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Title: A Study of Irish Graphic Design Since 1922: European Context.

Thesis number: 976

National College of Art & Design

Faculty of Design

**Department of visual communication**

# A study of Irish graphic design since 1922

## The European context

by

# Paul McKevitt

**1992**

'unless design reflects the artist's origins it is nothing'

Al O'Dea, 1971

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## Preface

For every student preparing a final year thesis, the collection of past pupil's work in the college library can be a useful source of influence and sometimes inspiration. It was from this compilation of theses that I decided on my own thesis subject.

Just like many of my fellow students my initial intention was to choose the work of some designer of international recognition, who has been of significant influence in the design world. However, it struck me as I flicked through the masses of thesis titles, that very little had been written on contemporary graphic design here in Ireland. How strange I felt, that here I was studying graphic design and there was no written evidence that design existed in Ireland outside the college walls.

We all know that this is not the case, there are many design consultancies and advertising agencies in existence, but why is there no, or very little documentation on their work? Is it due to lack of design awareness among the general public or is the graphic design so insignificant that it doesn't merit recognition? Instead we focus our attention on British, mainland European, and American design.

As a final year student, I'm faced with the situation in a few months of being "out there" in the "real world" of the working environment, and not knowing what lies before me. It raised many questions for me . Is there a healthy graphic design industry here in Ireland? Or is every student faced with the age old situation of emigration in order to find work? If there is a design industry, who is involved, and what kind of work are they doing?

Now that we are in 1992, and the European community taking shape, I feel there is an extra relevance in investigating the Irish graphic design situation. Will the European Community have any effect on Irish designers ? Are they concerned with the future possible benefits and perhaps increasing competition on the domestic market by international designers ? As Ireland became the Cultural Capital of Europe in 1991, it was also put in the spotlight, highlighting its achievements in , amongst other things, its visual arts,

Another issue which came to light was the question of national identity in terms of design. Unlike many other European nations, Ireland has a short history of contemporary design. Much has been written about Ireland's national identity, and by implication our national difference from England -" that country we love to hate yet never cease to imitate", as our first President, Douglas Hyde remarked. In terms of design, this remark is justified up to a point, and may have been the case for some years. However, with advances in communication and our membership of the European Community, we are now able to take influences from anywhere in the world. Does this situation mean therefore, that Irish design is merely a mix of imitative styles devoid of any character that we may call our own ?

These are some of the issues which I have explored in this thesis.

## Introduction

Throughout this thesis I will examine various aspects of Irish graphic design in a European context, discussing the issues of national identity, progression and commitment.
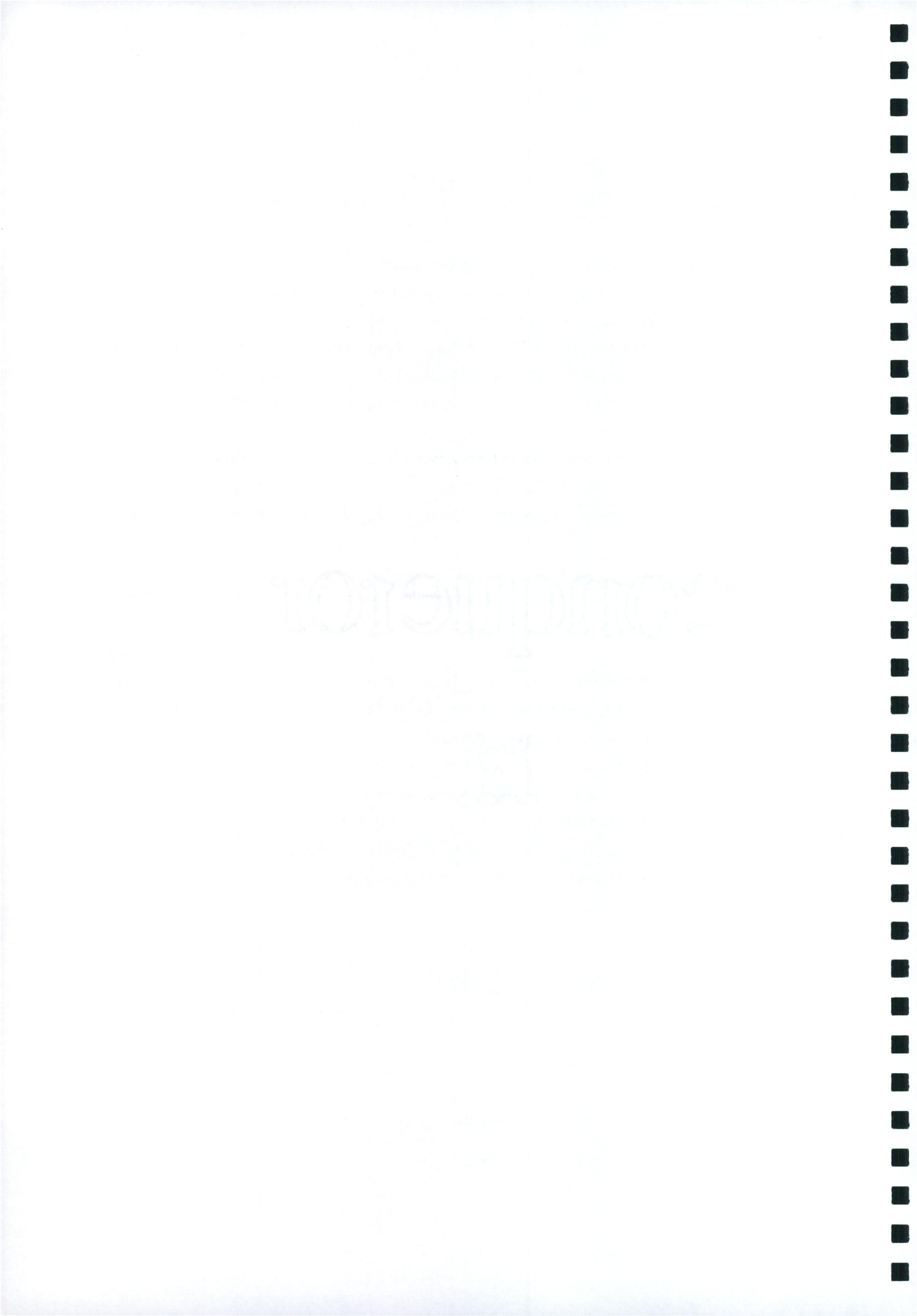
The first chapter gives a brief history of Irish graphic design since 1922 and the establishment of the Irish Free State, looking at the development and changes over the years; the commission for the Scandinavian report <u>Design in Ireland</u>, the setting up of Kilkenny Design Workshops, the gradual split between advertising agencies and design consultancies, to the present day situation.

Chapter Two will also deal with history, and look at the issue of investment and commitment to design, suggesting some of the reasons for Ireland's lack of sophistication in matters of design. It will compare the situation of design in the public service here, with that of another European nation.

Chapter Three will look at Ireland's national identity and the reliance on the use of Celtic imagery to create that identity. It will question the importance of an identity for us in changing Europe, and will look at some of the first State graphic design after 1922 - Irish stamps.

To continue the theme of national identity, Chapter Four looks at the Corporate identities in Ireland's public services, An Post and Telecom Eireann, comparing them both to the identity scheme for the Dutch Postal Services (P.T.T.). The identity scheme for AIB Bank will also be discussed in relation to the use of Celtic imagery.

In contrast to the whole notion of Ireland's Celtic identity in design, Chapter Five takes a look at some present day graphic designers who emerged in the eighties. Using the examples of two successful young design firms, Design Factory and Design Works, it will look at the development of the two companies and their attitude to the Irish industry. By looking at some of their work, I will discover if there are any characteristics that can be described as distinctly Irish.

# Chapter 1


A brief history of graphic design in Ireland since 1922

AÁBḂ aábḃ
CĊDḊ cċdḋ
eÉFḞ eéfḟ
GĠIÍL ᵹġiíl
MṀN mṁn
OÓPṖ oópṗ
RSṠ rꞃsṡ
TṪUÚ tṫuú⁊

Fig. 1.    Gaelic Script.
           (NCAD printshop)

It is generally accepted that Ireland's culture is strongest in literature, drama, language and music, rather than in things visual. However, after Ireland's Independence in 1922, there was a resurrection of two particular Irish visual traditions: 1. the Gaelic Script 2. Early Christian or Celtic Design (17,p.2).

