

Irish Postal Stationery 1922 – 1983

Synopsis

Introduction

Ireland became a “Free State” in February 1922, when authority was passed from Great Britain to an Irish Provisional Government, following the ratification of a Treaty between both parties. One of the early tasks of the Irish Provisional Government was the reorganization and the replacement of the British postal adhesives and stationery. The British stamps in use at the time were overprinted in April 1922 but the British postal stationery was retained in use until the first Irish definitive envelopes were printed by the Irish Government Printing Works and issued in December 1924.

The only change to the British postal stationery used in Ireland was for registered envelopes. The King George V orange 5d embossed postal stationery envelopes were used at the point that the Treaty was signed and a green King George V 5d envelope was introduced between 1922 and 1924 to differentiate registered mail posted in the new Free State from that posted in Northern Ireland or Britain. Examples of this green 5d envelope are included in this exhibit because of the strategic significance to the postal stationery of the new Free State (only non harp material in exhibit).

The postal stationery introduced by the new Irish government had a distinctive harp motif (embossed or typographed) which remained in use until the Irish Post Office was reorganized on 31st December 1983 to form a new company called “An Post”, at which point the iconic harp design was retired. The harp appeared on 101 individual items of postal stationery (14 envelopes, 11 postcards, 8 letter cards, 8 newspaper wrappers and 18 registered values -in up to four sizes per value). All 101 formats are represented in this exhibit. Air letters, which are also Irish Postal Stationery, are not included in this exhibit due to the absence of the harp motif. On top of the individual formats, there are many sub types or varieties, multiple shades of stamp, paper shades, envelope knives, watermarks and card widths for the majority of the issues and multiple text differences/errors for the registered envelopes.

Irish letter cards have the same postal rate as envelopes and the same postal stationery stamps are used, with all stamps being typographed. Newspaper wrappers were also issued from 1924 up until 1983, with the same harp motif as is found on envelopes, postcards, and letter cards. The format of wrappers is 104 to 113mm wide and 264 to 275 mm long, with all stamps typographed. Similarly, the same stamps were used on “stamped to order” issues, approved by Irish Government Revenue Department and printed by Irish Government printing works in Dublin Castle. A number of typical stamped to order items are include for the Electricity Supply Board or the Cork Gas Board, where multiple stamps are used to meet required current postage rates.

The issue of the respective types of postal stationery closely follow the changes in Irish postal rates (see table below), and the frequency of changes, particularly in the 1970’s, meant some issues had a very short lifespan. The frequency of changes, especially in registered envelopes, led to multiple variations and multiple errors in compensation rates on reverse of envelopes where texts frequently refer to obsolete rates. The envelopes were produced by private firms and stored by the post office and the stamp was applied when needed. This then led to many “out of date texts” when the current stamp was applied, either in error or for economic reasons where it would have been costly to dump the obsolete pre-printed envelopes.

First Day cancelations and earliest dates of usage of pre-decimal stationery (pre 1971) are avidly sought after by collectors, and are preferentially included in this exhibit.

The most comprehensive study to date of the variations is contained in study issued by Forschungs und Arbeitsgemeinschaft Irland e.V. (FAI see reference below). This exhibit has been set out to demonstrate the multiple variations outlined in this study but a number of new variations (detailed in red) not previously reported. Some missing issue dates are also reported, as well as some earlier dates than previously reported.

Items of particular note in this exhibit are indicated in red (red text, red box or red dot) and include personal research over the last 15 years of collecting in this area. These include;

Rare items

- The 1925 ½d envelope with flap on right hand side are considerable rarer than those with flap on left hand side – postulated to be envelopes fed incorrectly into printing press.
- Green 2d issued from 1951 FAI P6d mint issue on greyish white cardboard (only two unused cards recorded).
- 1924 violet 5d registered envelope (size K) with no printers name under flap, FAI reference indicates this size not part of first issue of 1924 but this envelope has all the characteristics of EU2a and not EU2b.
- 1947 light green 5½d registered envelope mint envelope size H – FAI EU 3b HII, (damaged “E” in OFFICE on 5th line of English text, no printer’s imprint under flap, no Roman Letters -Irish script).

