National College of Art and Design
Visual Communications

An Irish Identity as Expressed Through Contemporary Graphic Design.

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art & Design and Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of History of Art and Graphic Design, for the year 1993.

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INTRODUCTION

How does one present an Irish identity?

In the world of literature is it fair to say that a definite sense of "Irishness" (as opposed to aspects of rural life) exists in the work of contemporary Irish writers such as John McGahern and Brian McMahon? And what of fine art; apart from work which uses obviously Irish subjectmatter, can qualities such as ambiguity and irony that are seen to be present in the work of many contemporary artists, really be regarded as intrinsically Irish?[1]

For whatever reasons, some say a national inferiority complex,[2] some say a wish to be rid of our colonial past,[3] the Irish as a nation seem to be continually obsessed with the questions of whether there really exists this elusive mysterious quality of "Irishness" and in what way does it manifest itself in the creative and cultural work of the nation?

This near obsession with national identity seems to have crept into all aspects of Irish life. What started in the 19th century as an attempt to visually define "Irishness" in a very obvious way in order to further the nationalist cause has led to the emergence and adoption of particular images, symbols and styles that now, whatever the context, immediately signify an Irish identity.

These images, symbols and styles, apart from a few exceptions, have not diminished in popularity since their adoption as Irish imagery in the last century and are still being used for the same reasons in contemporary Irish graphic design.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the history and evolution of these symbols and styles. The rest of the thesis deals with how these symbols and styles are used in contemporary Irish design. For organizational purposes this latter section has been divided into three chapters involving,

1. symbols made popular during the 19th century,
2. images and styles derived from "celtic" sources, and
3. Irish banknotes and postage stamps.

CHAPTER ONE

A Short History of Symbols and Styles used to denote an Irish Identity.

In Ireland, the visual arts had always held a back seat to literature, mainly due to a strong Irish oral tradition.

This oral tradition began in precolonial times when the job of keeping alive the history, culture and mythology of the people was given to the bards or "filidh". These bards held very important positions in Brehon society, which existed in Ireland in the centuries preceding the beginning of colonization by the English in the 12th century. Occasionally they even held more power than the chief or taoiseach.

Only members of certain families could enter this profession. After becoming apprenticed to an already qualified bard, they then spent nine years memorizing not only all the history and culture of their people, but also the correct form in which to recount it.[4] There is no surviving evidence to suggest that equal importance was placed on any visual tradition.

Brehon society collapsed in the 12th century with the introduction of English rule and society, and with it went the power of the bards. From then on the oral tradition survived in the poems and songs of the ordinary people.

Although the visual arts did hold a back seat to the oral tradition before the arrival of the Normans, it was by no means non-existent. Obviously from the number of objects surviving one has to surmise that a lot of effort and wealth was put into the production of personal jewellry, early ecclesiastical buildings, metalwork and manuscripts.

It could be said that poverty and lack of opportunity, resulting from the continued enforcement of English rule are the reasons behind the sudden and almost complete stop in the production of any indigenous Irish artwork and architecture. If these are the reasons, then it took until the 19th century, when Ireland had greater economic and to some extent political freedom, for the attempt to establish a national style in all areas of the arts to begin.

In tandem with the growing interest in archaeology and antiquities in Britain and the continent, the early 19th century also saw the beginning of study into Irish antiquities, folklore and language. George Petrie is generally considered the

fig.1, O'Meara's Irish House, decorated by Burnet and Comerford in 1870

most important antiquarian of this time and was very successful in renewing the interest of the Irish people in the architectural and artistic achievements of the past. His book, On the Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, pub.1845, was the first comprehensive study of the architecture of early Christian times. The discovery of the Tara Brooch and the rediscovery of the Book of Kells and Durrow added to the popularity of celtic metalwork and manuscript design. All this renewed interest in Ireland's ancient past coupled with the worldwide move towards nationalism in the mid-19th century led to the emergence of a strong desire to create an Irish Free State. And what better way to express nationality than through the use of instantly recognisable emblems.

Thus emerged such symbols and styles as the shamrock, harp, wolfhound, roundtower, celtic knotwork and Irish uncial script.

The Irish wolfhound and roundtower were two popular emblems used at the time. The wolfhound is a dog long associated with Ireland and has been used as a hunting dog for centuries. There are even references to this breed in the ancient stories of Fionn and Oisin. There was renewed interest in the wolfhound in the 19th century and it often appeared as an emblem, either accompanying a figure of Hibernia or Erin, or in a group with a roundtower and shamrock and other emblems (eg. "National Emblems", fig.4). The idea of using the wolfhound as as emblem of Ireland more or less died out towards the beginning of the 20th century.

The roundtower is another emblem that quickly went out of fashion. The roundtower is an ecclesiastical building peculiar to Ireland (although some examples can be found in West Scotland). Its rediscovery by the Antiquarians in the early 19th century led to its inclusion in many illustrations, paintings and buildings as a means of denoting Irishness. The decoration of O'Meara's Irish House built in 1870, and now unfortunately demolished, showed nearly all the Irish emblems popular at the time. The roundtowers on the roof and the wolfhounds in the alcoves on the walls are two of the more immediately recognisable symbols.

From the mid-19th century many artists and craftsmen became very interested in the intricate designs present in the decoration of objects and manuscripts from celtic to early Christian times. Through their use and reuse through illustrators such as Margaret Stokes, among others, this type of celtic design also became intrinsically linked with Irishness. The use of typefaces based on the celtic uncial script found in the manuscripts of this period also dates back to the 19th century. The capital "T" with all its interlace and entwining animals from Margaret Stokes' title page of Samuel Ferguson's Cromlech

fig.2, Margaret Stokes; title page of Samuel Ferguson's The Cromlech of Howth, 1861

fig.3, "School of Athens" by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1751.

