

Irish Postal Stationery—1922 to 1970

Exhibit Objective & Scope

The objective of this exhibit is to present the postal stationery used and issued by the Irish Free State established by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922. Each section of the exhibit begins with the British postal stationery used by the new Irish Free State in 1922 and 1923, during the transition from British to Irish postal control. The exhibit then looks at the iconic harp series introduced in 1924 and concludes with the 1969 issues, prior to the currency change to Decimal in 1971. All Irish items have the distinctive harp motif in this period and exhibit covers envelopes, letter cards, postcards, wrappers, telegrams and registered envelopes—each section organised chronologically.

Introduction

Following the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the first Irish Free State postal stationery was introduced in 1924, with the distinctive harp motif. The introduction of each new issue closely followed the postal rate changes, which were relatively static for the first 19 years. This pre-decimal period saw the issue of indicia for 9 envelopes, 7 letter cards, 8 postcards, 6 wrappers, 4 telegrams and 10 registered envelopes (each in F, G, H and K formats).

Some issues, such as the green 2d envelopes, also have a number of envelope sizes, knife shapes, flaps and watermarks.

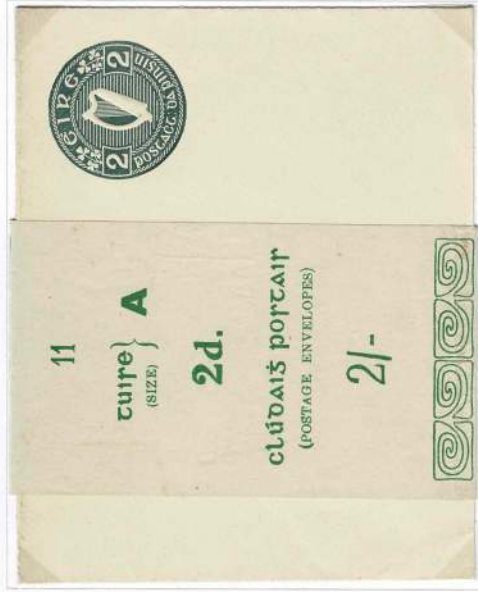
Specimens of the Irish Harp series are generally only known in official Post Office archives and this exhibitor has not come across any others in thirty years of collecting.

Exhibit Plan	
Section 1	Postal Stationery Envelopes
Section 2	Postal Stationery Letter Cards
Section 3	Postal Stationery Postcards
Section 4	Postal Stationery Wrappers
Section 5	Postal Stationery Telegrams
Section 6	Postal Stationery Registered Envelopes

Bibliography

- Brian Callan (2021), *Postal Stationery Registered Envelopes—New Discoveries*, Die Harfe No. 155, FAI, Winter 2021, p10-11.
- Brian Callan (2022), *British to Irish Postal Stationery Transition (1922-27)*, Journal of the United Postal Stationery Society, Vol 64, No.4, pp195-200.
- Brian Callan (2022), *Irish Free State—The Transition of British to Irish Postal Stationery (1922-24)*, Gibbons Stamp Monthly, April p66-63.
- Otto Jung (2014), *Postal Stationery of Ireland*, FAI Literature Series, Volume 30.
- Joachim Schaaf and Brian Warren (2014), *Irish Postal Rates 1839-2014*, FAI Literature Series, Volume 31.

The first Irish postal stationery was the envelope issued in 1924 containing the 2d embossed harp motif, white harp on green circle (120 X 95mm). These envelopes had a variety of sizes, flaps and four distinct watermarks. The 2d rate was in use up until 1941 which gave rise to varying shades of stamps, caused both by careless mixing of the colours used and a change in ink manufacturer. The normal olive green indicia (initially embossed) can also be found in paler green and deep green shades. These stamps were applied by Government Printing Works at Dublin Castle.



1926 2d green embossed postal stationery envelope with BALYCLARE/ CO ANTRIM watermark, sharp 60mm flap, with green wrapper bandsize A, 11 postage envelopes 2/-.

Wrapper bands are very difficult to source, having survived in only low numbers.



1926 2d olive green stamp (lighter shade), white harp embossed, knife 62 mm high, round tipped flap, and with "Dean Swift" watermark. Sent from small village of Farran Co. Cork to Cambridge, UK, on 19 October 1938. (Scarce origin).



Rare or significant items depicted with red border and/or red text

Irish Postal Stationery –1922-1970

Synopsis (February 2026)

Exhibit Achievement Highlights

Large Gold and UPSS Champions of Champions (WESPEX 2022)

Large Gold , APS Research Award and Best in Show (SEAPEX 2021)

FIP Gold medals Thailand 2023, Uruguay 2025 and Philakorea 2025. Exhibit won special prizes at all three FIP shows.

