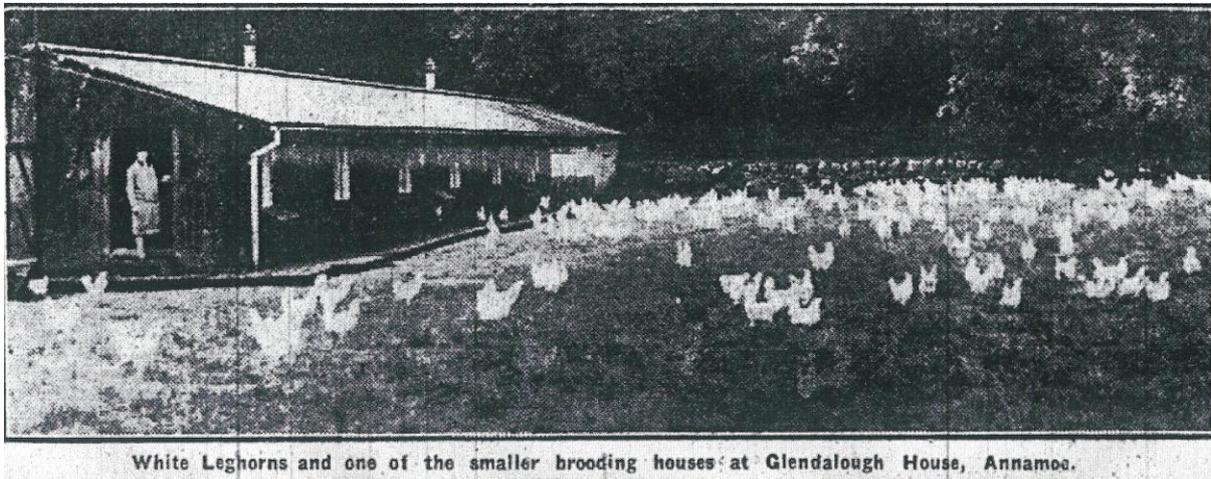
⁶ A Miss N C Byrne was a delegate, as was R C Barton

⁷ Supplied by Thomas Cook and Son (organised by Wm Giles); they probably had the contract for the whole tour but may have sub-contracted the Irish section. A charabanc was an early open-topped bus commonly used for tours, work and school outings, by 1930 covered coaches were the norm, especially for important international visitors, but were sometimes called by their older name

⁸ Possibly T R Robinson, congress vice president, Westminster, London

A few of the more prominent visitors were Mr Francis, Director of the Congress; Mr F C Elford, Vice President of the World's Congress; Prof Morley Jull, Chief Poultry Husbandman of the USA, Washington etc.

Mr Robinson led off the first party, nearly all Yankee folk, to see the outdoor poultry runs. Miss Byrne, shepherded the next bunch of about 50, and Miss Codd talked herself hoarse for the benefit of the third group, who seemed to have included all the inquisitive folk. "How long is that shed?" "How many fowl does it hold?" "How big a staff is employed?" "What are the scales for?" "How do you manage the trap-nests?" "Isn't it all so beautiful, and so clean?" etc., etc. This group met Mr. Robinson's coming back, and with a strategy that told cunning, he wanted to know "How many would prefer tea at the marquee to tramping through damp grass looking at so many hens?" Carried unanimously! 'And so we all walked back again' as the song puts it.



Back by the duck's stream and lakes, through the lovely old wood, and up to the house again. Miss Byrne led the way to the hatchery, and certainly the visitors were now genuinely impressed. They poured out questions about the incubator that holds 16,000 eggs, and hatches 2,500 every week; about the 5,000 little chicks in the next room, the other thousands in the adjoining quarters, and right up to the last place of all. Some of the dear old ladies demurred at the temperature, the smell of so many fowl, the noise of the eternal chattering of the chickens, but the majority wanted to see it all, and went back twice, and even oftener. It made an Irish heart swell to hear so many people praise the Irishman and his enterprise.

Having partaken of a sumptuous tea, Prof Morley Jull expressed the gratitude of all the visitors for the hospitality extended to them in that charming setting, to the Free State Government for organising the tour, to the Irish section of the World Congress, and to Mr Barton in an especial manner⁹. Delegates

⁹ "Your wonderful plant might well be emulated in any country on the globe"

from the 50 or 60 countries had enjoyed seeing his model farm and poultry plant which might be well emulated in any country on the globe. This candid praise was loudly applauded.

Dr Hinchcliff, on behalf of the Saorstat Government and the Irish visitors, offered thanks to Mr Barton for his kindness. He told a story that he heard from one of the staff a year or two ago, who, when asked would she be well satisfied to get all the 60 eggs hatched in a particular clutching, said she would be more so if she got 61. He had waited throughout Congress how to get 61 chickens out of 60 eggs! However he was satisfied, he said, if it was ever to be accomplished it would be in Drummin Farm (applause)

Then came a very pleasant and typical surprise. A member of the Italian contingent jumped up on the steps, and in the name of the Italian contingent, and representing Cooks¹⁰, conveyed to the Irish Government so beautiful, so lovely, his very great thanks. The speaker's peculiar English was striking, but his next phrases were even more so – “the Government of this country, where my mother was born, I will never forget it; I was so anxious to visit – it is one of the best and most happy days of my life, and I give thanks especially to the gentleman and lady for all the attention and the great hospitality they have been so good to render us”.

When the tumult of applause had died down, I asked Dr Hinchcliffe the name of the Italian speaker. “His mother was Irish”, said the doctor, “I don't know where his mother came from, but his name is O'Phelan”, written it seems Ophelan!