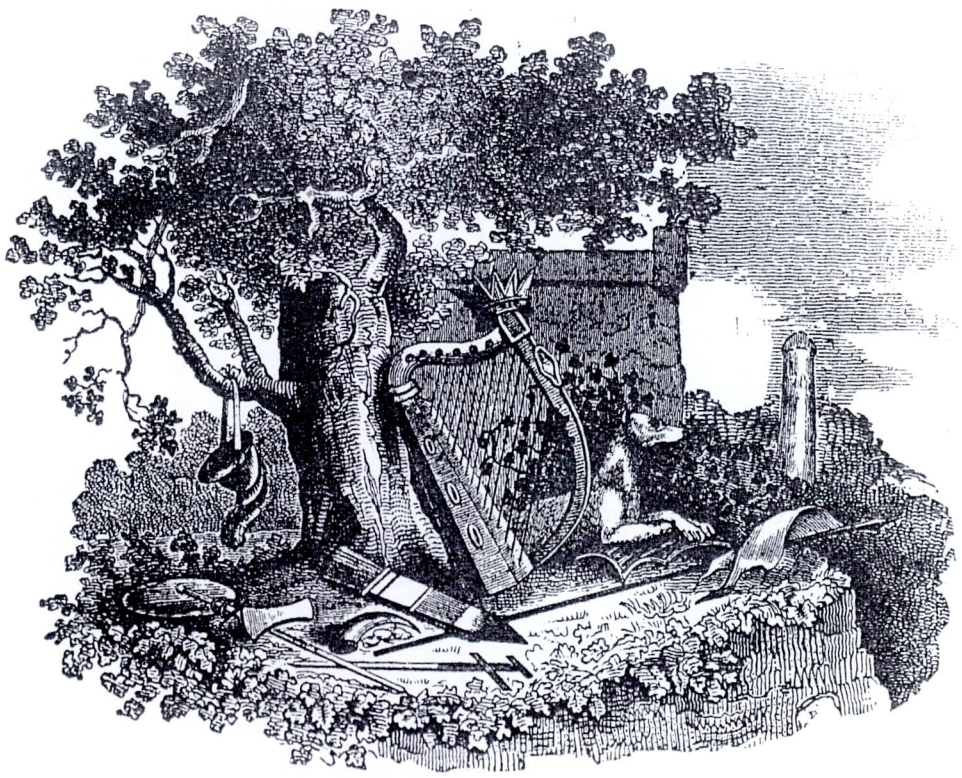

fig.4, "National Emblems"- illustration heading a letter from Caesar Otway in The Dublin Penny Journal, 7th July 1832.

on Howth, pub.1861, comes directly from the Book of Kells. Unlike the wolfhound and round tower, this use of celtic design and script in order to convey Irishness, continued into the 20th century and is still very much relied upon in contemporary graphic design.

Another emblem popular at the time and still popular today is the shamrock. In fact, the idea of using a shamrock to denote Irishness had been in use for some time before the 19th century. It was first mentioned in Tudor times, when it was generally believed in England that the shamrock was a staple part of the Irish diet. Edmund Campion's Historie of Ireland, pub.1570, refers to "shamrotes, watercresses, and other herbs they feed upon". It had also long been associated with St.Patrick and St.Patrick's Day, the 17th of March, when the plant was, and still is, worn by Irish all over the world. The connection between St.Patrick and the shamrock (unsupported by any historical evidence) is explained by Caleb Threlkeld in his Stiripium Hibernicarum, subtitled, A Short Treatise on Native Plants, especially such as grow spontaneously in the vicinity of Dublin, pub.1727.

> This plant is worn by the people in their hats on the 17th day of March yearly which is called St.Patrick's Day, it being a current tradition that, by this three leaved grass, he emblematically set forth to them the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

In art the shamrock begins to make a regular appearance in the 18th century. A caricature by Sir Joshua Reynolds dating from 1751 shows four gentlemen with musical instruments, each with a different emblem denoting a different country of origin in his hat. One of the men, the Irish peer Lord Charlemont, is wearing a large bunch of shamrock in his hat. By the early 19th century its use had become widespread.

The shamrock, harp, wolfhound, roundtower and oaktree, which sometimes symbolized Ireland rather than England, can all be seen together in the illustration "National Emblems", which headed a letter from Ceasar Otway in the Dublin Penny Journal for 7th July 1832.

The next most commonly found Irish emblem was the harp. It, like the shamrock, existed as an Irish emblem before the 19th century. It is said to have appeared on the Irish arms in the reign of Henry VII and certainly appeared on the Royal Arms of Britain in the reign of James I. The Earl of Northampton, the Deputy Earl Marshal is said to have observed,

> that for the adoption of the harp the reason he could assign was that it resembled Ireland

fig.5, Daniel Maclise; illustration of "The Origin of the Harp", from Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies, 1845.

in being such an instrument that it required more cost to keep in tune than it was worth.

In the 19th century the harp was often drawn accompanying Hibernia (a female figure used to represent Ireland). A three dimensional example of this can be seen on top of the National Bank, College Green carved in 1889 by Pearse and Sharpe. Sometimes the woman was incorporated into the harp to form one side. This can be seen in Daniel Maclise's illustration of "The Origin of the Harp" from Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies, pub.1845. Its increased familiarity today is due mainly to two reasons: in 1862 it was adopted as a trademark by Guinness's Brewery, and in 1926 it was adopted as the symbol to be used by the new Irish government.

As mentioned before, the oral tradition had greater importance than our visual tradition. Even with the development of new styles and emblems in order to complement and help define the emerging nation during the Celtic Revival and the years following not a lot of importance was attached to Irish art and visual communications.

As late as 1949, Thomas Bodkin wrote in his Report on the Arts in Ireland that "no country in Western Europe cared less or gave less, for the cultivation of the arts". This attitude towards the arts was obvious in the indistinguished and unambitious visible manifestations of the Irish government. When the country became a free state in 1922, the crown was simply replaced with a harp. Revolutionary heraldry was abandoned in favour of the colour symbolism of a European-style tricolour flag. The only feature that gave the state any visual distinction was its first official language- Irish - to be used in the ancient Gaelic script. Even this was eventually disgarded when the Minister for Education in the 1960s decided that the Irish language should be "modernised" and school children should now learn to read and write Irish in roman type. This lack of regard for the state's visual identity unfortunately still exists today. As yet there is no unity in the colour, position and type of harp used on government literature. Each department seems to have its own favourite variation.

Things did begin to change, however. It took until the 1960s for Ireland to begin to catch up to the rest of the world. The momentum of successive Programmes of Economic Development pioneered by Lemass and T.K.Whitaker, the impact of the Second Vatican Council, and the introduction of national television where taboo issues could be raised on popular programmes like the "Late Late Show" - all these factors led to the transformation of what had been a predominantly agricultural, isolated, conservative population into a new, urban, dynamic and youthful economy where a fundamental change in cultural attitudes was

quickly taking place. It was this change in attitude that the then Taoiseach Sean Lemass was referring to when he said, "the attitude in mind which is expressed in the phrase 'it's good enough' must be replaced by a new attitude in which nothing less than the best is good enough".[5]

With this in mind the Irish Export Board, Coras Trachtala, in 1960, sought and was granted administrative responsibility for improving standards of design in Ireland. Its first step was to invite a group of eminent Scandinavian designers to report on the state of design in the country. The five-man team spent two weeks visiting factories, colleges, museums and shops. Their report Design in Ireland, pub.1962, was predictably critical of the low level of design in Ireland.

The government in the form of the Export Board responded to this report by setting up Kilkenny Design in 1963.[6] The concept behind this "missionary centre of influence" was that this would be a community where foreign and native designers and craftsmen would interact and that this permanent implant of design skills would have a lasting influence on industry and on the Irish people in general.

Graphic design was one of the main design areas targeted by Kilkenny Design for development. They realised that,

> national identity as perceived by politician, industrialist, investor, tourist, export buyer or general public is projected in many ways, by no means all controlled or influenced by government or industry.

In other words the visual manifestations of state and commerce contribute a large share to the image of Ireland. Thus the majority of their graphic work was done for state or semi-state bodies where the idea of depicting national identity through image and symbol was re-introduced and re-worked. Many of the resulting logos have stood the test of time and are still in use today, (eg. Telecom Eireann, O.P.W. etc...).

The workshops were set up at a time when good modern design was rarely seen, When there were no industrial designers in the country and when education for those wishing to become designers was clearly inadequate. Nowadays it is possible to find well-designed Irish products in most areas of manufacture and there are no less than eleven third level institutions in Ireland offering internationally recognised courses in design. Kilkenny Design was not directly responsible for all this of course, but it had the effect of focusing att ntion on design leading to the establishment of the Crafts Council of Ireland, the National College of Art and Design Act, and the setting up of the Society of Designers of Ireland.