With the establishment of the Irish Free State, the Government needed to establish a visual identity that embodied the ideas of a national identity. The Gaelic Script was immediately put into use. This typeface(Fig.1), one of the few variations of the Roman Alphabet to have survived with the common forms that we call Roman and Italic, was to be seen on everything, from street namesigns, to government forms and postage stamps, examples of which will be dealt with later in this Thesis. As Ireland became involved in the European Community in the sixties, it was decided that the Gaelic Script be dropped as it was unsuitable for use internationally because of its ilegibility(32).

**Scandinavian Report**

In 1960, having struggled out of the grips of a depression in the fifties, the Irish Export Board sought and was granted administrative responsibility for improving standards of Irish design, mainly for Industry.The following year it invited a group of eminent Scandinavian designers to Ireland, to report on the state of design in the country. Their report, Design in Ireland, published by the Export Board in 1962 was based on a selective, but well balanced survey. Although predictably critical of the level of design awareness in industry and a little idealistic in its recommendations, it was perceptive and optimistic stating that,

> Ireland, by virtue of her lack of sophistication in matters of
> design, has a unique opportunity denied by circumstances to
> many more developed countries, of making a great
> contribution, not alone to her own prosperity and culture, but to
> the culture of Western Europe. We believe that with courage
> and foresight the possibilities can be realised (28,p.4).

The Scandinavian report was mainly concerned with the state of Industrial design for the Irish Export Board. However, it expressed a need for widespread change in attitudes to all facets of design for both the export market and the domestic market, stating that:

> the factors which determine the quality good or bad, of the
> design we produce, are deeply rooted in our homes, our
> schools, our shops, our historic traditions, our whole way of
> living (28,p.xi ).

This sentiment was echoed in the same year by the Taoiseach, Sean F Lemass, 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 (30,p.25 ).

So it seemed that Ireland at the beginning of the sixties, a time when Irish society looked forward to permanently better times, was starting to realise the importance of design, both industrial and graphic, in the development of the country.

The Scandinavian report and the resulting establishment of Kilkenny Design was met with sharp criticism by some. Al O' Dea, a craftsman who ran Corrib Crafts, and became famous internationally for his finely produced furniture, was one of these critics.

> You asked me what I think of Kilkenny, a load of bastard Scandinavian, that's what I think. And how could it be anything else? These Norwegians, Finnish or Swedish designs are right from and for the people who live in those lands. They reflect the stark, cold and almost functional characteristics of the country and the people.This is good, why should they pretend to be flowery and ornamental? But they do not reflect anything at all Irish, and why should we be delighted with phoney Scandinavian as our contribution to design?(1.)

This is certainly a valid argument, although reactions of this sort may well have occurred no matter what nationality was involved in the design report.

**Kilkenny Design**

In 1965 the Kilkenny Design Workshops were officially opened. It was an agency with responsibility for design advancement in Ireland, the first country to establish a state design service. The plan was to have a permanent implant of design skills through an organisation which would have a persuasive and lasting influence on industry and on the Irish people generally, bring with it advantages of training and continuity of experience and ensure empathy with the problems peculiar to Ireland's industries(17,p19).

The organisation would be a missionary centre of influence, but its emphasis would be on practical demonstration. There would be international professional designers and other specialist staff working alongside Irish craftsmen and trainees gaining experience and confidence.

Although mainly concerned with product design for Irish industry, Kilkenny Design was aware of the need for good graphic design and recognised the need to exert influence in this field because its main objective was to improve product design for export, where packaging was needed to protect and present products.

Even products such as craft objects, which the customer can comprehend and judge by appearance and feel and products whose appeal is purely subjective, can gain in acceptance and market loyalty by projecting their qualities and identity in well designed labelling and promotional material. Examples of this can be seen in Fig. 2 with the Kilkenny Design logo on all packaging. It was such work that played an important part in establishing the image of Kilkenny Design itself in its early trade promotions.

Along with design for private industry Kilkenny Design was involved in projects for state and semi-state bodies. They saw similar needs for good design in the public sector where they felt design was underdeveloped and took on projects for various bodies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, An Post and Telecom Eireann.

The idea behind Kilkenny Design was sound, and indeed provided a fresh and enthusiastic approach to design here in Ireland, improving the overall design standards for both the export and domestic markets. However, over the years the company fell into financial problems and was forced to close in 1989, leaving a gap in the industry which has yet to be filled.

**Fig. 2.**  Package design by Kilkenny Design for craft objects.
(after 17, pp.73, 145-146)

**Advertising and Graphic Design**

Most of the graphic design being produced at this time in Ireland was handled by advertising agencies(31).

Advertising agencies have existed in Ireland for most of this century, having survived through the various periods of recession. During the post-World War 2 years, the rest of Europe was beginning to reconstruct as their economies were expanding, and resulted in a rise of living standards and consumerism. Unfortunately Ireland was merely a spectator in these times, as it seemed locked into a continuous depression.

Irish advertising agencies were witnessing many new successful European marketing and advertising campaigns, and were eager to get new ideas in to Irish advertising. These new ideas came in the form of Dutch designer immigrants.

Housing in Holland after the war had reached crises proportions, and émigré's like Jan De Faow found the offer of employment and housing here, an attractive one. By the mid-fifties there were many Dutch designers working in Irish advertising agencies.

Because design in Holland was more advanced than Ireland, and these Dutchmen had been fully commercially trained in graphic design, they brought with them a sense of professionalism based on attitude and style which was to benefit Irish design in advertising (31).

**Signa**

A few graphic designers began to specialise, and set up their own consultancies in the sixties. One such company was Signa. It was begun by the architect, Michael Scott, and the painter and designer, Louis le Brocquy. There was also a team of four designers, including Peter Wildbur, who was to Design various Irish stamps, one of which will be dealt with later on in the thesis.

Fig.3, shows a whiskey carton designed by Signa for Tulamore Dew, and featured in Graphis(Switzerland)as an example of an excellent package design, winner of a first class award in Irish Packaging Competition 1965. The designers were Louis le Brocquy and Peter Wildbur.

The design uses an ancient map to create its identity, and avoids the use of complicated Celtic imagery. The text is kept simple, and placed within a series
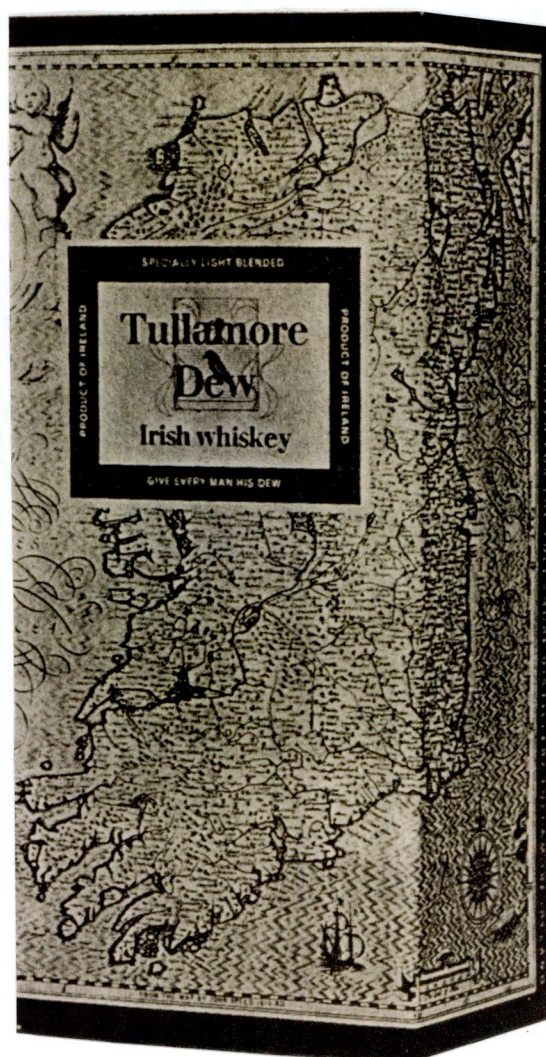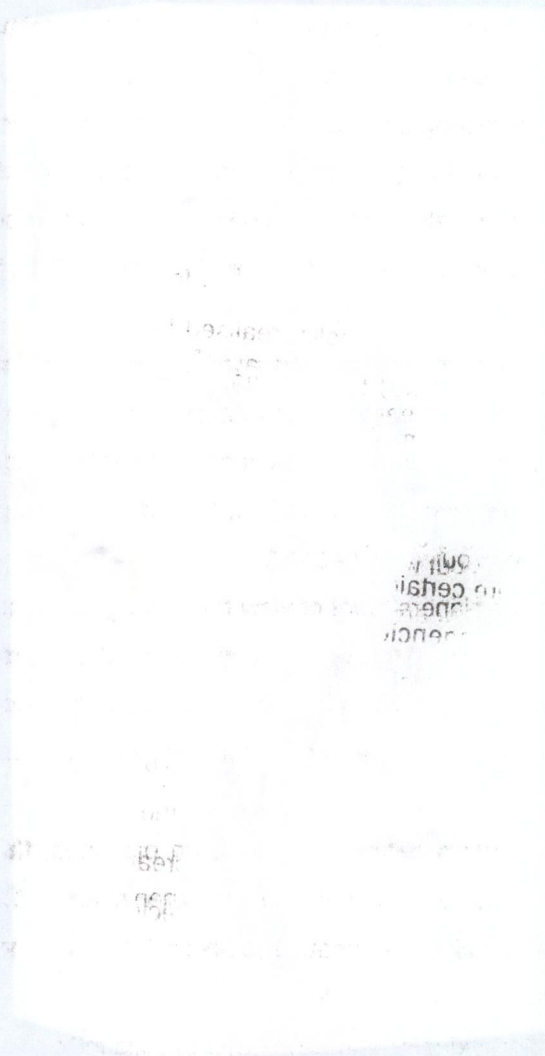
**Fig. 3.**   Package design by Signa, for Tullamore Dew.
(after 29, p.8)

