

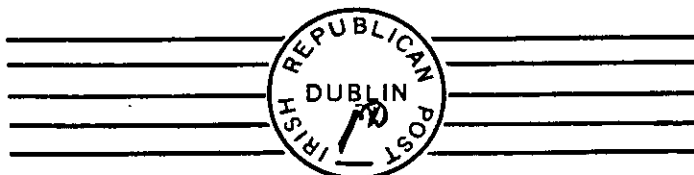
THE IRISH POSTAL SERVICE

REPUBLICAN ARMY

CENSORED COVERS

Supplement No. 43

ÉIRE PHILATELIC ASSOCIATION



There is no substantial evidence that the so-called Republic of Ireland prior to the establishment of the Provisional Government under Postmaster General J.J. Walsh developed a postal system of its own for the general use of the public. Reference is sometimes made to a "Republican Post Office". This "underground" postal system was maintained by the Sinn Fein Party for correspondence between sympathizers in the cause. Branches were said to have been maintained prior to the 1916 Rebellion at the Sinn Fein headquarters in Dawson Street, at J.J. Walsh's shop in Berkley Street and at the home of Tom Clarke. (1)

That this underground system continued during the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921 seems certain. "there were what were sometimes called 'Republican post-offices', shops where letters might be safely left to be collected by the I.R.A. orderlies and subordinate officers." (2)

There is in existence a so-called Republican postmark which is illustrated herewith. Some copies have had written in ink on the marking. This was apparently applied to circulars distributed by the Sinn Fein movement by leaving them in citizen's letter boxes. (3)

The 3rd South Tipperary Brigade

At Soloheadbeg, four miles north of Tipperary Town, the first shot in the resumption of the Anglo-Irish War after the 1916 Rebellion was fired on January 21, 1919. A fine memorial consisting of a granite shaft supporting a bronze torch was placed there some years later. Elements of the Third South Tipperary Brigade of the I.R.A. ambushed a police escort and captured rifles and explosives. (4)

The Anglo-Irish War was conducted as "guerilla" warfare by "Flying Columns" of the I.R.A. These men were capable of marching long distances, striking at police barracks and ambushing military escorts. They also disrupted enemy communications and gained information by holding up trains and post office mail cars and raiding local post offices. These raids were so frequent during this period, that it is impossible to record them but many envelopes exist in collections bearing notations that they were seized and opened by the Republicans. (5)

(1) Philatelic Magazine. December 15, 1921, p. 635. "Irish Stamps: A Retrospect".

(2) Piaras Beaslai, member of the General Staff of the I.R.A. 1918 to 1921. "The Anglo-Irish War". The Kerryman Ltd., Tralee, Ireland, page 12.

(3) F. E. Dixon. The Revealer. April 1966, page 622

(4) The 3rd South Tipperary Brigade. Sean Fitzpatrick. Commemoration Digest. April 1966, pages 135-151.

(5) F. E. Dixon. Random Notes No. 115. November 1966.

The raiders usually opened the letters, scanned the contents, marked the envelope, and either anonymously returned it to the same post office or posted it at another office. It is believed that many postmasters, particularly in the south of Ireland allowed the I.R.A. systematically to inspect the mail at their offices.

The Dixon collection contains a number of typical items - an envelope, seized in a raid at Kilfree Junction, Co. Sligo on June 24, 1920, anonymously returned to the post office and sent on with a printed slip attached, dated 12 August. Another cover posted August 2, 1920 at Galway was reposted at Athlone on August 22nd with manuscript, "Passed by Censor / I.R.A." A cover posted February 12, 1921 at Allihies, Co. Kerry, redatestamped there on the 14th and resealed the next day at Bantry, Co. Cork with red ink, "Found open / Recovered from Raided Mails."

Passed By Censor



Stolen and opened
by raiders.

The illustration above is a cover from the collection of Rev. John Leahy. It is postmarked from an undecipherable suboffice in Limerick on Dec. 3, 1920, addressed to Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare. It has "Passed by Censor / I.R.A." in manuscript and is sealed with a stencilled label, "Stolen and opened / by raiders".