Although Kilkenny Design changed dramatically since its inception in 1963 and was finally discontinued altogether in 1988 due to lack of government funding, it was crucial to the development of good design in Ireland, and graphic design especially.

Up until very recently (the late 1970s), design companies did not exist in Ireland. Graphic design was up until then handled by the advertising agencies, hardly the most fruitful environment for innovative design. Now, however, all that has changed and Ireland can boast of some of the best young design companies in Europe, who are following on from Kilkenny Design in establishing and developing the concept of "Irish" graphic design.

CHAPTER TWO

An Irish Identity in Contemporary Graphic Design through the use of symbols made popular during the 19th century.

Christopher Coppock wrote in an editorial for Circa, no.14, 1984, that,

> the Southern State is constantly preoccupied with projecting an image of Ireland which transcends the oppression of its colonial heritage.

Indeed there is no doubt that the first part of this statement is true. Ireland is constantly preoccupied with projecting an image of Ireland and what it is to be Irish. All one needs for proof of this is to refer to magazines such as Circa to witness the continuing never-ending debate as to the existence and definition of the Irishness of Irish art.

Why is it that the Irish have to constantly keep referring to and exploring this concept of an Irish identity through visual means? Robert Ballagh points out the ludicrous nature of this particular trait in the catalogue for the "In a State" exhibition, 1991. He puts forward the ridiculous notion of French intellectuals sitting about discussing the nature of French cultural identity. The French know what it is to be French and that's that. The Irish, though, seem to be constantly pre-occupied with defining national identity. This preoccupation continues to some extent into design. What other country has so many different emblems that they can call upon in order to denote national identity? In this chapter, three easily identifiably Irish emblems will be discussed - the shamrock, the harp and the Irish wolfhound. You would have a hard job trying to come up with even one equally as well recognised symbol or emblem for a country such as, say, France, for example.

Getting back to Christopher Coppock's statement, he claims the reason (or at least one of them) for this national pre-occupation is that Ireland wishes to project an image of itself that "transcends the oppression of its colonial heritage". If this is true, then we don't seem to be succeeding, for many of the symbols used to denote Irishness in design have only become such through their implementation by our English colonists, (discussed in more detail in the previous chapter). It is these symbols and their present implementation in Irish graphic design that will be discussed in this chapter.

fig.6, Bord Fáilte's logo.

fig.7, The Canadian Tourist Board's logo.

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the country with the latest figures estimatig that £920 million was generated in Ireland in 1992 directly due to the tourism industry. With an industry as important as this it is not surprising that a lot of attention has been focused on all aspects of the Irish Tourist Board, as it is probably the most obvious vehicle on the international market which promotes an Irish identity. It does this through a number of means, one of the main ones being graphic design. In an article on Australian graphic design in the magazine Design World, no.19,1990, it was said that "one of the most immediate impressions of any country's culture is evident through its graphic design". If this is the case what impressions of our culture is Bord Failte conveying through its use of graphic design?

Liam de Paor has said of St.Patrick's Day and all its cliched pagentry, that it "marks a unity that actually exists".[7] Is this true? Is it the case that Irish identity is now generally accepted as being portrayed and celebrated through a once yearly explosion of shamrocks, green beer and leprechaun stickers? If it is true, Bord Failte are on the right track as regards their graphic design.

They've opted for the shamrock, a symbol made popular during the 19th century and probably the most cliched symbol associated with the country.

The Bord Failte shamrock has been left as unchanged as possible. The logo is nothing more than a kelly green shamrock encircled by its own stem. I know the logo had to be as obviously Irish as was possible, but it's still hard to believe that some small degree of development or originality couldn't be successfully injected into the design. A tendency to multiply designs rather than invent them was a failing of the Celtic Revival and to a large extent is still unfortunately a failing today.

However, for all its apparent unoriginality, this particular style of logo must be very acceptable in the tourist industry world-wide, as the Canadian Tourist Board uses an almost exact copy of Bord Failte's symbol. The only difference is that the shamrock is replaced by a maple leaf and the colours used are red and white not green and white.

I feel a slight diversion away from the idea of depicting Irish identity purely through symbols is necessary at this point in order to get an overall view of Bord Failte's approach to conveying a sense of Irishness through graphic design in general. Not only is the Irish Tourist Board complacent in sticking to Irish stereotypes in their logo but this approach also continues into their ad campaigns.

As well as being of featuring stereotypical red-faced Irish folk in many of their ads, they have also tended to rely upon the tenuos link they believe exists in the minds of the general public between Ireland and "celtic" mystique. Some of the copy used in their ads is very much on the whimsical side with lines such as the mysterious "Ireland. You'll only know by being there" and "Ireland - where all the time in the world isn't enough".

The reception Bord Failte's ads have had among the British advertising industry can be judged by a comment made in 1987 by Detta O'Cathain, Managing Director of the British Milk Marketing Board and an influential figure in the British marketing industry. She said,

> It's so boring. I can't remember when I last saw a decent advertisement for holidays in Ireland which actually made me want to go there.

Thankfully though their advertising approach has begun to change. One of the latest series of Bord Failte ads features Jack Charlton in order to bring attention to more practical points - the good fishing and golf potential here.

So perhaps Bord Failte will eventually be able to leave behind all notions of stereotypical Irishness in all areas of their graphic design.

It seems to be that Irish companies who deal mainly with an international market favour the symbols that came to prominence during the Celtic Revival when it comes to choosing a logo. Bord Failte is not the only Irish body to have made use of the internationally recognised shamrock. In fact, it seems that the shamrock is the most acceptable symbol to be used in connection with any industry that wishes to display an Irish origin.

In 1971 Kilkenny Design was asked to design logos for Dairy Produce and Food Quality Assurance. These designs were used to identify national initiatives following Ireland's entry into the E.E.C. The first logo consists of a shamrock surrounded by and linked to a simplified milk churn and the Food Quality Assurance Mark consists of a shamrock surrounded by a circle representing a plate, with a fork in place of a stem.

Obviously since the 19th century, the shamrock has gone from strength to strength. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is another example of a logo that uses the shamrock. It's logo consists of a white shamrock with one red leaf on a green hexagonal background. This shamrock unlike Bord Failte's has, at least to some extent anyway, been developed and added to.

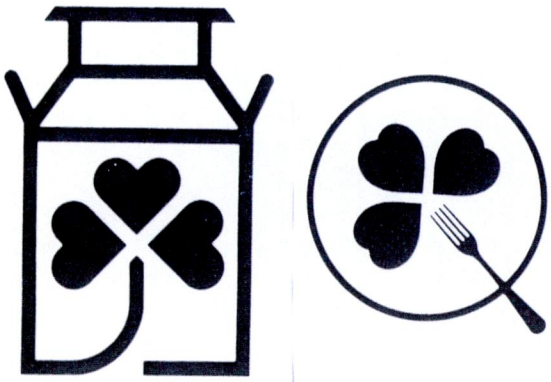

fig.8, Dairy Produce and Food Quality Assurance marks.