Unusual usage

- The 1925 ½d envelope Dublin to Jinja in Uganda on 27th March 1927. The cover is endorsed “Per 1st Flight from Cairo”, arriving in Kisumu on March 31st and then with large red Kenya Sudan Air Mail strike for the same date.
- Light green 2d postal stationary stamps cut from original covers and glued to an alternative cover as seen e.g. 1971 postcard to Gorey, Co. Wexford, bearing 3 postal stationery embossed 2d cut outs plus 1d cheque stamp, all tied by Inis Coirthe CDS. Correct rate was 6d for postcard from 1st October 1970, 1d cheque stamp was not legal usage but not required as rate already applied.

Evidence of date of issue (previously unknown or incorrectly reported)

- 1983 blue black 26p envelope was issued on 29th November 1983 and not 19th November as detailed in reference texts (Post office Philatelic Information communication attached behind exhibit page).
- 1982 brown 80p size H registered envelope was issued on 31st March 1982 while a number of reference texts report this as 21st March 1982 (Post office Philatelic Information communication attached behind exhibit page).

Sub types not previously recorded

- 1971 violet blue 4p issue FAI K8b rg2 – light cream card (b), gum on back flap (r) large perforations with two holes missing on left side(g2). This cover also has a vertical movement of stamp and opening instructions.
- 1964 green 1s5d registered envelope (Mint Size K - FAI EU 8c KII – identified by sharp flap and position of text “To Cover...” on reverse. Brackets around “REGISTERED LETTER” on face have not been previously reported. Rare due to unreported subset of EU 8c KII.
- 1970 blue 2s9d mint registered envelope size H. (FAI EU 10a H – 1s registration fees incorrectly incorporated into text on reverse as per previous issue. This combination of incorrect fee is a variation on EU 10a not previously recorded.

Epilogue

The iconic harp motif was retired on the formation of “An Post”, with the final issue being the green 96p registered envelope, issued in January 1983. This forms the logical conclusion to this exhibit

Table of Irish Postal Rates during 1922 to 1983

Irish Domestic Postal Rate Changes					
Year	Letter Rate	Card Rate	Printed Papers	Registration Envelope Rate (Compensation)	Newspapers
1922	2d (3oz)	1½d	½d (oz)	3d (£5 comp)	1d (6oz)
1925		1d			
1937			½d (2 oz)		
1941	2½d(3oz)	1½d	½d (oz)		
1948	2½d(2oz)	2d	1d (2 oz)	4d (£5 comp)	1½d (6oz)
1951			1½d(4 oz)		
1953	3d (2oz)			6d (£5 comp)	
1956			2d (4 oz)	9d (£5 comp)	2d (6 oz)
1962	4d (2oz)				
1964	5d (2oz)	3d	3d (4 oz)	1s (£10 comp)	3d (6 oz)
1969	6d (2oz)	4d	4d (4 oz)	1s3d (£20 comp)	4d (6 oz)
1970	9d (2oz)	6d	6d (4 oz)	2s (£20 comp)	6d (6 oz)
1971	4p (2oz)	2½p	2½p (4oz)	10p (£50comp)	2½p (4oz)
1973	5p (2oz)	3½p	3½p (4oz)	12p (£50comp)	3½p (4oz)
1974	7p (2oz)	5p	5p (4oz)	18p (£50comp)	5p (4oz)
1976	9p (2oz)	7p	7p (4oz)	24p (£50comp)	7p (4oz)
1977	10p (60g)	8p	8p (120g)	27p (£50comp)	8p (120g)
1979	12p (60g)	10p	9½p(120g)	32p (£60comp)	9½p(120g)
1980	15p (60g)	12p	12p (120g)	40p (£75comp)	12p (120g)
1981	18p (60g)	15p/18p	15p (120g)	48p/58 (£75comp)	15p (120g)
1982	26p (60g)	22p	22p (120g)	70p (£100comp)	22p (120g)

Bibliography

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- Joachim Schaaf and Brian Warren, Irish Postal Rates 1839 - 2014, FAI Literature Series, Volume 31 2014.
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- J.E. Foley, Irish Postal Stationery Notes, regular column in Revealer, Eire Philatelic Society – starting October 1973 page 871.
- Otto Jung, Postal Stationery Stamped to Order (STO), FAI Literature Series, Volume 2.