The censorship of mail reached the stage of perfection by July 1921. Fred Dixon reports a handstamp in green "CENSORED / BY / I.R.A." on a local letter posted in Dublin on July 8th and a cyclostyled label, "CENSORED BY - I.R.A. / 9th JULY 1921" on a local letter at Waterford.

The signing of the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty on 6th December 1921 gave rise to a cleavage among the former comrades and the Anglo-Irish War resolved into a tragic Civil War in Ireland 1922-1923.

CIVIL WAR IN IRELAND 1922-1923

Many of the I.R.A. members were opposed to the Treaty and refused to recognize the Provisional Government. In April 1922, under Rory O'Connor, a detachment of the Dublin Brigade seized the Four Courts Law Building, Dublin and held it until July. Other buildings were also seized and public functions, including the postal service were disrupted.

In the south of Ireland (roughly on a line from Waterford to Limerick) the I.R.A. was the only effective authority after the British forces withdrew. The destruction of the railway center at Mallow cut off communications and there was a shortage of postage stamps in the southern offices. (See Irish Republican Army Stamps of 1922. Revealer Supplement No. 3, 1961).

The Provisional Government (called the "Staters") beseiged the Four Courts with artillery fire on June 29, 1922 and drove out the I.R.A. It then moved in July to establish its authority in the South. It landed a large force by sea at Passage West and captured Waterford City, Cork and Tipperary. On April 23, 1923, a cease fire order was issued by the I.R.A. command and the civil war in Ireland came to a close.

While there is evidence that the I.R.A. during the period of the civil war continued to seize mail and subject it to censorship, its efforts were directed more at disrupting the postal communications of the Free State by seizing the stamp supplies and the cancellers of the post offices

The Looted Irish Stamps.

The raids were so frequent during 1922 that one cannot get the details. On April 22nd, 1922, five separate offices were raided by the I.R.A., including Castlebridge but these were polite raids as in each case a receipt was given:

"Official Receipt - Received for the Provisional Government from the Postmaster (or Postmistress) of Post Office stamps to the value of L s. d. approximately. 22/4/22 LeSarbhuideachas". (6)

TRAIN HOLDUP

On July 27, 1922, a mail train from Wexford to Waterford was held up at Passage East and £ 2,570 worth of provisionally overprinted stamps intended to re-supply the southern post offices were stolen. Four Wexford people were eventually arrested in connection with the holdup when they tried to buy goods with some of the stamps. An interesting account of the trial appeared in Stamp Collecting of February 10th, 1923:

"Lieutenant Morris, of the Free State Army, said that the prisoners had no special occupation, and the Recorder added" 'They might be stamp collectors.' (Loud laughter). The jury found the prisoners not guilty of being associated with the holding up of the train or threatening the railway guard, but guilty of receiving, and they were each sentenced to five years' penal servitude."

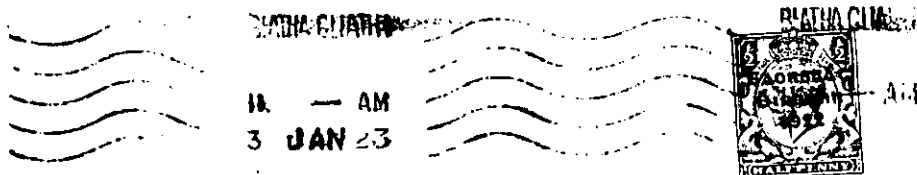
G.P.O. FIRE IN DUBLIN

In November 1922, the temporary G.P.O. in the Rotunda, Dublin was set on fire by armed raiders. Much of the mail salvaged has a handstamped "SALVED FROM/FIRE G.P.O. DUBLIN". Mr. Dixon has an envelope which looks like it had been in the fire, and was officially resealed on 9 November, with pencilled, "C B I.R.A."

