

Percy Edwin Ludgate – Irish Civil Service Saga

By Gerry Kelly

It appears that Percy Ludgate had ambitions to join the Irish Civil Service. The following note outlines the chronology.

On 4th November 1898 the Civil Service Commission (CSC) placed notice in the London Gazette (LG) that Percy Edwin Ludgate was registered as a “Temporary Boy Copyist (New Class)”.¹ Although the upper age criterion was eighteen, he had just celebrated his fifteenth birthday three months before. These positions were qualified through competitive examination² and would certainly be a sought after entry level for a career in the Civil Service. The Regulations and Remuneration for temporary boy copyists were also published in the LG and give some insight to the role.³ It marks the start of his ambition to join the Irish Civil Service. According to the 1901 Census on 31st March, Percy was working as a Boy Copyist at the National Education Office (17 ½ years old).

The CSC gave notice in the LG on 7th Nov 1902 of an Open Competitive Examination for situations as Assistant Clerks (Abstractors).⁴ Percy applied and subsequently sat the examination on 10th February 1903. The top fifty candidates were announced on 13th March and published in the LG on 17th March 1903. He was the **top Irish candidate** being placed nineteenth in the Order of Merit.⁵ This did not result in him being offered a position despite him passing a formal medical examination. A spot check in the LG of other Irish candidates on the Order of Merit confirms they were offered positions on 30th March. The Regulations for Assistant Clerks (Abstractors) are attached for reference.⁶ Boy Clerks were not retained on the Register beyond the age of twenty and Percy would have had to step down from this position on 1st August 1903 (if indeed he stayed until this date or was released earlier).

The LG published the “Regulations respecting Open Competitive Examinations for Clerkships in the Second Division of the Civil Service” on 23rd August 1904 and gave further notice of an examination to be held on 18th October 1904.⁷ Percy competed successfully for this more senior graded clerkship but failed the medical examination. Consequently his certificate was not issued.

On 20th February 1905 in the House of Commons the “Case of Mr. Percy Ludgate – Irish Civil Service” was raised during Questions in the House.⁸ The question was put by Mr. Timothy Harrington MP Dublin Harbour (and former consecutive three term Mayor of Dublin from 1901 to 1904). The Financial Secretary of the Treasury responded (Mr. Victor Cavendish MP, soon to be the 9th Duke of Devonshire). The oral question would have been pre-submitted through the Speaker of the House (William Court Gully) and oral answer prepared by The Treasury which was responsible for the Irish Civil Service at that time. The questioner petitions for Percy Ludgate to undergo a new medical examination with a view to being certified for one or other of the above positions. The answer corrects some factual inaccuracies posed in the question but the response is not supportive.

¹ London Gazette. 4th November 1898 Pages 6454 & 6455

² London Gazette 14th January 1898

³ London Gazette 22nd May 1896 pages 3066 to 3068 and amendments 13th July 1897 pages 3900 & 3901

⁴ London Gazette 7th November 1902 page 7095

⁵ London Gazette 17th March 1903 page 1779 & Weekly Irish Times 21st March 1903 (London Correspondence)

⁶ London Gazette 19th September 1902 page 6029

⁷ London Gazette 23rd August 1904 pages 5419 and 5420

⁸ Hansard 20th February 1905 Vol 141

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It seems that Percy's hope of a career in the Civil Service ended at this point. Percy was 21 years old at the time.

According to the 1911 Census, Percy was working as a Commercial Clerk at a Corn Merchant.⁹ It could be that his experience in this business qualified him to be included on the associated War Office Committee "headed by Mr. T. Condren-Flinn, senior partner of Kevan & Son"¹⁰. If he had not already been working for this accountancy firm, the assignment may have introduced him to them and the offer of a staff position. It is ironic that having been rejected by the State, his later contribution to the War Effort would be so valued.

⁹ 1911 Census Return – Percy Ludgate

¹⁰ B. Randell, "Ludgate's analytical machine of 1909", The Computer Journal, Volume 14, Issue 3