

Introduction

The first dedicated Irish definitive stamp issued on the 6th December 1922 was the 2d. value, which reflected the inland letter postal rate of the time. It was a simple scenario, but there was much more to the story! This will be divulged in the final section of the article, with the understanding of readers that the author's views remain unproven.

Background Information

On the 1st February 1922 the Postmaster General J. J. Walsh invited the public to submit designs for Ireland's first issue of permanent definitive stamps. These stamps were to replace the temporary use of GB stamps which had been overprinted for use in Ireland, following the agreement between the British Parliament and Ireland's Provisional Government, after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of Independence on the 6th December 1921. This interim measure was adopted as there was insufficient time available to produce designs, prepare dies and print new definitive stamps, before the commencement of the transitional period on 17th February 1922.

Selected Designs

From the 100's of submissions five designs were short listed, by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs of the Provisional Government for further consideration. Three of these designs, namely - the 'Map of Ireland' a design by James Ingram, the 'Celtic Cross' by Ms Lily Williams and the 'Coats of Arms' of the four provinces by Ms Millicent Girling were selected. In addition a fourth design which did not feature in the 1922 press announcement was also selected, this being the 'Sword of Light', submitted by J. J. O'Reilly. Fig. 1 displays the designs selected and the stamp values finally attributable to each design.

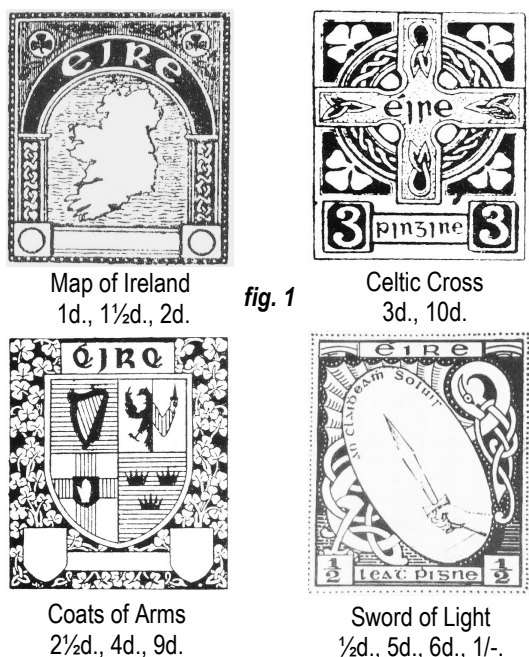


fig. 1

At the outset, the intention was to use the essay depicting the 'Coats of Arms' for the 2d. stamp. However due to a raft of design changes, coupled with tight time constraints, a decision was taken to adopt the simpler 'Map of Ireland' design for the 2d. value, noting that this key value would be the first stamp to be issued. In its place the 2½d. value took on the 'Coats of Arms' design, which was originally selected with the 'Map of Ireland' design, see fig 2.

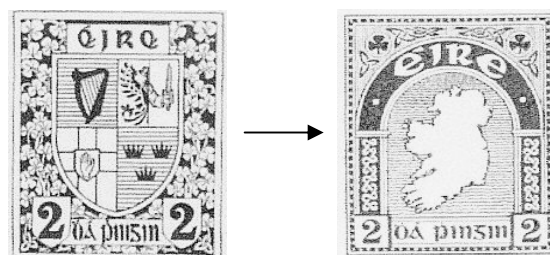
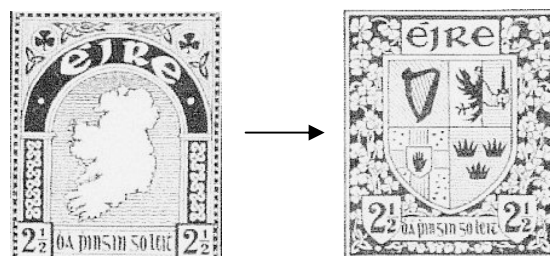


fig. 2



Implementation from Design to Sheet Printing

This section places emphasis on the actions taken to produce Post Office counter sheets (sheet make up 240 stamps in two 12 x 10 panes) of low value definitive stamps of Ireland. With the exception of the 2d. value the other eleven values were issued on diverse dates from the 2nd February 1923 through to 26th October 1923.

The Royal Mint were appointed to produce dies and printing plates for all twelve values, with Somerset House in conjunction with the Irish Department of Post and Telegraphs performing the administration and approval processes.