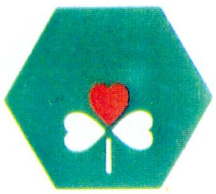

fig.9, The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's logo.

fig.11, Irish Ferries' logo.

fig.12, The I.D.A. logo.

fig.10, Aer Lingus' logo.

In order to communicate the fact that this logo stands for the "Northern" Ireland Tourist Board, a red leaf has been added, connecting it with the red hand of Ulster. Also, the hexagonal background was purposely chosen in order to incorporate into the logo the fact that there are six counties in Northern Ireland.

But the use of the shamrock to display Irishness doesn't stop here. The Irish transport industry has also fallen prey to its charms and suitability. The Aer Lingus and Irish Ferries logos also feature shamrocks. The Aer Lingus logo is remarkably similar to the Bord Failte shamrock. It consists simply of a green shamrock on a white background. The only difference between the two logos is that the Aer Lingus logo is missing Bord Failte's encircling stem. Although Irish Ferries use a shamrock in their logo, at least they have made some effort to develop it. Their shamrock is white on a background of three coloured strips, one navy, one blue and one green.

I find it incredible that such a large percentage of Ireland's tourist and transport companies feel it necessary to use the shamrock as a logo. No other country relies so heavly on one symbol in order to convey a sense of national identity. Surely it is possible to use newly designed symbols with equal success. In the catalogue In a State, pub.1991, Robert Ballagh cites a major identity problem as the reason for the constant debate about definitions of cultural identity. Perhaps this identity problem is also present in industry and graphic design. The shamrock is the one symbol everyone nationally and internationally associates with Ireland, so why introduce new symbols and possibly confuse the issue?

Up until now most of the industries I have discussed are all based around tourism and deal mainly with the general public, so obviously the logo and graphics they employ are to have the widest possible appeal. So perhaps as well as possible identity problems, this is another reason why they have all opted for this very simple symbol, because the simpler the symbol the better when dealing with a large market. If that is the case why then do other Irish industries who have no direct connection with the tourist industry also use the shamrock as a logo?

The I.D.A. is one such example with its three green hexagons in an obvious shamrock shape. The I.D.A. is a semi-state body set up to promote Irish industry at home and to attract foreign companies to set up factories here and, therefore,not the type of company catering to the needs of the general public. So whatever the reasons behind the continuing unsurpassed popularity of the shamrock in order to denote Irishness, this symbol which first became connected with Ireland in Tudor times, shows no signs of becoming unacceptable, at least not among Irish industry dealing with an international market at any rate.

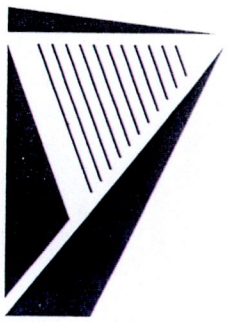

fig.13, The National Treasury Management Agency logo.

fig.14, Ryanair's logo.

fig.15, Bus Éireann's logo.

The harp is another symbol long associated with Ireland that is also used in contemporary design in order to establish a company's Irish origin. Although less popular than the shamrock the harp symbol has the advantage of being connected with the government, thus giving it a more dignified almost stately feel.

As I have mentioned before, the government has yet to introduce a uniform harp and rules of its application as regards all state literature. Presently each department uses its own preferred variation. In 1990, the National Treasury Management Agency was established to take over funding and treasury functions previously performed by the Department of Finance. The newly established agency approached the Dublin based design company, Design Works, to design a logo that would emphasise its,

> newness and independance as an organisation and its role as an agent of the Irish government in domestic and foreign capital markets.[8]

Its strong links with the Irish government and the need to choose a logo that would be synonymous with Ireland led Design Factory to the conclusion that the harp would be the most appropriate symbol. Their final design was a simplified and modernised interpretation of the harp.

But the harp isn't just relegated to government-linked bodies. Ryanair, the second largest Irish airline, also makes use of this ancient symbol. The body and wings of a female figure forms two sides of the Ryanair harp. This logo is obviously based on 19th century depictions of Hibernia or Erin forming one side of the Irish harp (eg. Daniel Maclises' illustration "The Origin of the Harp", fig.5). The quick painterly style in which the Ryanair logo is executed and the simple colour scheme (navy and white) combine to give this 19th century image a 20th century feel. This logo is an example of how an Irish identity can be successfully conveyed using an old and often used symbol in a new and refreshing way.

The harp symbol seems to work very successfully in many areas. An example where it was used to great effect was in the Slalom Canoe event in last year's Olympics. A distinctly Irish logo was needed to be placed on the front of the Irish team's canoes and kayaks as well as on the helmets of the canoeists. A clear, strong, but very definately Irish identity was needed. The harp emblem was chosen. The design is lively and humorous and doesn't convey any of the seriousness and conventionality that comes with the government harp. This bright green harp has a very fluid rounded shape with little pieces breaking away to become stylised air bubbles travelling upwards. The design has a very modern feel to it and successfully links canoeing and watersports with an Irish emblem.

The shamrock and harp are really the only two symbols used to denote Irish identity that have managed to survive in design since the Celtic Revival of the 19th century. The roundtower, celtic cross and Irish wolfhound have all gradually gone out of fashion. But perhaps the redsetter, adopted by Bus Eireann as a logo in 1987, could be said to have wolfhound ancestry. It's a good deal more friendly and less wolfish looking than its predecessor but it stands for all the same qualities - fidelity, loyalty, strength and dependability.

CHAPTER THREE

An Irish Identity in Contemporary Graphic Design through Images and Styles derived from Celtic and Early Christian Sources

Patrick Ireland has said that "in Ireland the past always had a big future"[9], a statement unfortunately all too true. Since the Celtic Revival of the 19th century it's not just the symbols discussed in the last chapter that have become immediately identifiable as Irish. The reawakening of interest in our celtic and early Christian past at this time led to the nationwide desire to study and simulate architecture and artworks that have survived from this period. Roundtower bellfrys and Romanesque-style churches sprang up all over the country and one only has to walk into any graveyard dating back to the last century to see the hundreds of intricately carved 19th century high crosses.

Just as early ecclesiastical building influenced the architecture of the period, the renewed interest in the Book of Kells and Durrow and the rediscovery of the Tara Brooch and other examples of celtic metalwork similarly influenced the nationally-minded illustrators and designers of the time. Much attention was given to the letterforms and intricate designs found in the old manuscripts. Thomas Bodkin has said of the old Irish scribes who worked on these manuscripts that "they worked in happy complacency". Unfortunately this was also the case when it came to the 19th century craftsmen. Instead of using these designs as a starting point for further development, they were more often than not simply copied directly (eg. Margaret Stokes, p.3).

Although celtic design is by no means peculiar to Ireland, (most preChristian celtic metal and stonework that still exists today has been found on the continent, and as for celtic-influenced early Christian art, many examples can be seen in Scotland and Northern England), the Irish have adopted celtic design as a national style. Obviously the meaning these designs once had are now lost. Now, according to Seamus Heany,

> ['celtic'] has come to mean an art form that refuses to accept the strident precisions of the present and rather chooses to continue to comment on a type of behaviour and existance which has no longer any relevance or resonance.
>
> (The Irish Times, 21 Sept, 1967.)