of boxes to the front of the package, resulting in a distinctive look which even by today's standards could be regarded as good design.

The gradual split between advertising agencies and graphic design consultancies came about for various reasons. During the boom of the sixties many companies were beginning to realise the importance of good graphic design in terms of establishing a corporate identity.

Although advertising agencies did handle graphic design, their main interest was in advertising campaigns, and with the advent of the television service (RTE) the demand in this field developed quite significantly.

Because many companies were setting up in these progressive times there was obviously a need for graphic designers to cater for their needs, especially in terms of printed matter. Some advertising agencies were reluctant to develop this end of the market as there was higher commission rates in advertising (32).

During the seventies Ireland suffered another recession and advertising agencies, such as McConnells, realised that retaining the creative members of staff during these hard times, was a big overhead. In letting some of these members go and form their own design studios, the advertising agencies were able to sub-contract the work out when needed.

From the graphic designers' point of view this arrangement seemed to suit too. There were certain creative restraints for many graphic designers who worked in advertising agencies; most of the work was heavily influenced by the art director, then executed in teams. This was sometimes a drawback, in that it limited any creative attempts by individuals.

With graphic designers setting up their own practices, the advertising agencies were now able to subcontract the work out when needed. They were free from the overheads of maintaining a creative team and the designers were free from the creative restraints of the art director.

The graphic design industry has developed significantly since the sixties, and there are many well established design consultancies now in existence throughout Ireland. Perhaps, one reason for this is an increase in design awareness amongst the general public, companies now realise that good design is an important element for a successful business.

Later in the thesis I will be discussing in more detail two examples of present day graphic design consultancies, and looking at some of their work in relation to national visual identity.

# Chapter 2

## Commitment and funding
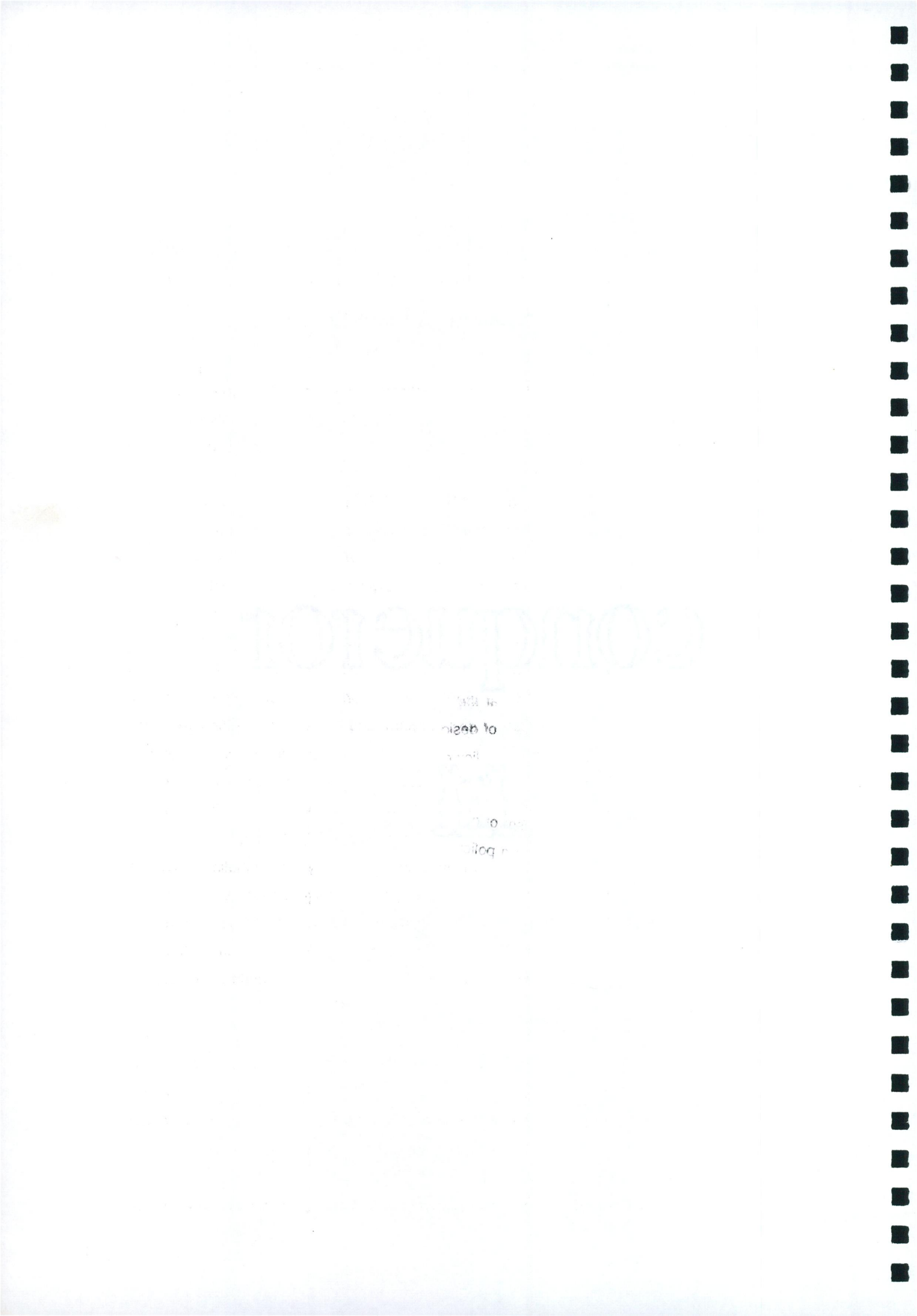
When we compare the history of design in Ireland to that of many European nations, there is little evidence to show that there has been any proper investment or commitment to the industry. The establishment of Kilkenny Design was a substantial development, but it was relatively recent and short lived.

Perhaps Ireland's political history, isolation and low economic status, are valid reasons for Ireland's lack of sophistication in matters of design - Ireland was never a centre for finance or fashion. The realisation of the importance of design as a component of a national culture may well have been overlooked in a nation whose primary concern was to struggle for survival.

In 1922 Ireland was established as a Free State, dismissing the centuries of oppression by replacing the English Crown with the Irish Harp on every government document. By this time, the Dutch PTT (postal services)was a well developed organisation in which design played a critical role in that company's affairs.