Changes to Exhibit since last showing: inclusion of ½d newspaper Bromide Proof and 1½d postcard Bromide Proof. Inclusion of unadopted KGV 1½d lettercard proof.

Introduction

Ireland (the 26 counties of Southern Ireland) became a “Free State” in January 1922 when the Provisional Irish Government ratified the Anglo-Irish Treaty already ratified by the British Government in December 1921. Postal authority was formerly passed from Great Britain to an Irish Provisional Government at midnight on 31 March 1922, with overprinted adhesives introduced on 17th February 1922. The British stamps in use at the time were overprinted 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 postal stationery introduced by the new Irish government had a distinctive harp motif (embossed or typographed) where the harp is recognised as a national emblem of Ireland.

Scope: This exhibit covers the postal stationery used after Ireland gained independence from British control in 1922 to the conversion to decimal currency in 1970.

The exhibit does not contain specimens as these were not generally issued, the exhibitor knows of only those retained by the Irish Post Office in a specimen book. The exhibit does contain five bromide proofs in black on glazed piece of ledger page with Royal Mint CANCELLED in red and endorsed with date of issue. These are from a presentation volume given to H.A. Richardson, Senior Engraver at the mint. No other examples are known and these are the rarest items in this exhibit.

Irish letter cards have the same postal rate as envelopes and the same postal stationery indicia are used, with all stamps being typographed. Wrappers were also issued from 1924 to 1970, 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 indicia typographed. The same indicia 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 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 indicia was applied when needed. This then led to many “out of date texts” when the current indicia was applied, either in error or for

economic reasons where it would have been costly to dump the obsolete pre-printed envelopes. Several new discoveries are included in exhibit, not previously reported (see 2021 reference).

The most comprehensive study to date of the variations is contained in 2014 study issued by Forschungs und Arbeitsgemeinschaft Irland e.V. (FAI see reference 4 below). This exhibit has been set out to demonstrate the multiple variations outlined in this study (of which the exhibitor was a study participant) but a number of new variations (detailed in red) not previously reported (See reference by the exhibitor). Some missing issue dates are also reported, as well as some earlier dates than previously reported. These will be updated in the next edition of the FAI research.

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 20 years of collecting in this area. These include;

Rare items

- 1924 ½d, 1½d, 2d and 1/- harp Bromide Proofs from presentation volume to Senior Engraver H.A. Richardson (no other examples known).
- Unadopted trail overprint on British KGV 1½d lettercard.
- 3d,4d and 5d large ESB commercial envelopes, not issued for public use, surviving in very low numbers.
- Imperforate 4d lettercard.
- Wrapper bands for postal stationery, which have survived in only small numbers.
- 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; 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 first issue.
- 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).
- 1970 brown 1/9 size G – EU 9d G identified as it has a registration fee of 9d, which is corrected by red overprint on reverse . Only two unused copies of this variety are recorded and this is the first used copy recorded, sent within Co. Cork on 3rd Dec 1970. Ref Otto Jung, Postal Stationery of Ireland. FAI Vol. 30, page 220, 2014.
- King George V telegram transmission form printed with green one shilling indicium for use in the transition from British to Irish postal control.
- 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).
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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.
- The 5d registered cover from Dublin to Shanghai, Nov 1938, is a scarce destination.
- Size F and G registered envelopes of first issue of Olive Green KGV embossed registered envelopes (only in used for four months so very scarce).
- Registered letter to Isle of Wright with full set of overprinted British definitives used within two weeks of issue. While this is a philatelic use, it nonetheless captures clearly an important development in Irish postal history.

Epilogue

The exhibit begins with the transition of each postal stationery item from British to Irish control and extends to the end of the pounds/shilling/pence era in 1970. This is an appropriate place to stop as rarity decreases considerably after this time.

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)

Bibliography

- Brian Callan, *Postal Stationery Registered Envelopes New Discoveries*, Die Harfe No. 155, FAI, Winter 2021, p10,11 2021.
- Brian Callan, *Irish Free State-The Transition of British to Irish Postal Stationery (1922-24)*, Gibbons Stamp Monthly, April, pp 60-63, 2022.
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- Otto Jung, *Postal Stationery of Ireland*, FAI Literature Series, Volume, 2014
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- John J. Walsh, Postal Stationery of Ireland, Revealer, Eire Philatelic Society, March 1958, p357.
- J.E. Foley, Irish Postal Stationery Notes, regular column in Revealer, Eire Philatelic Society – starting October 1973, p871.
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