For all this these designs can still be found on hundreds of Irish items. A 19th century style Irish landscape surrounded

fig.16, The Expo'92 logo.

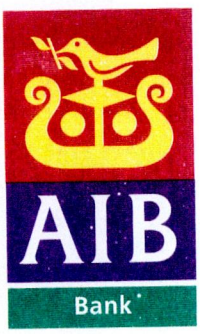

fig.17, The Allied Irish Bank logo.

by celtic interlace on a Ballygowan bottle, an illustration of the Tara Brooch on a milk carton and a small section of a Book of Kells winged creature on a Maguire and Paterson matchbox - these are just three of many modern day examples.

With so many examples to choose from I have decided to opt for more wellknown examples that have been designed for the international as well as the national market.

A good example is the award-winning logo designed by the Dublin based design company, Design Works, for the Irish pavillion at Expo'92 in Seville. This logo was designed to reflect the Irish "voyage of discovery" in all areas of the arts and sciences from ancient up to present times. Design Works took their inspiration from the model gold boat dating from the first century A.D. which was part of the Broighter Hoard found in Co. Derry during the last century.

Even though this logo is clearly based on celtic sources, there is no real overuse of Irish celtic design, with just five small spirals in the boat to represent the sailors and two small spirals marking the horizontal lines in the "A"s in the accompanying "IRLANDA". Also the use of a boat to represent sea-surrounded Ireland is original. The only other contemporary logo to use a boat in order to display Irish identity is the much maligned Wolfe Olins' logo for Allied Irish Banks which was based on a depiction of the ark found carved into a 12th century stone cross in Co. Meath. Design Works Expo'92 logo was designed specifically to just convey a feeling of Irish identity, which it does successfully. Wolfe olins' logo also conveys a definite feeling of Irish identity, but it is less successful than the Expo'92 logo because it fails somewhat in its added task of conveying to the public what qualities A.I.B. has as a bank. Who's to say that if an Irish based company had designed this logo, it would have perhaps been regarded as cliched, as over relying on the celtic/Irish connection.

In a recent article on Irish graphic design in The Irish Times a number of Irish graphic designers pointed out that their work does not pander to internationally recognised styles. Paddy O'Flaherty, a designer at D.B.A. Publications and Graphic Services, states "we are not concerned with following international design trends", a view also held by Susan Braybrooke, an American writer who wrote an article on Design Works for Print Magazine, Mar/Apr 1991. She claims to recognise certain qualities such as "zany wit, lightness of touch and charm about their design" that are "distinctly Irish". The reason she puts forward for this innate "Irishness" in their work is the fact that the company is still nurtured by some of the traditional values of Irish life; "home, family, faith,

fig.18, Dublin 1991 European City of Culture logo.

the Irish countryside and folk culture" that these values are an intricate part of its work ethos. But obviously other Irish designers up until now have also been exposed to these Irish values. As Ciaran Carty said about painting, but which could be equally applicable to design, "the sense in which a painting is 'Irish'... is something innate in the conditioned sensibility of the artist"[10]. If so, then every previous Irish designer should have been equally able to use to full advantage the particular values and ethos of Irish culture in their work. However, that hasn't been the case. Perhaps it is only now when the advocation and acceptance of regionalism in art has begun that it is acceptable for particularly Irish qualities and images to be universally acceptable in both fine art and design.

A relevant example of this new departure away from marginalising local and even national themes could be Cathy Predergast's bronze copy of the Broighter model boat, which she exhibited in Rosc'88. Whether or not Design Works were aware of this three dimensional representation of the boat when designing their boat is irrelevant. What is interesting is the fact that the influence postmodernism has on the fine art world seems to have also seeped into Irish design. Now it seems that it is not only the artists but also the designers who have the opportunity to, in the words of Joan Fowler,

> introduce local themes into their work
> in the knowledge that these may be of
> interest not only locally and nationally
> but internationally as well[11].

This is definitely the case with the Expo'92 logo. Design Works have successfully used a symbol, that, although quite wellknown in Ireland, would not previously have had the same recognition elsewhere.

Not all of Dublin's design companies have been so highly praised. Design Factory, a longer established company than Design Works, is responsible for the Dublin 1991 European City of Culture logo. When designing this logo they seem to have fallen into the trap of over-relying on the celtic/Irish link that exists in the minds of most. Design Factory claim to have captured "a sense of Dublin's cultural heritage"[12] in the logo. Personally I feel this claim is unjustified. In designing the logo they must have realised the impossiblity of the task before them, that is to give an impression in just one logo of the wealth of cultural achievement associated with the city. Instead they resorted to a geographical and less appropriate representation, for the symbol they arrived at concentrates on the location of Dublin, using a graphic of flowing water to represent the River Liffey. The way in which the water is represented gives it a "celtic" feel with the spiral-ended stylistic waves and a rough, rock-hewn-like appearance.