In 1920 Jean Francois Van Royan was appointed general secretary of the Dutch Posterijen, Telegrafie en Telefonie(PTT). Van Royan (1878-1942) was a tireless advocate of design at the PTT, a passion which stemmed from his own commitment to the idealism of design reform and the Arts and Crafts movement, and which developed into a policy of commissioning work from leading figures of the European Avant-Garde in the 1930's. For example it was largely as a result of his efforts that movements such as the 'new typography' , with members like Piet Zwart, gained currency throughout the Netherlands(Fig.4) (7,p.28).

Van Royan thought it was important to develop the aesthetic sensibilities of the community by acting as a mediator between artists and the general public. He regarded this charge as a moral duty, the moral and the aesthetic in his view of the world, were closely linked. He believed that good design and an aesthetically satisfying environment would not only improve society but would also raise the individual to a higher plane(12,p.62).

Van Royan was executed during World War 2 by the Nazis for his involvement in  underground activities, and his death brought this chapter in the history of the PTT to a brutal conclusion. However, the legacy of Van Royan was rekindled during the years of post-war reconstruction; the creation of an Art and Design Department under the direction of an aesthetic adviser provided a new, more formal context for the work he had began.

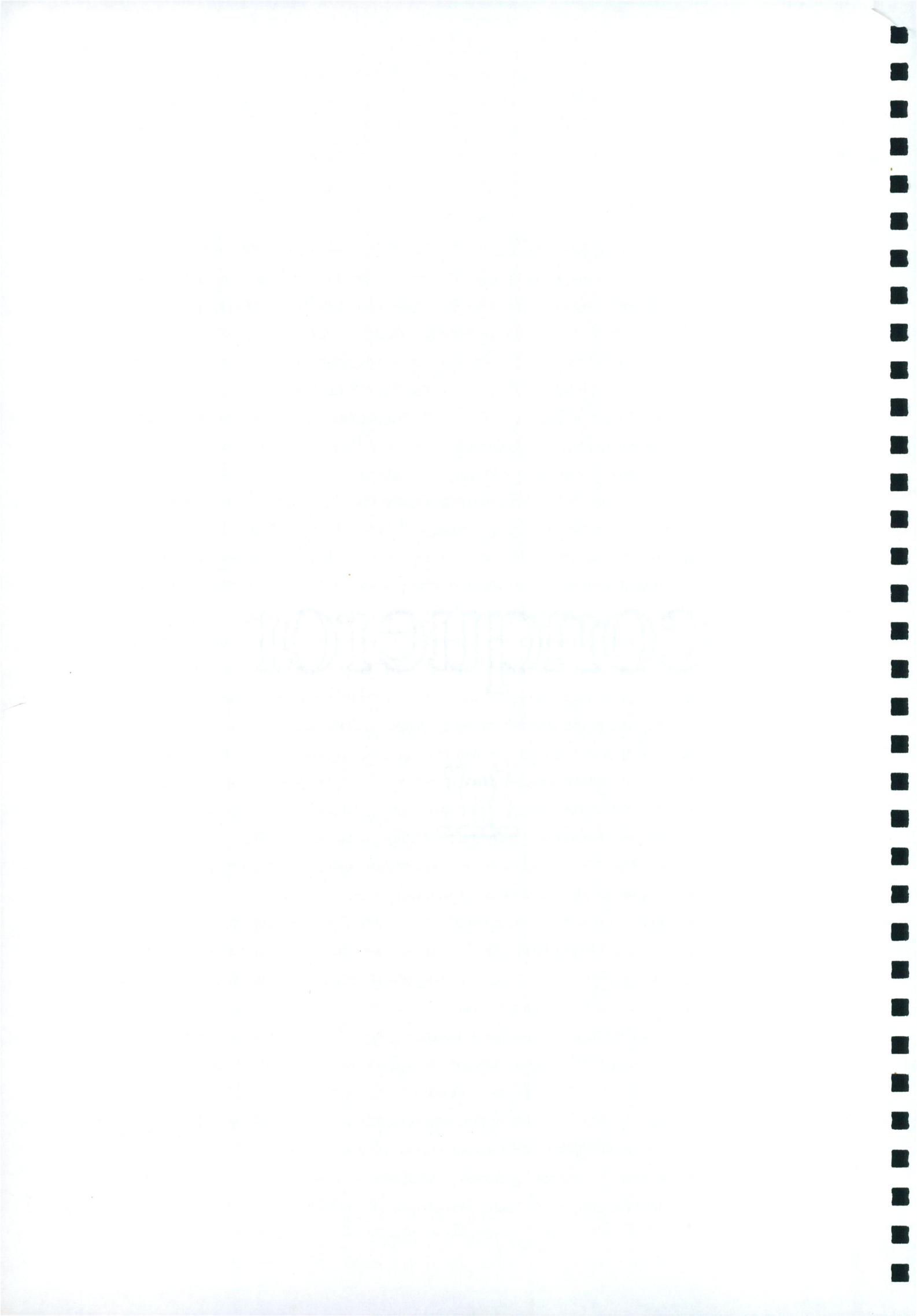From the early days of commissioning well known figures of the Avant-Garde to

**Fig. 4.**    Stamp design by Piet Zwart, for the Dutch PTT.
(after 7, p.24)

the establishment of its own Art Department, ensuring high standards not only in graphic design, but in architecture, industrial design and art, the PTT has become a role model for government and corporate clients. Most recently the PTT has received international attention for its new house style identity scheme, which will be dealt with in chapter 4. It is this unique characteristic of dedication and innovation in design, that is part and parcel of Holland's cultural identity.

## Cultural Background

What reasons exist for this unique history of design in Holland?, and what makes it so different from Ireland? Van Royan"s ideas had been nurtured in a cultural atmosphere which, because of Holland's geographical location, was open to a variety of European influences. Beginning in the late 19th Century, the Arts and Crafts movement in England, Art Nouveau in France, and the Wiener Werkstatte in Austria, had made an impact in the Netherlands, giving rise to a similar movement in Dutch Architecture and Design, known as "Niewe Kunst" (literally, new art or art nouveau) which in turn led to the Amsterdam School and other movements in the decorative arts.

In the visual arts, movements such as Symbolism, Expressionism, and a number of variations of Cubism were also represented in the Netherlands during this same period. Yet another group of artists, among them Theo Van Doesburg, founded the periodical De Stijl in 1917, and maintained close contact with the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus(12,p.60 ).

By contrast, new approaches to art and design in Ireland have consisted of a revival of Celtic imagery. There were no indigenous Avant- Garde art movements in Ireland at the beginning of this Century. Even today design in Ireland is based on practice not philosophy. There is no articulation of a theoretical design ideology with a socio-political undercurrent comparable to the movements mentioned above. Although the Celtic Revival was socio-politically related, it was not a new movement, but a resurrection of the past with no direction in terms of design.

The reasons for this may well lay in conservatism, in a country where traditions are rarely, if ever violated. Continuity in design was emphasised, rather than any radical new departures.

**Funding**

When it comes to state-sponsored design, Ireland lacks the commitment that exists in other European nations. In 1982 Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, developed a system to stimulate the design industry by pumping money into it, by way of the so called Funded Consultancy Scheme(later renamed Enterprise Initiative). This meant that firms with 60 to 100 employees, would have the cost of fifteen days design consultancy reimbursed in full, followed by another fifteen days at half price. A total of 25 million pounds was spent on this scheme by 1987.

Design was seen as a matter of national importance, not in the same philanthropic way as the Dutch PTT, but as a way of increasing the competitiveness of British products both at home and abroad. The governments involvement in design contributed to the dramatic upsurge of consultancies, and pointed the way to a growth of design as a service industry.

Although efforts were made by the Irish government to create a better standard and awareness of design, with the establishment of Kilkenny Design in 1960. Unfortunately Kilkenny Design closed in 1989 due to financial problems, and since then, there seems little evidence to prove that there has been any real effort made to improve, or promote the standards of design . Recently, however, the Society of Designers in Ireland, have set up a programme called  Design Ireland which,

> aims to promote design awareness in Irish industry. It is funded jointly by The Department of Industry and Commerce, and The European Commission, and its objective is to educate Irish Industry in the competitive benefits of integrating design into business strategy (6,p.1).