Mr. Barton's thanks were conveyed in a few, well-chosen, words – he was pleased to have met them from so many different countries, and expressed his gratitude to the many officials of the Department of Agriculture who had given so much assistance in starting the little enterprise that they had come so far to see. They were now going to see the ‘Garden of Ireland’ and he wished them one and all a very happy journey.

After rounds of applause, some of the British delegates started the chorus *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow* and the happy suggestion was adopted with a thorough cordiality, and the old mansion rang with the chorus.

Then the goodbyes, and one wondered if the host's hands were able to withstand such hearty handshaking. Into their cars, and lined up to the start, and just as the first charabancs set off the occupants, waving hands commenced singing *Auld Lang Syne*; the second passed the door with the chorus swelling *Come Back to Erin* and one by one the twelve big cars passed away down the winding avenue, beneath the grand old oak trees, out into the country road and off to Glendalough – the Seven Churches that they were clamouring to see.

¹⁰ Thomas Cook and Son, not the profession; he seconded Jull's vote of thanks “on behalf of the Latin races”

Appendix

The Congress focused on six areas, viz. Breeding and Incubation, Nutrition and Rearing, Diseases and their Control, Economics (including Marketing), Education and General, and Rabbits. The introduction has extensive lists of officers, delegates and exhibitors, from which come the following Irish Free State representatives¹¹.

D J McGrath, Department of Agriculture, was Secretary of the Irish National Organising Committee of the Congress and Exhibition. Miss M Hennerty, Chief Poultry Officer, DOA, was a congress council member. Other official delegates were J F Craig, Principal, Veterinary College, Dublin; J H Hinchcliff, Agricultural Director, DOA, and Irish Free State Committee for Congress; Miss K Nunan, Munster Institute, Cork; and T O'Connell, Senior Agricultural Inspector, DOA.

Private delegates and exhibitors were Mrs Alexander, Miss P Ally, R E Barrow, Mrs C F Barrow, R C Barton, J Battersby, F Bergin, F C Bernard, Miss Bernard, E Bohane, Miss D F Bourke, Miss E Bourke, Miss P Boyle, Miss P Brady, Miss Browne, Miss K A Browne, Miss N C Byrne, A Carton, Miss E Cavanagh, J Caveyn, C Cleary, Miss M Codd, Miss M Collins, Miss A Cope, Miss J Costello, Miss J Cox, W D Coyne, Mrs V E Craigie, Miss R Grehan, J K Curley, Miss Deane, J Dempsey, Miss M Dempsey, Miss A Dillon, Miss J Dillon, Miss M F Dillon, Miss J Donovan, Miss P Donovan, Miss E Doyle, Miss J Doyle, Miss K M Doyle, Miss M Doyle, J P Drew, Mrs M Drohan, Mrs L Farrell, H F Farrell, Miss A S Fleming, Miss A M Flood, L Goggin, G Gordon, Mrs Gordon, Miss E M Hackett, J Hamill, G B Hammond, Miss J M Hanrahan, Miss E M M Harman, Miss H C Hartigan, Mrs A Hartland, Miss M A Hickey, Miss T Hogan, Mrs Hornidge, Miss T Irwin, Miss L Jones, R F Jones, Miss M R Kavanagh, H Kennedy, Miss B Kinmouth, Miss N Liston, Miss K Long, Miss K Loughnane, E G Lyons, Miss M M McDermot, Miss M T MacNulty, Miss E McCarthy, Miss A M McCluskey, C McCluskey, B McCormick, P McCormick, W A McCulloch, Miss S McEvoy, R McKinnon-Waters, N MacTiernan, Miss M Mangan, J Mangan, Miss M M Mullins, Miss N M Murphy, P Murphy, Miss R Murphy, Mrs R Murphy, Mrs M Nagle, Miss A Nunan, Miss M O'Brien, F J O'Connor, Miss J O'Donoghue, Miss M O'Donovan, Mrs E M O'Hara, Miss J O'Keefe, Mrs M N Olden, Miss K O'Morchoe, J Patterson, D Philpott, Miss B Power, Miss M Quinlan, Miss B Quinlan, Mrs Read, Miss B Reeves, D P Riordan, Miss M E Ryan, Miss B K M Scott, R B Scott, M Shanahan, E J Sheehy, Miss K Shiel, Miss M Slattery, C Smiley, Miss E A Spratt, Miss M Staunton, Mrs Strong, C J Strong, Mrs G E Studdert, G E Studdert, J Thompson, R H Tweedy, Miss E Walsh, Mrs A Whaley and Miss P White.

Of the 135 delegates, 127 were private delegates; of these, two-thirds (85) were female of which only 13% (11) were married.

¹¹ <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924001171838;view=1up;seq=1>

A Stray Historical Thread

A Mr O'Phelan, an Italian of Irish descent representing Cook's travel agency at a poultry congress field trip in 1930, is an intriguing puzzle.

To speculate: He probably acted as tour interpreter and on the ground organiser of the "Latin Races" but didn't have any involvement in the congress as he does not appear on the list of Italian delegates. He may have been employed by them on their Mediterranean routes and was drafted in for the tour, possibly coming with the Italian delegation. It's likely that many of the larger delegations booked group travel via either Thomas Cook or Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits to London; the latter bought the former in 1928.

Does this explain how his mother ended up in Italy, through working for Cooks? But was his father, O'Phelan, also of Irish descent? Ophelan is not an Italian surname. Alternatively, he could have used his mother's surname. Unfortunately the Thomas Cook and Son archives don't appear to have any relevant records.