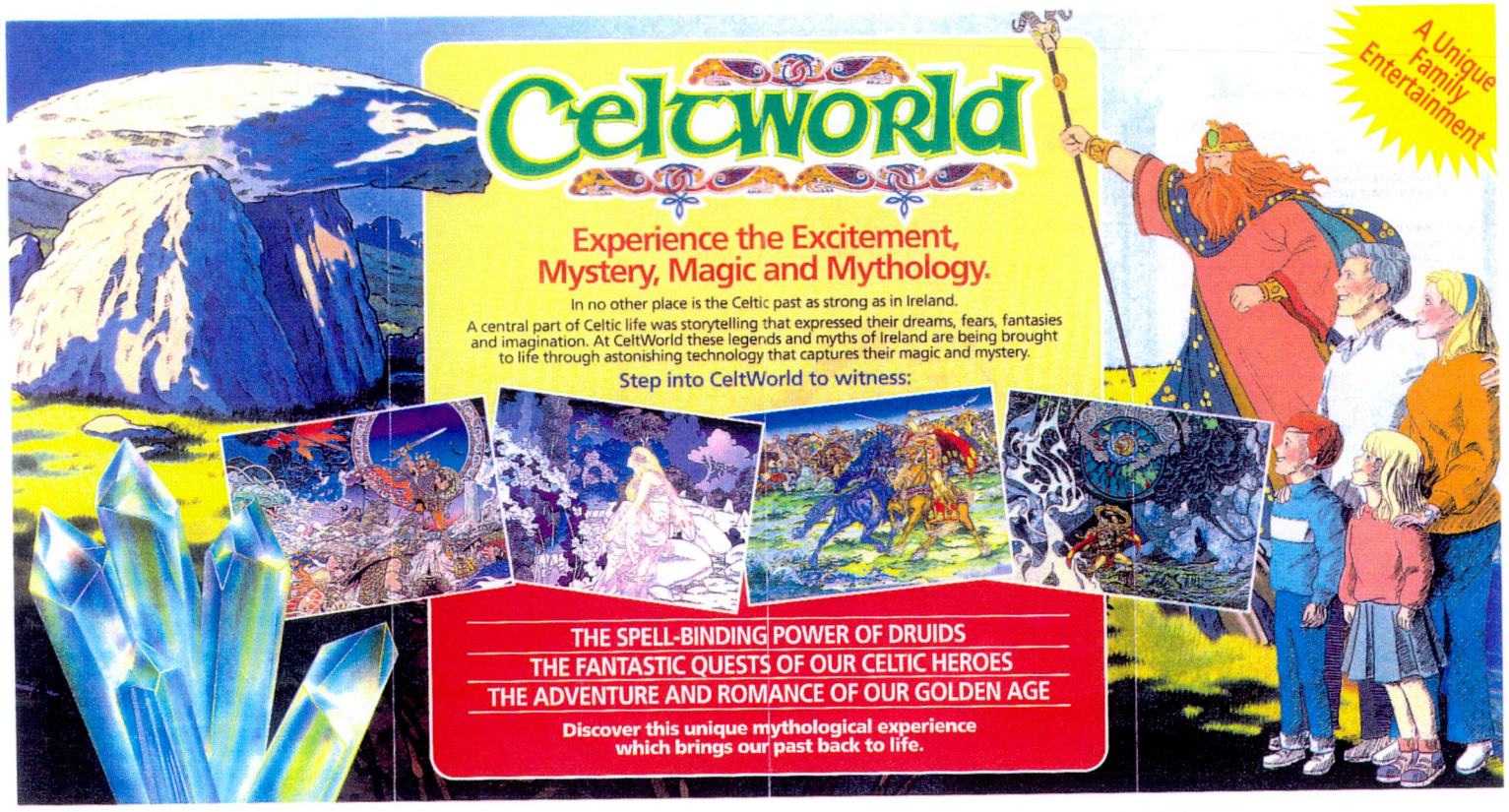

fig.19, A section of the Celtworld brochure produced by Bord Fáilte.

This "celtic" approach to the design is in no way representational of the culture of the city, which is more reknowned for its 18th and 19th century heritage than its celtic and early Christian past.

In his article "Sleeping with the Past" (Circa no.59), Luke Dodd has said that ,

> museums function as an expression of how a particular culture or people view themselves or more particularly would like to be viewed. Museums are the public face of a culture.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word "museum" as a "building used for storing and exhibition of objects illustrating antiquities, natural history, arts, etc...", a definition that also covers the latest development in the global heritage industry - the theme park. If Luke Dodd is correct, these theme parks then, are a representation of what we imagine to be the attractive features of our nation and our culture and are the latest vehicle through which Bord Failte is advertising our national heritage.

At the moment, Celtworld in Tramore, Co. Waterford, is one of the few completely finished theme parks. Its purpose is to recount the stories of Ireland's mythological past. Its graphic identity, and a taste of what can be expected at Celtworld can be seen to full effect on the brochure released by Bord Failte. Some examples of the copy used on this brochure are, "Discover this unique mythological experience which brings our past back to life" or "Celtworld - where legend lives". The whole publication is covered with Jim Fitzpatrick illustrations. These science fiction, comic-book style "celtic" warriors doing battle with beautiful blonde maidens looking on, give a pretty good impression of the style of story telling in Celtworld.

Even the style in which "Celtworld" is written on the brochure is completely over the top with green and orange uncial-style lettering surrounded by Book of Kells-style birds. The designers of the brochure were obviously not interested in historical accuracy as the Celts and Celtic culture were long gone by the time this type of uncial lettering and manuscript illustration were developed in Ireland.

One would imagine that the inaccuracy of the brochure really shouldn't matter because, after all, Celtword is perceived as being essentially just an entertainment. However, the alarming point about this is that Celtworld is meant to be an accurate representation of Irish folklore. It has even received the imprimatuer of Daithi O hOgain, the professor

fig.20, The Irish Museums Association logo.

of Irish folklore at University College Dublin. What sort of Disney-like cultural and national identity are we portraying through this type of theme park? Will it eventually get to the stage where it will be necessary to continually exaggerate and glamorize our past in order to boost the much needed tourist industry?

This is what has happened in Czechoslavakia where the President has recently had the uniforms of the guard at the Presidential Palace redesigned by Theodar Pistak, designer for the film Amadeus. The new Hollywood style uniforms consist of gold-braided blue or red tunics with white trousers. Maybe then Celtworld is a forerunner to the type of amenities tourists will encounter all over the country in the future. Indeed, this Disney-style approach to dealing with tourism has already been discussed. At a Bord Failte conference on heritage tourism in January 1992, Tony Christopher, president of the Hollywood based Landmark Entertainment Group, put forward the idea that what we should do here is build a really big theme park, possibly based on Finn McCool, which would generate global interest in Ireland.

If this is the approach to be taken by theme parks what of museums? Maybe the future of tourism isn't so bleak. Maybe it is only the theme parks that are concerned with using the much overused Irish/celtic connection. If this is the case why then have the Irish Museums Association chosen a new logo purely based on this connection? Their new logo is an image taken from early Irish eccleciastical sources. It consists of four linking figures in a square shape. Only a small number of the museums in this association exhibit artwork from this period in history, so why use it as a logo? Why not choose a logo that concentrates instead on the museum aspect of the society not on the Irish aspect? Or why not develop to some extent the image they have already chosen and inject a bit of originality into it rather than just lifting it straight from a thousand year old manuscript?

fig.21, The Office of Public Works logo.

In the article "Searching for the Heart of Saturday Night", Circa, no.14, 1984, Dorothy Walker has claimed that abstract linear art is a style of art very much a part of the Irish people. It has been with us since the great stones were carved at Newgrange around 3,000BC. She says, "for 5,000 years, the high points of Irish art have been expressed in abstract form". She goes on to say that all the traditional crafts of Ireland, from knitting to basket making to St.Bridget's crosses, have a strong abstract bias in design. There is certainly some truth in this. The celtic work in stone and metal from the La Tene period in Ireland doesn't feature any figurative work, unlike the work produced on the continent at the same time. And the ecclesiastical architecture from the great church-building 12th and 13th centuries in Ireland is noticeably lacking in figurative sculpture and decoration also unlike the churches erected in France and Germany during the same era.

Admittedly this argument is soley based on opinion and impossible to prove, but all the same it's very tempting to draw comparisons between this supposedly Irish preference for non-representative linear art and modern Irish graphic design and, more especially, Kilkenny Design's predilection for celtic and preceltic spiral-work and other patterns in their design work of the 1970s which, for whatever reasons, fits nicely into Dorothy Walker's theory.

Two very good examples of this celtic spiral-inspired work from this period in Kilkenny Design's history are the symbols which were designed for the Office of Public Works and the National Film Studios of Ireland.

The O.P.W. logo designed in 1970 consists of an equilateral triangle with four circles within a circle at each apex. It is obviously based on preChristian spiral design, probably the wellknown triple spiral at Newgrange. The triangle placed onto or cutting into the three circles could be referring to the Ordnance Survey triangular symbol for the summit of a mountain and the three expanding circles could also be representative of ripples in water, both of these factors tying in with the Forest and Parks section of the O.P.W. The obvious relation it has to the shape of a shamrock shouldn't be over-looked either.

In 1990 the management of the Office of Public Works decided to adopt this trefoil logo for the full office. Four young designers (all had just graduated from N.C.A.D.) were given the job of producing a manual that would give strict guidelines as to the application of the logo, typeface and colour on any publication or signage produced by the Office. Up until then a corporate colour had never been decided upon by the management. The former Parks and Monuments Service used

fig.22, The National Film Studios of Ireland logo.

green in a lot of their communication, and the Waterways Service in recent years had been using blue on their vehicles. The new colours now to be used on all communication by the office are teal and red. Teal is a mix of blue and green incorporating the two previously used colours.