Design Ireland will initiate programmes that encompass a wide range of events and activities, including regional design road shows, design management awards, an international design conference, a publication of a design journal and the presentation of scholarships to graduates of design.

These recent developments are welcome and may create a better sense of design awareness. However, the government here has always had the opportunity to act as a benefactor with a cultural responsibility to society, similar to the Dutch PTT. So why has it been that within government bodies, design has yet to be institutionalised and this vitally important area been so neglected?

It would seem that the opinion of N. Hamilton, regarding state design in England, is applicable to this country too. He is of the opinion that the proliferation of committees with their characteristic mentality is responsible for the lack of individual enterprise:

> In matters of design, committees tend to be scared by the unorthodox and prefer to play safe. They would rather deal with organisations than with individuals, with groups, units, partnerships or other multi-headed set-ups. This ensures anonymity to both sides of a design contract; nobody need eventually be personally responsible for anything - the organisation man's ideal(11,p.20 ).

It would seem that Irish indirectness, a strong sense of politics and a fear of novelty, appears to stand in the way of any integration of government-bodies and designer. This comes to light when compared to the example given in Holland, where design in the public sector is highly developed. A greater openness in the administrative machinery, more tolerance, individual champions of art and design, and a close contact between art and officialdom form a stark contrast with the situation in Ireland. Any social motivation in promoting the use of design, certainly in the case of the government, has yet to make itself apparent.

There are however, signs that design will infiltrate further into the administrative world. State and Semi-State bodies will have to start thinking commercially , and present themselves as both with-it and businesslike in the European Community. A new image with an up to date look can have a great psychological effect on staff and public alike.

# Chapter 3

**Ireland's visual identity**

Changing styles in Irish stamps
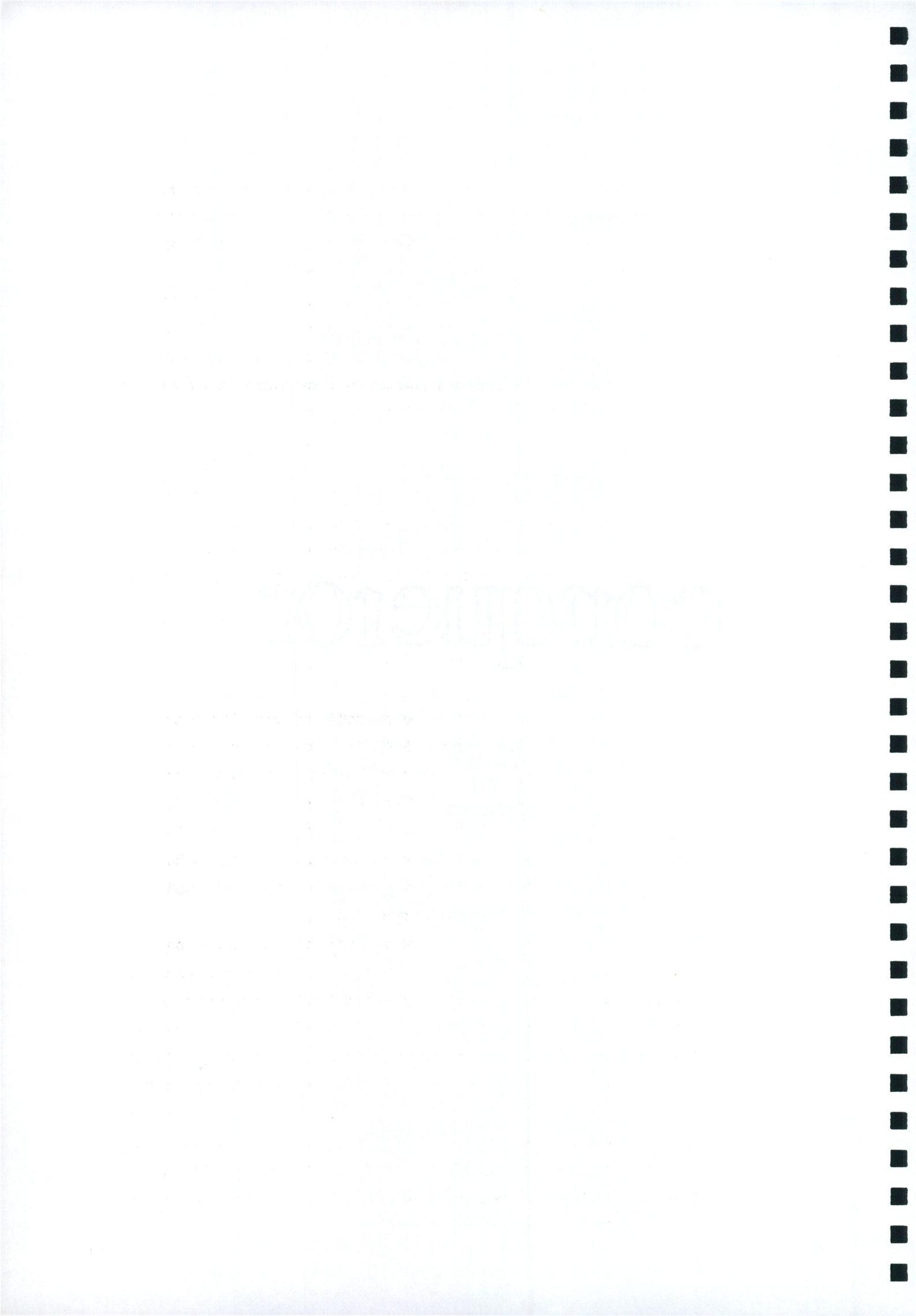
In this chapter I will discuss the issue of Ireland's visual identity, and its importance in a changing Europe. By looking at some examples of Irish stamps, which were one of the first pieces of state graphic design produced, I will trace the visual changes in approach to the issue of Ireland's national identity.

The issue of a nations visual identity has always been an important factor in the study of design, and has recently become highlighted with the start of Europes economic unity.These developments have drawn the prospect of a unified culture nearer, and although this may yield important advantages, there are many who would regret the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity.

The plan amongst others to introduce a single European currency (ECU) has created criticism from some designers. In Holland, where design is regarded as an important part of their culture, most of the printed material is produced by the Dutch government, and since it hires professional designers to turn out the work, most of the country's printed matter is well designed. However, this given could change with the introduction of Europe's economic unity.Armand Mevis, a Dutch designer, fears that, "if all the countries of Europe use the same currency, there will be more opinions offered on the design, the more opionions, the less interesting the design"(25, p.114).He believes that smallness allows for individuality.

The culture of a country should be reflected in their visual identity and the difference between one nations visual identity and another is generated by the persistence of traditions of craftsmanship, training, and styles common to that country. When we speak in terms of traditional Irish design, we must first look at what is meant by 'Irish Tradition'. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 'Tradition is based on accumulated experience or continuous usage'. What has been handed down in Ireland and what has been accumulated from experience, has today in Ireland, two or three different manifestations.

The most perceptible are the rural handicraft, the Georgian tradition, and early Christian / Celtic culture. With regard to the latter, its artistic manifestations had lapsed long before the Georgian period, and thus today's use of the early ornaments is scarcely more of a tradition in Ireland, than elsewhere. However, Ireland has abundant sources of ornamental objects and they have been utilised for many years. Having said that, designers have almost invariably turned to the most intricate motifs of interlaced animals etc. This approach to design is in complete contrast to European movements, such as the Bauhaus, whose ethics are based on simplicity of type and image. Examples of how Irish and European influences have been combined successfully, will be looked at later in the logos for An Post and Telecom Eireann.

**Irish Postage Stamps**

Postage stamps are the first Irish manufactured products that many people see and in this way are capable of conveying a strong impression of Ireland. They are also a commodity handled by nearly everyone in Ireland, and are a profound factor in the moulding of public taste.

On the 1st of February 1922 the postmaster general of the Irish Free State issued invitations for submissions of designs for the first regular series of postage stamps. A large number of artists responded to the request, and from almost eight hundred submissions four designs were selected to be developed for the issue. An interesting point here, is that submissions by printing houses were dropped in favour of work by Irish artists, not designers as such. Perhaps it is for this reason that the first stamps produced were weak in some elements of design. It may also suggest reasons why the stamps portray a romantic vision of Ireland; perhaps they would be more subtle in their approach if produced by a designer.