Special emphasis is now given to the 2d. value, which in reality would be the only value available for release on the 6th December 1922. This date being of significant political importance to the Irish Authorities, as it reflected the anniversary of the Independence Treaty being signed in London.

The original die proof for the 'Map Stamp' was registered by Somerset House on the 12 July 1922 and for its use with the 2d. value the die for leads was submitted by the Mint on the 6th September and approved on the 11th September 1922.

After approvals next followed the complex process of producing master plates, which entailed striking 'leads' from the engraved die.

Next came the make up of a forme, followed by the process of electroplating and treatments, which resulted in the production of a master plate. From the master plate, wax moulds were then taken, followed by nickel and copper electro plating onto the wax moulds, which after further treatment resulted in the creation of working printers' plates.

In parallel with plate production, Thomas De La Rue & Co. Ltd., was contracted to perform print trials on watermarked mill sheets supplied by William Joynson & Son of St. Mary Cray, Kent. The multiple 'Se' watermarks were applied by the mill using the 'Dandy Roll' process, see fig. 3. The watermark represents an abbreviation of 'Saorstat Eireann', which translates to 'Free State Ireland'.

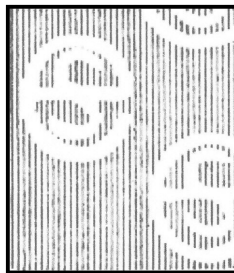


fig. 3

De La Rue performed trials in late 1922 in order to establish the suitability of the paper stock for typograph printing. Mill sheets were pre-gummed by Samuel Jones, a De La Rue sub-contractor, then plate glazed followed by printing trials making use of a plate on press at the time, which was the Fiji 2d. George V stamp in grey-green, see fig. 4.



fig. 4

The printing of the new definitive stamps was to be undertaken in Ireland by the Government Printing Works in Dublin Castle.

In order to adopt this plan, it was necessary to install new equipment. The Post Office Stores Controller, based out of Aldborough House, placed orders for typographic printing presses with Wharfedale, a Yorkshire based company and comb perforating machines from Grover, a London based firm. It is noteworthy to record that both Messrs Harrison & Sons and Thomas De La Rue, were at the time using the same press and perforator combination. Furthermore, the printing process being adopted in Ireland was to follow the standard practices of the British Postal Authority.

At the outset watermarked mill sheets were to be sourced from Joynson and then routed to De La Rue, who were contracted to gum and paper glaze the mill sheets, following which the sheets would be consigned to Dublin Castle for printing, guillotining of sheets, perforating and trimming, after which finished sheets were to be consigned to the Post Office Stores for distribution.

Whilst all appeared to be in place, in reality behind the scenes much transpired, which has not been the subject of much publicity, as it is somewhat embarrassing to the Irish Authorities.

This said the 2d. stamp, in its final form - see fig. 5, was duly released on a limited scale in Dublin postal districts, on the 6th December 1922.

In the authors opinion this was a significant achievement, for many reasons, some of which are set out below.



fig. 5

Authors Input (in bullet point form)

- The Grover perforating machines being installed at Dublin Castle would not be fully operational in time to take up the first printings of the 2d. stamp. As a result De La Rue were again contracted to perforate sheets from the first printings. This decision placed further time penalties on the process, as the sheets after printing in Dublin Castle would be returned to De La Rue for perforating, cutting & trimming and then returned back to the Post Office Stores Department in Dublin for distribution.
- Taking into account the timing estimates to perform the various stages of the printing process, coupled with the prevailing civil strife in Dublin, the apparent un-readiness of the print facilities in Dublin Castle, raises the question - who actually performed the first print run ?
- In view of the prevailing situation and *strictly* in the author's opinion, the first typograph printings were in fact printed in London and not in Ireland.
- The first print run was small, taking up only 3 of the 10 ton order for mill sheets from Joynson. As a result due to the limited number of sheets printed, coupled with the need for Post Offices to have stocks prior to the 6th December 1922, the decision was taken to restrict the distribution of this first issue to Dublin postal districts.
- A re-issue of this printing was taken up by Dublin Castle in late December 1922.
- There is a minor shade variance between the two issues - De La Rue being deep sea green and the first Dublin Castle printings being deep blue green.
- De La Rue printings which are presently unlisted must command a premium value.

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