The logo for the National Film Studios of Ireland was designed in 1976. At first glance the design seems to be an exact copy of some piece of celtic metalwork. Then on closer observation you realise that the four spirals represent two reels of film placed back to back. Unlike the O.P.W. logo, the whole celtic feel to this piece of design wasn't developed enough. Maybe the reference to reels of film was too subtle, meaning that the success of the logo was more or less dependant on the aesthetically pleasing, but overused celtic spiral design. The logo was dropped in the 1980s.

fig.23, A selection of the winning typefaces in the Kilkenny Design/Letraset "Design an Irish Typeface" competion.

As well as the symbols and patterns so far discussed, there exists another important means to convey an Irish identity that originated in early Christian times. That is the use of the Irish uncial typeface, a uniquely Irish contribution to graphic design. This typeface is based on the script used in early Irish manuscripts. Up until the second half of the 20th century it was quite unusual to see English printed in a typeface based on this script. Uncial script had originally been developed from the roman alphabet by the 8th and 9th century monks who wrote in Latin but who's vernacular language was Gaelic, so eventually the Irish language also came to be written in this script. Every schoolchild up until the 1960s was taught to write Gaelic using a variation of uncial script. It was then that the Minister for Education replaced this typestyle with modern roman type.

Although this typestyle was dropped by the state in the 1960s when writing in Irish, characters that match the English alphabet have been taken and developed and several uncial typefaces have been designed to fit the English language. This development was actively encouraged by Kilkenny Design and Letraset who in 1978 launched a "Design an Irish Typeface" competition. The result was a series of attractive typefaces which immediately convey a sense of Irishness through the use of centuries old Gaelic letterforms, but which have been developed sufficiently to bring them more in line with the English alphabet.

This suggestion of Irishness through the use of Gaelic letter-forms is a much more successful method, I believe, of conveying an Irish identity than through the use of symbol. With the numerous variations of uncial-based typefaces that now exist, the designer can take a much more subtle approach by being able to choose the uncial typeface most applicable.

Two examples of wellknown successful logos that have been developed with the uncial typeface in mind are the An Post logo and Telecom Eireann's logo.

In 1984 the Dept. of Posts and Telegraphs separated to become An Post and Telecom Eireann. A corporate identity was needed for both of these companies in order to, in the words of Tom Shakespeare, project manager for An Post,

> convey to the public an image of a company
> that is efficient, friendly, cost effective,
> innovative, market driven, customer orientated,
> and good to work for.
>
> (from An Post's Corporate Identity Standards Manual)

An Post decided to invite designers from the country's most experienced firms and consultancies to compete for the job. The winner of the competition was a twenty two year old N.C.A.D. post graduate student, Della Varrilly.

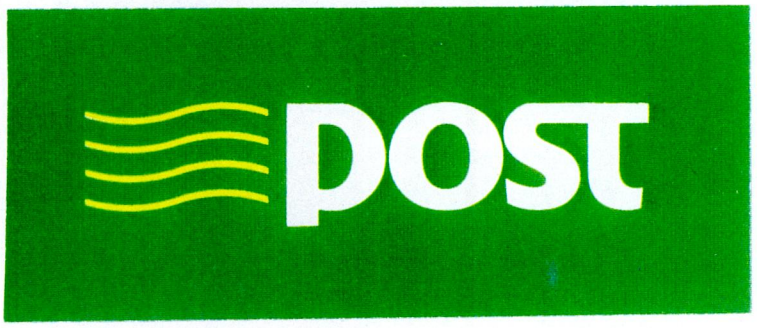

fig.24, The An Post logo.

fig.25, Telecom Éireann's logo.

The logo is simply just a combination of the "cancellation mark" symbol and classic Gaelic uncials for the word "post". The use of this type-based logo as opposed to a symbol or pictorial representation has the added advantage that the wording is instantly recognisable in both English and Irish. The decision to remove the word "the/an" from the main logo was also made for this reason. A lot of development went into the uncial-based letterforms that were used. The letters were rounded and the "s" and "t" connected in a kind of ligature giving it a cleaner more modern look. The cancellation mark which accompanies the logo suggests not only its familiar application but was also intended to point towards An Post's future in electronic mail. The choice of colour was obvious - the familiar postbox green that is nationally associated with the postal service.

An interesting point to note about the development of this logo was that when the details of the competition were released, no mention was made that any suggestion of "Irishness" was to be incorporated into the logo. The fact that Della Varrilly chose to give an impression of national identity through her design was very much her own choice. It could be said that An Post's decision to choose this logo over other non-"Irish" designs shows that when used with a bit of originality and development, the Irish typeface is attractive and versatile enough not to be strictly limited to expressing an Irish identity and can be used to create good and even classic design.

The other new semi-state body formed in 1984 was Telecom Eireann. Kilkenny Design was given the job of designing their logo. The brief was to design a graphic identity that would be as appropriate and recognisable in Ireland as it would be as appropriate and recognisably Irish in the global world of communications technology.

The logo, as in An Post's logo, was developed from the old Gaelic script. In this case the Gaelic forms of "T" and "E" are combined. The "E" sits very comfortably between the "T"'s descender and the long horizontal stroke of the upper part of the "T". Above this sits "Telecom Eireann" presented in capitals in a plain sans serif face. The whole symbol presents a very compact and stable image, and the cable-like appearance of the symbol lends to its suitability in the communications field.

The "Irishness" present in the design is not only obvious through the use of Irish letterforms but also through the echo of a celtic spiral shape formed through the linking of the two letters at the extremity of the "T"'s descender. In fact the design has such a clear Irish quality about it, that unlike most of the logos discussed in this thesis, the designer was confident not to use typically Irish colours. It is printed blue on a white background.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Irish Identity through Postage Stamps and Banknotes.

I have decided not to deal in depth with the concept of national identity through postage stamps and banknotes as there have already been two theses written on these subjects by N.C.A.D. students. The first is Irish Stamp Design by Philip Melly, 1985 and the second is The History, Design and Evolution of Irish Banknotes by Yvonne Blackmore, 1985. However, as postage stamps and banknotes are the two most obvious vehicles in the world of graphic design that promote national identity, I have decided it is necessary to include a short chapter on these two very important image-promoting media.

Postage stamps are a very potent medium for advertising, propaganda and for promoting a country's image, as they could be said to be miniature posters which are constantly changing and being redesigned. There are two types of stamp, commemorative and definitive. Commemorative stamps are, as the name suggests, designed for specific occasions, whereas definitive stamps are used for everyday use, as it were. The latter group therefore, through their continuity, are more important when it comes to promoting national identity.

The first series of definitive stamps issued in Ireland in 1922 was more or less directly related to the political struggle which was ongoing at the time, and thus with the large amount of shamrock, harp and celtic ornament, these stamps were used as a medium for nationalist propaganda. After 1960 a more subtle approach was taken that would have more international appeal. In 1982 a new definitive was designed based on motifs from early Irish art. Out went the shamrock and celtic knotwork and in came the colourful abstract animals found in the early manuscripts. Even the latest series of definitives, designed in 1990, can't get away from these early periods in our history. This series entitled "Irish Heritage and Treasures" features objects dating from our celtic and preceltic past.