The submissions all included a variety of Celtic imagery and reflected the strong sense of nationalism at the time. The example shown here,( Fig.5)was designed by James Ingram. It portrays the map of Ireland positioned under an arch which suggests the Hiberno Romanesque architecture common to many ancient Irish churches. It is set in a background of Celtic knots and shamrocks entwined with scroll work, which is reminiscent of the illustrated manuscripts of the medieval Irish monks.

The text is in Gaelic Script, and from a design point of view, gives a clear indication of the value and the country of issue - Éire. The composition and layout of the stamp, however, could be criticised for over indulgence. It seems that almost everything associated with Ireland, including the map itself, was included in the stamp. The use of the map created some controversy, particularly in Belfast, since no national boundaries were delineated.Perhaps the use of the map this can be seen as the Irish government's romantic vision of a "united Ireland".

I feel that there was influence taken from the previous '1 penny stamp'(Fig.6),issued by the English and overprinted in Irish in 1922 after the Free State was established. There are direct similarities in the colour, layout and ornamentation of the two stamps.

The 1/2 p stamp, (Fig.7), was issued in 1944 and designed by Richard King, a well known Irish artist. The stamp depicts a monk inscribing the annals of Ireland, originally issued as a commemorative for the Tercentenary of the death of Michael O'Cleary, one of the four masters who compiled the annals.

**Fig. 5.** Stamp design by James Ingram.
(after 18, p.15)
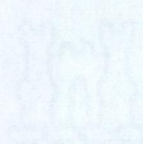


**Fig. 6.** English 1 penny stamp.
(after 18, p.14)

**Fig. 7.** Stamp design by James King.
(after 18, p.16)



**Fig. 8.** Stamp design by Peter Wildbur.
(after 18, p.18)

Once again the Celtic theme is predominant with the use of the Gaelic Script. However, the text in this stamp has been applied in a more interesting way, the sweeping stroke of the letter E in Eire frames the main subject of the monk, merging image and typography together and immediately suggests the early Irish manuscripts.

This is executed with care and accuracy and is incorporated well into the main subject matter, giving the stamp an overall modern composition, backround details have been kept to a minimum with a series of horizontal lines varying in thickness at the top and bottom of the stamp.

There is certainly evidence here to show how European influences such as Modernism have penetrated Irish design since the issue of the first Free State stamps. Although the stamp has retained its distinctively Irish look, it has benefited from the European influences with the use of simple text and imagery but with an overall decorative feel.

The present day definitive issues were the third in the series which were issued in 1983 with the theme of Irish architecture down through the ages. The stamps used reproduced line drawings commissioned from the Irish artist, Michael Craig, with lettering arranged by Peter Wildbur (previously of Signa Design), and illustrate nine buildings of various periods spanning at least a thousand years. The example given in Fig.8, is of St. Mac Dara's Church, a pre twelfth century early Christian oratory located on an island of the same name, off the south west coast of County Galway.

It is clear from this stamp that a change in attitude towards subject matter of stamps has developed over the years. Unlike the previous definitive, which dealt directly with historical or religious themes, this series is more subtle in its approach to these subjects and deals mainly with a subject that has world wide appeal - architecture.

There are no shamrocks or Celtic motifs, and the use of Gaelic Script that was so predominant amongst earlier stamps, has been dropped and replaced by a modern sanserif type.

In general the stamps were beginning to be more subtle in their approach towards projecting a national identity. The need for Irish stamps to have some sort of international appeal was beginning to be realised by those involved in the production of these designs. Indeed, the dropping of the Gaelic Script was attributed to this, as it had limited legibility, a factor which would not enhance their popularity internationally(31 ).

Certainly the design for this stamp reflects Ireland's progression in the

context of European design, with its change in subject matter, and the simple layout of text and image, breaking away from the complicated and cluttered composition so common in previous stamps.

However, it does raise a question regarding the definition of a national identity in Irish design. The changing attitudes in design during the sixties in Ireland and the effects of European influences can be seen as a reflection of Ireland's eagerness to be involved in the European Community. The continuous use of Celtic imagery in projecting Ireland's national identity perhaps seemed too antique for a progressive nation trying to merge with the rest of Europe. A new image was needed and European design seemed the way forward.

The changes here in design may well have been needed, without them Irish design would have perhaps remained in a vacuum. The question is how far should these changes have gone?

The stamp in Fig.8, shows a dramatic change in design from the two previous examples and this can be accredited to the changes mentioned above. Although this stamp is successful as an example of modern international design, it lacks any characteristics that can be referred to as particularly Irish, other than the architecture itself. Can this new approach to design be seen as a loss of confidence in Irish Identity? Perhaps Irish designers now feel that Irishness must demonstrate a knowledge of the latest styles in order to gain admittance to the international design world.

# Chapter 4

**Corporate identity**

Design for the public service

AIB Bank

Corporate identity is an essential means of promoting and establishing business recognition, an identity that can determine the public perception of that company.

Because of its importance, I have decided to discuss some corporate identities in Ireland which have tried to incorporate a sense of "Irishness" in their design. Again the problem arises as to what is meant by "Irishness", so lets assume that in the examples used here, they all include some element that we associate with our Celtic heritage, be it the Gaelic Script or motifs from ancient manuscripts.

The examples I wish to use are likely to be the most well known and more important identities: An Post, Telecom Eireann and AIB Group.

**Telecom Eireann**

In January 1984 the Department of Post and Telegraphs was split into two autonomous companies; An Post, dealing with the postal services and Telecom Eireann, dealing with telecommunications. And so a new corporate identity scheme was needed for both companies to supersede the previous P&T logo (Fig.9).

The new symbol for Telecom Eireann was designed by Kilkenny Design. Initially there were various suggestions for the company name, "Bord Telecom", "BT" and "TE" amongst others.

"Telecom Eireann" states the function and origin of the company - an important consideration in the global world of communications technology. "Bord Telecom Eireann" is quite a mouthful, while the abbreviation "BT" or "TE" could remind people in turn of a wellknown department store in Dublin - or even our national broadcasting service! (10,p.6). Examples of alternative designs for the Telecom Eireann logo, showing variations from Celtic to modern typography, are shown in Fig.10.

The logo (Fig.11) designed by Kilkennny Design is quite simple, yet memorable with a strong visual impact. It is literal, containing both the "T" and the "E" in recognisable form. As a public company, it was important that the corporate identity used, not only evoked a sense of strength in a fresh dynamic logo, but retained public acceptance by using "tradition" in projecting a national image. This was achieved by combining the gaelic forms of the letters "T" and "E". It is interesting that the new logo for Telecom Eireann moved towards a more
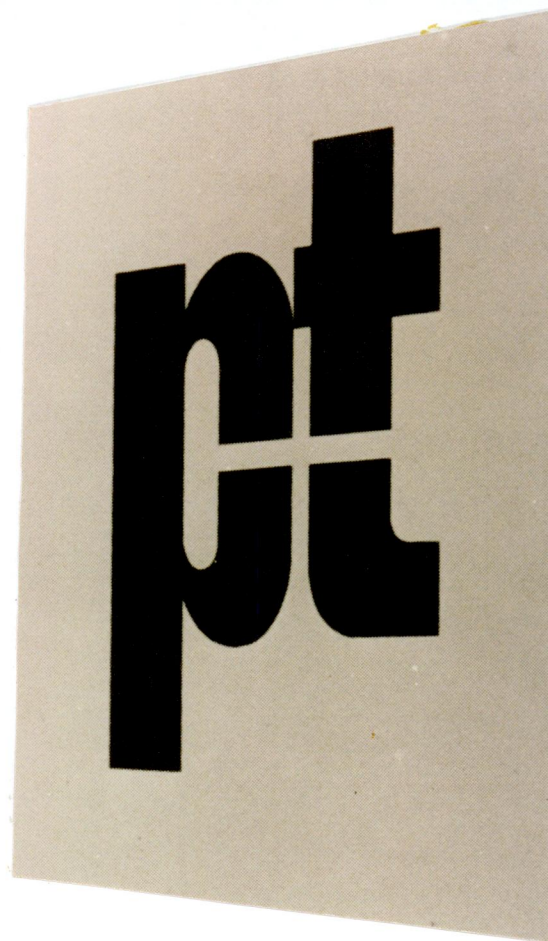
**Fig. 9.**     Irish P+T logo.
(after 17, p.182)



