CHAPTER 2

Newsletters and Printed News, 1585–1620

As has already been mentioned above, the newspaper that Abraham Verhoeven began printing in 1620 drew on at least four traditions of communication: the newsletter, the news pamphlet, the print, and the almanac chronicle. This chapter will describe each of these in more detail.

Posts and Newsletters

Across Europe, merchants’ factors, private intelligencers and diplomatic agents spent much of their time writing reports on recent events, an activity which, like pamphlet printing, began in the fifteenth century but grew considerably around the middle of the sixteenth. By the seventeenth century it was a commonplace that ‘there is a kinde of politicall necessitie among Princes, to watch the affaires of one another’. Merchants were under a similar necessity, as an English newspaper editor explained in the 1640s: ‘it is requisite for Marchants, and for those that travell beyond Sea, or upon the Sea, to know (as neere as intelligence can be given) what forces are upon the Seas, and where the Armies quarter, that they may prevent many dangers’. Given these needs, it was only natural that all the princely courts and great trading cities of Western Christendom should be linked by formal and informal information networks. Regular exchange of letters, however, was impeded by the irregularity of postal communications.

The wealthiest could employ couriers to bear messages great distances, but the high cost prohibited the use of special couriers for all but the most necessary communications. For more mundane purposes the two systems of public carriage available were those of ‘ordinary posts’ and of ‘common carriers’. In the second half of the sixteenth century a number of guidebooks were published that advised travellers on the routes to take to get from one part of Europe to another, and these routes are usually in some way described as postal. That is to say, the itineraries describe the transport infrastructure of postal communications, without giving any clue as to their organisation or

1 The Belgick Souldier (Dordrecht, 1624), p. 3.
frequency. In Italy, a much-reprinted book entitled *Poste per diverse parti del mondo* appeared in Rome in 1562. Its compilation and revision have been attributed to the Genoese postmaster, Giovanni da L’Herba, and the postmaster of Perugia, Cherubino della Stella. In Germany Jörg Gail put together *Ein neues nützliches Raißbüchlin* (a new useful travel book), published in Augsburg in 1563. In England Richard Rowlands (later to adopt the name Richard Verstegan) brought out *The Post of the World* (London, 1576). There may well have been other such books—indeed, there certainly were, since Verstegan based his work on an unidentified German original that was not Gail’s *Raißbüchlin*. The genre persisted into the nineteenth century, and is not dissimilar to the driving directions now available from such online providers as Michelin or Google Maps. As a typical example of a route from such a work, consider the itinerary ‘From Paris to London by the way of Rye’ as given in James Wadsworth’s *The European Mercury* (1641):

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From Paris to Pontwaize, 3 Stages. leg. [leagues] 7.
From Pontw. to Mannie, 3 Stages. leg. 7.
From Mannie to Eque, 3 Stages. leg. 7.
From Eque to Rhoan leg. 6.
From Rhoan to Tote leg. 6.
From Tote to Deepe leg. 6.
From Deepe in Normandy by Sea to Rye leg. 30.
From Rye to the Redhouse. m. [miles] 18.
From the Redhouse to Cheapstead m. 18.
From Cheapstead to London, m.18.
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The route is therefore: Paris—Pontoise—Magny-en-Vexin—Écouis—Rouen—Tôtes—Dieppe—Rye—The Red House (presumably an inn or post house)—Chipstead (near Sevenoaks)—London. Typical landmarks in such guides were towns, villages, castles, inns and, in Catholic areas, monasteries.

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3 A scan of the Austrian National Library’s copy of the Venice 1564 edition (shelfmark 41.Z.58) is available on Google Books at books.google.com/books?id=NDI8AAAACAAJ.
4 Reprinted as Herbert Kruger (ed.), *Das älteste deutsche Routenhandbuch. Jörg Gails ‘Raißbuchlin’* (Graz, 1974).
6 J.W. Gent, *The European Mercury. Describing the Highways and Stages from place to place, through the most remarkable parts of Christendome* (London: I.R. for H. Twyford, 1641).