Although the stamps are attractive why is that some other period of our history can't be illustrated? It's as though we are projecting an image of ourselves as a country obsessed with the glories (or is it the tourist attraction?) surrounding our preChristian and early Christian past.

fig.26, Some of the 1990 definitive series of stamps.

fig.27, Some of the 1982 definitive series of stamps.

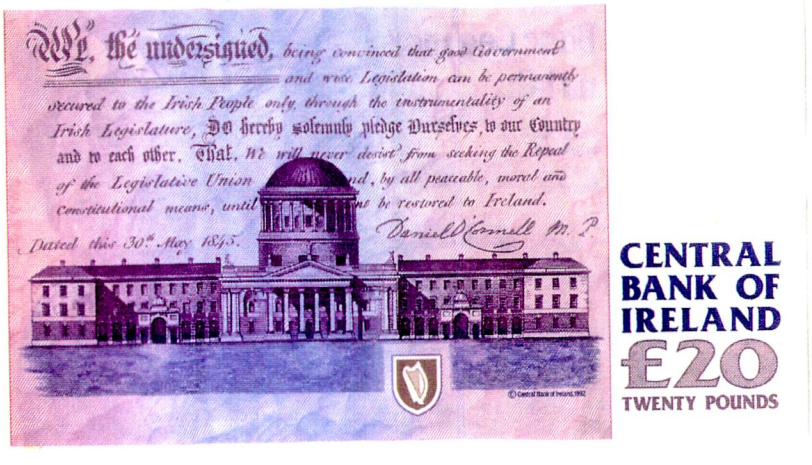

fig.28, The new twenty pound note.

Banknote design is not innocent of this over-reliance on one period of our history either but at least lately there have been changes to move away from this type of representation. Most of the notes in circulation at the moment were designed by Serivon Planning & Design in 1971. They chose to illustrate each note with a portrait of a towering figure from Irish history. By the end of next year the Central Bank hope to have replaced all the 1971 designed notes in circulation with new designs. At this stage two of these notes have already been replaced. The one pound note featuring the warrior queen Medb was the note with the most obviously "celtic" feel to it, with a section of uncial script overlying Newgrange-type spirals on one side and an illustration of Medb and a celtic spiral design overlying more uncial script on the other. The overall colour of the note was green. This note was replaced in 1990 by the less immediately recognisable Irish pound coin, which in common with most of the other Irish coins, features an animal (the stag) that is native to Ireland.

The other note that has been replaced is the twenty pound note. The new note introduced in 1992 was designed by Robert Ballagh. It is smaller in size and instead of W.B.Yeats, features a portrait of Daniel O'Connell. The notes that make up the 1971 series were all quite distinctly Irish. If the images on some notes were not always immediately recognisable as Irish, then the typeface definitely was. All typographical information, apart from signature and serial no. on the 1971 series bank-notes is printed in a typeface designed by Michael Biggs. It is a bold sans serif type with a very definite Irish feel to it. The typeface designed for the new twenty pound note, although still retaining some features of uncial script, has a much more universal feel with its narrower more elongated letterforms. The Central Bank claim to have redesigned the twenty pound note to bring it more in line with the size of other European banknotes. There is also an obvious move in this design away from the "Irish" 1971 series with the introduction of a typeface less reliant on the uncial script. Also, the choice to use Robert Ballagh as the designer (who has always been against the concept of visually defining Irishness[13]), shows an attempt at breaking away from previous approaches that relied on typically Irish images or the use of a definite uncial-style typeface. No doubt the new notes soon to be introduced will also take the same approach.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is clear that Ireland has many ways in which it can convey a sense of national identity.

The shamrock, perhaps the most cliched symbol that can be used, seems to be regarded as the simplest and most effective means of conveying Irish identity. It is the most popular symbol among Irish companies wishing to denote Irish origin, especially companies involved with dealing with an international market, mainly tourism and travel based industries, eg. Bord Failte, Aer Lingus etc...

The harp, the next most popular symbol, has a more dignified feel. Perhaps this is due to its connection with the Irish government, or maybe it is due to the fact that it is not used quite as often as the shamrock as an "Irish" symbol. Ryanair's logo is a good example where the harp is used to good effect.

The use of celtic designs and symbols and the use of an uncial-based typeface are other methods often employed. The Irish logo designed for Expo'92 is a good example of where an Irish celtic image can be taken and used to convey an Irish identity through good graphic design. Usually though, designs using celtic patterns and images, more often than not, fall into the trap of relying too heavily on the celtic/Irish connection and perhaps can lack originality and development, eg. The National Film Studios of Ireland logo, the Irish Museums Association logo etc...

The use of an uncial based typeface is yet another way to give a design a sense of Irishness. The An Post and Telecom Eireann logos are two good examples where this typestyle, based on ancient manuscript script, is used very successfully to give an Irish feel without relying on cliched symbols or images.

On most occasions the use of cliched symbols and styles in "Irish" design is acceptable if not particularly original, for it has to be remembered that a symbol will only become a cliche through constant use owing to its suitability. But one would imagine that with the numerous methods that can be employed to denote Irishness, there should be ample opportunity for the development of good and original "Irish" design. It seems to be that, with the exception of a few examples, this has not been the case. What Thomas Bodkin said of the ancient scribes of the early Irish church I feel is equally applicable to the designers of many of the designs discussed in this thesis, that is, that,

> The Irish scribe work shows a complete absence of any questing doubt....The Irish penman worked in happy complacency.
>
> (Report on the Arts in Ireland, pub.1949.)

FOOTNOTES

1. Many artists and critics have mentioned these two qualities as being representative of an Irish mind, eg. Dorothy Walker has written of an Irish love of paradox and a gift for improvisation, Robert Ballagh has pointed out the Irish sense of irony and humour and Richard Kearney and Louis Le Broquy have written of an ambivalence of mind. ("Searching for the Heart of Saturday Night", Circa no.29, 1986.)

2. Robert Ballagh (In a State, exhibition catalogue, p.21), said that,

   > we Irish prattle on incessantly about definitions of cultural identity which, if it proves anything, indicates the existence of a major national identity problem.

3. Christopher Coppock made the point in his editorial "The Art of Appropriation", Circa no.29, 1986.

4. This information is taken from The Linguistic Training of the Mediaeval Irish Poet by B. O Cuiv.

5. Taken from the report Design in Ireland, pub.1962.

6. N.Marchant's and Jeremy Addis' definition of the Kilkenny Design Workshops, Kilkenny Design, pub. 1984, p.9.

7. The Irish Times, March 17, 1984.

8. Taken from Design Facts, an occasional newsletter from Design Factory.

9. Taken from The Irish Imagination 1959-1971, Rosc 1971.

10. Taken from his biography on Robert Ballagh.

11. Taken from her article "Regionalism Reconsidered", Circa, no.59, 1991, pp.22-25.

12. Taken from Frank McDonald's article "Variation on a Theme Park", The Irish Times, Sept.19, 1992.

13. A good example of Robert Ballagh expressing his dislike for visually defining Irishness can be found on p.21 of the In a State catalogue, 1991.

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