**Fig. 10.**     Alternative logo designs for Telecom Eireann.
(after 17, p.183)
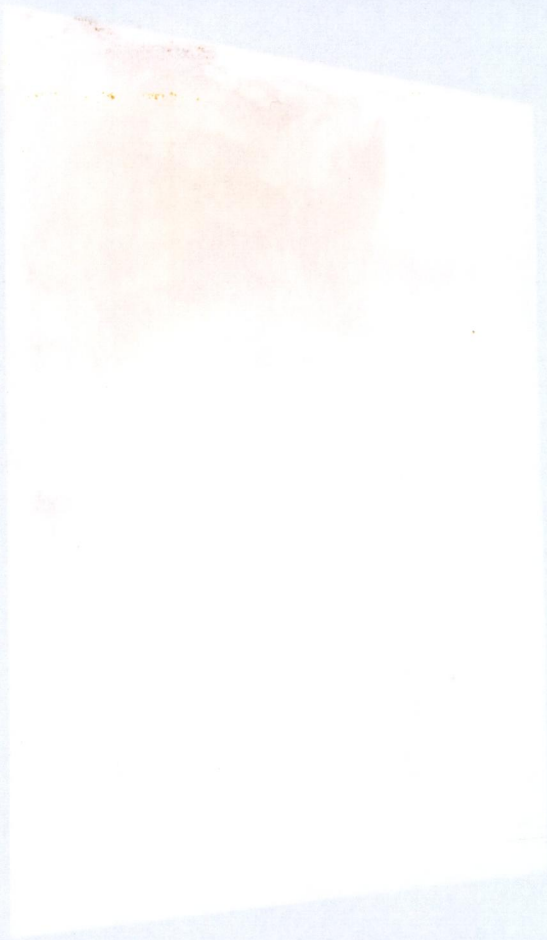
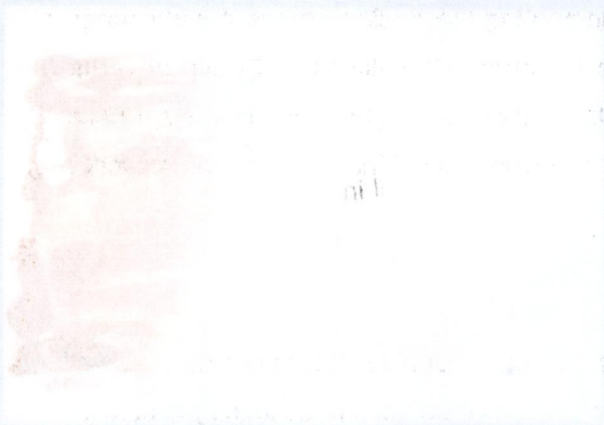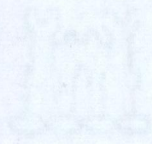**Fig. 11.**    Logo for Telecom Eireann.
(after 17, p.183)
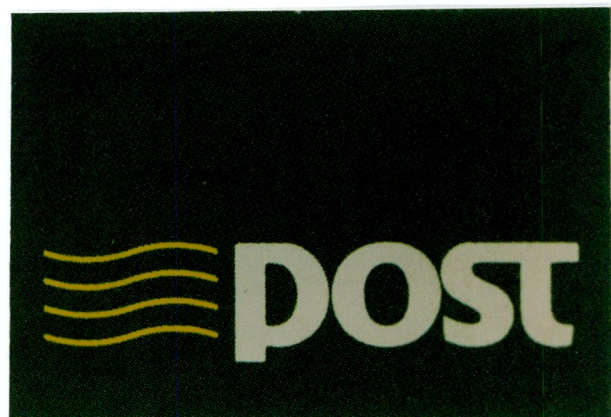


**Fig. 12.**    Logo for An Post.
(after10, p.7)

traditional identity than the previous P+T logo, which lacks any sense of Irishness in its design.

**An Post**

The new identity scheme for an Post was also implemented on the 1st January 1984. The logo (Fig.12) was the result of an open competition in the summer of 1982 which sought submissions from experts in the field of design. The winner of the competition was a twenty-two-year-old postgraduate of the National College of Art and Design. Della Varilly worked in close co-operation with her two tutors in the Graphics Department at NCAD, Bill Bolger and Frank Bissette.

The main emphasis in the design of the new logo was bilingualism. The inspired decision to use the An Post logo as opposed to a symbol or pictorial representation had the added advantage that the wording was instantly recognisable not only in Irish and English but on an international level as well. This also explains the removal of the word "The/An" from the main logo.

The logo is based on tenth century Irish manuscripts typeface "Uncial" in order to give the logo an instantly Irish flavour. Uncials were developed in Roman times and became the standard scriipt for scribes in the early Christian church from the fifth to the tenth centuries. Some changes were made to the original design with a view to rounding the lettering and producing a cleaner, more modern look.

The cancellation mark which accompanies the logo suggest not only its familiar application but was intended to point towards An Post's future in electronic mail. The colour chosen for the logo was post box green.

The responsibility for implementing the design across a wide range of company products was given to O'Connor O' Sullivan, a Dublin advertising agency. Further developments in the corporate identity programme were handled by Kilkenny Design who compiled a design manual incorporating the artwork and its application.

**Dutch P.T.T.**

I have decided, with the example of the Dutch P.T.T. to compare how other European Public Services have dealt with their own corporate identity scheme.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the Dutch P.T.T. has a long history of commitment to design and privatisation on the 1st January 1989 posed a problem. How could the "new" P.T.T. present a fresh and dynamic image without appearing to abandon its tradition as a patron of art and design? The challenge was to

express both continuity and change, and the solution was sought through the creation of a new House Style.

The existing P.T.T. House Style, was designed by Tel Design and Total Design of Holland. It was implemented throughout the 1970's and because of the organisation's vast extent, only completed in 1981. The new scheme relied on the use of bright colours for its visual impact, creating a typographical standard for all printed matter, signage and lettering, using the sanserif typeface Univers 65.

Rather than creating a specially designed symbol, the logo consisted simply of the letters "P.T.T." in white reversed out of the background colour. Lower case was used for clarity; previously the initials had appeared as capitals, but unless they hare highly condensed, the two "T's" in upper case are separated by a large white space which looks clumsy when prefixed by the "P". Although the lower case solution was primarily functional, it also suggested an air of informality in an otherwise bureaucratic and monolithic organisation.

Six months before privatisation, Studio Dunbar (Tel Design) was called in to modify the House Style. Their solution was in ways a development of the existing corporate identity and it retains many of its characteristics such as the bright colour coding: blue for the holding company, red for post and green for telecom. A neutral secondary colour grey is also used on signs. (Fig.13)

Studio Dunbar decided that in order to give the different sections of the company a sense of autonomy, each should have a different logo, based on one design but with subtle variations.

The logos(Fig.14) work as follows: The P.T.T. Nederland logo has a blue background with two squares - one green and one red - to indicate P.T.T. Telecom and P.T.T Post. The coloured areas have a fixed position, the Post logo has a red background with a blue square to symbolise the connection between the company and the holding. The same goes for Telecom except that its blue square has a different position. On the right hand side of the logo there is a row of five dots, which function as the border for further specification: black blocks with white letters, which might contain the name of an organisational unit, for example.