As a result of the fire, the machine cancels were put out of action and it was necessary to repair and put into use from December 1922 to the end of January 1923 the old 1916 Krag machines which were damaged in the 1916 Easter Rising. (7). In the interim, Dublin skeleton cancels were apparently used. (8)



13 NO 22



JANUARY 1923 RAIDS IN SOUTH

In January 1923, huge organized raids of practically all Irish Free State post offices south of the line from Wexford to Limerick were made by the I.R.A. Cancellers were stolen in County Wexford and resulting improvisations are known from Foulksmill, Castlebridge, Wellington Bridge and Tacumshin. (9)

Post offices in County Cork, including Toames, Tarleton, Killinardrish, Ballincorrig, Leamlara, Knockraha, Little Island, Glounthaune, and Dungourney were visited (10). Later in the month of January, several raiders were captured after most of the Cork city offices had been cleared of all postage stamps. Except in one case, nothing but stamps were seized, and the cash tills were not interfered with.

(6) F. E. Dixon. Random Notes No. 42. November 1960.

(7) The Revealer. April 1966, page 628

(8) Mrs. C.J. Cooke "Irish Postal History" 1935. page 44

(9) F.E. Dixon. Random Notes No. 115. November 1966

(10) William Ward "The Looted Irish Stamps" Stamp Collecting. April 21, 1928, p.

THE REGUMMED PROVISIONALS

Some 1d stamps are found in collections both loose and on cover which were apparently kiln-dried, and regummed. They give a first impression of having been varnished over. The white portions have turned a dirty pink colour, owing to the running of the colour when immersed, and the new gum was of a thick brownish nature, which has considerably stiffened the paper. Fred Dixon has several copies on cover, the best examples used at Wexford 9 January 1923 and Dublin & Wexford T.P.O. 30 January 1923.

Because of their use in Wexford in January, it has generally been thought that these were part of the stamps looted in the Wexford offices in January 1923 and had been left out in the rain so that the gum was washed away. Mr. William Ward, who claimed that he had been requested by the Irish government to investigate the matter contends that these regummed stamps were stamps stolen from the mail train in July 1922. (11). When or where they were stolen is relatively immaterial. These stamps are known as "Republican Regummed Stamps" but "strictly speaking they reflect the use of stolen stamps to the detriment of the Post Office, without political implications of any sort (12)"

One writer flatly concluded after examination of the available information that these regummed stamps were the improvisation of a stamp dealer. (13)

TEMPORARY CANCELS

The improvised markings used in the Wexford post offices after the loss of the regular cancels to the raiders include a boxed "FOULKSMILL", a straight line "WELLINGTON BRIDGE" and "CASTLEBRIDGE/WEXFORD" temporary marking. (14).

FOULKSMILLS.

BISECTED STAMPS

The Marquess of Eute Sale 6th May 1959 (#461) contained a 4d bisect tied to a rather soiled cover from Monkstown, Co. Cork to London by c.d.s. and "No 2d available" in indelible pencil; no postage due was charged. It was valued at 10 Pounds.

POSTAGE DUES & MANUSCRIPT MARKINGS

Inasmuch as the raids stripped many of the post offices in Counties Cork and Wexford of their stamp supplies, for a few days letters had to be prepaid in cash at the offices.

The postage due stamps used at the time in the offices were the British stamps since Ireland did not produce its own distinctive postage dues until later. These British stamps were ignored by the raiders and were temporarily used as letter stamps in the Cork area particularly. Their sale directly to the public was forbidden and where letters were handed over the postal counter to an official, they were stamped with the postage dues, obliterated and forwarded to their destination with a notation that postage stamps were not available. (15)

Also letters were transmitted with the endorsement, "No stamps available" together with the postmark. (16).

(11) William Ward, "The Looted Irish Stamps". Stamp Collecting. April 21, 1928, p. 64

(12) Kohl Handbuch. Zervas translation.

(13) "Republican Reissue" H.D. Catling. Stamp Collecting March 17th, 1928 pages 708-9. Mr. Catling also reported that he had a pair of 1d Thom, obviously waterstained and surface-gummed, clearly postmarked Wexford Dec. 6, 22 which was a month earlier than the January 6th raids.

(14) S. Stafford Johnson Sale. 2 April 1958 #216; same T. E. Field Sale 11 May 1966 #674.

(15) A copy used January 8, 1923 on a piece of cover was contained in the Agnew collection and brought 5 Pounds at that sale.

(16) Mr. Dixon has one dated January 1923 from Bantry.