Beneath that it is possible to add a second specification with black lettering against a white background. The logo acts as a springboards for the rest of the House Style: its individual elements - bars, squares and circles - provide a structure which can be used quite freely by other designers on, for example, buildings.
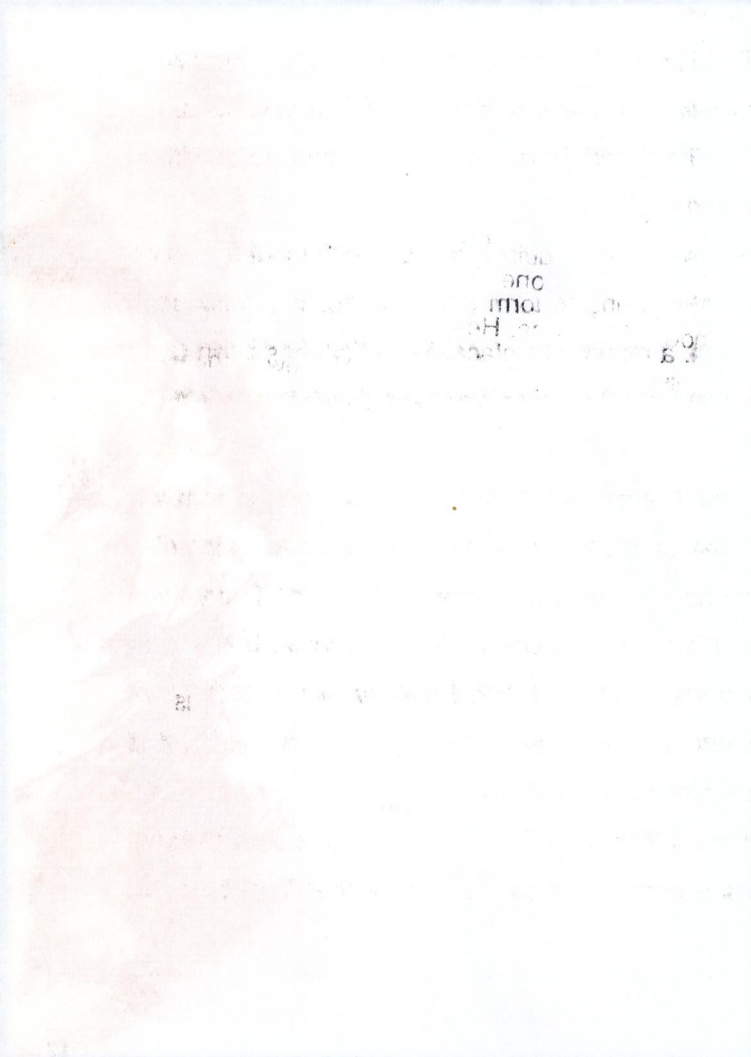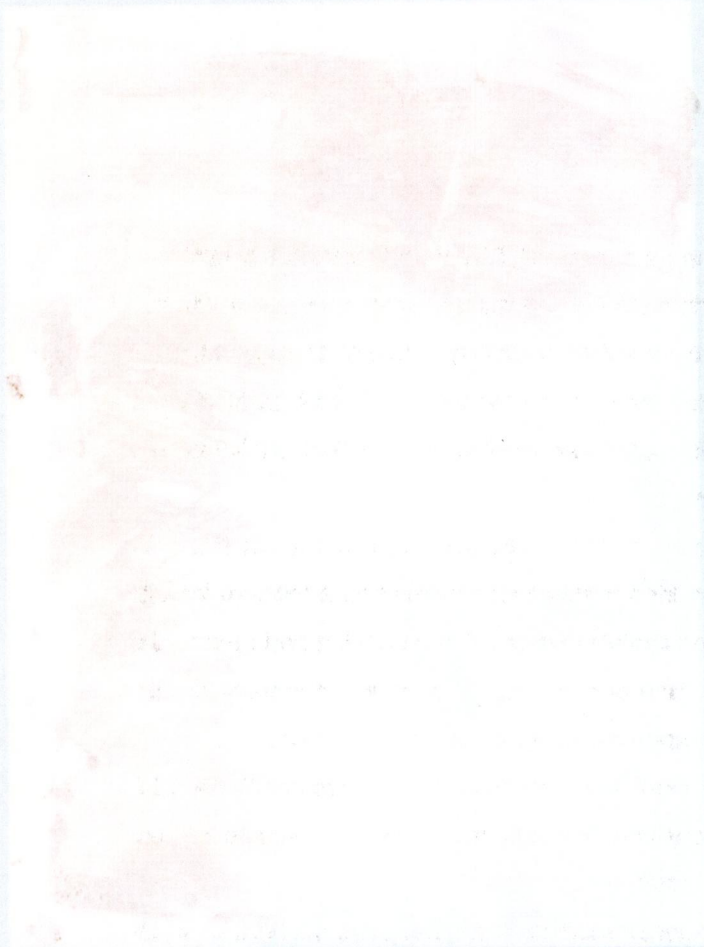
The most notable thing about the identities dealt with in the chapter is their

**Fig. 13.** Signage for the Dutch PTT.
(after 7, p.62)



**Fig. 14.** Logo for the Dutch PTT.
(after 7, p.15)

flexibility. The new identity scheme for the P.T.T. is built around a system of geometric squares, this geometric base can be manipulated to create a variety of designs but also can be made to be sober, formal and simple to execute, this in fact is a key part of the corporate identity strategy: the P.T.T. has created what it calls "the level system" - which is meant to ensure a high level of quality on even the most routine items of literature.

Simplicity is also a key part of the corporate identity for An Post. The lettering used, although based on Irish manuscript Uncials has a modern look and is very clear which makes for good legibility when printed positive and reversed out of colour. Similar to the P.T.T.'s use of Univers, this typeface suggests an air of informality and friendliness to an otherwise bureaucratic organisation.

The postmark which accompanies An Post's logo is always positioned at the top lefthand side on vehicle livery and post office signage - similar to its usual position on envelopes, making it instantly recognisable.

Although the postal and telecommunications services both here in Ireland and in the Netherlands are autonomous bodies, the distinction by means of design were handled in quite different ways.

Both companies of the P.T.T. were kept well within the House Style, giving each company its own logo but using the same design with subtle variations. On the other hand the logos for An Post and Telecom Eireann have no similarity except for their use of gaelic lettering.

The logo for Telecom Eireann is, again quite simple. The symbol based on Gaelic Script with "T" and "E" interlocking to form one - suggesting continuous lines of communication. In contrast, a modern typeface, Helvetica, has been used for the Telecom's logo giving it high legibility and uniting the old with the new in the overall design.

Just as the P.T.T. has used a grid as a design characteristic that we associate with, amongst others the Dutch. It is interesting that like everything else in the Netherlands, it is built around a system of geometrical squares." Every thing in Holland is based on them. It's as if we think we'll all drown in the sea or something if we don't insist on squares"(31, p.18). Possibly this is a result of rectangular field and dyke systems penetrating the national consciousness . It is what Jan De Fouw terms as the "mondrian mind"(35).

Likewise the designs for An Post and Telecom Eireann seem to have adopted a strong visual identity associated with Ireland - the Gaelic Script.

However, both designs use the ancient script in such a way that they are successful in representing a fresh dynamic image while retaining a distinctly Irish look or "heritage" part of the public's perception of the companies.

**AIB Bank**

In January 1990 Allied Irish Banks launched their new and controversial corporate identity scheme under the new title of the "AIB Group"

The new scheme was carried out by Wolfe Olins, a large and well known design consultancy, specialising in corporate identity in the UK. It took almost one year to research and execute the project at a cost of approximately £8,000,000.

The new scheme was received with mixed feeling. However, according to the public relations for group the overall response with the general public has been good. The implementation was well organised and was soon applied to all aspects of the group's business, shortly after its introduction.

The new corporate mark (Fig.15) had two functions: to provide an easily recognised and powerful means of identifying the company, and to encapsulate and deliver a sense of the personality of the company.

The corporate mark uses four colours comprising: the symbol (ark and dove) in red and cream; the AIB logotype box in blue and the green bar. They always appear together and in a fixed relationship.

AIB Group's new symbol is inspired by one of the earliest known Celtic images of the ark. The original, from which this symbol was taken, was found carved onto a stone cross located near the river Killary in County Meath, Ireland.

The use of the ark as part of the corporate mark serves to "affirm the Group's Irish heritage and is a symbol of their commitment to the many different communities they serve worldwide" (20,p.1).

The typeface used for the AIB logo is Bembo Serif, in upper case, chosen for its elegance and adaptability and intended for use primarily on Group publications and advertising. Frutiger Sans-Serif typeface is used for the various operating companies within the Group and was chosen for its strength and clarity.

When the contract for AIB's corporate identity scheme was awarded to Wolfe Olins, it created much controversy. Many were disappointed to see a large corporate company seek design skills overseas, seeing it as a lack of confidence in Irish design and designers. Others argued that there wasn't a design consultancy in Ireland big enough to undertake such a large scale job, which

**Fig. 15.** Corporate identity for AIB Bank.
(after 20, p.15)
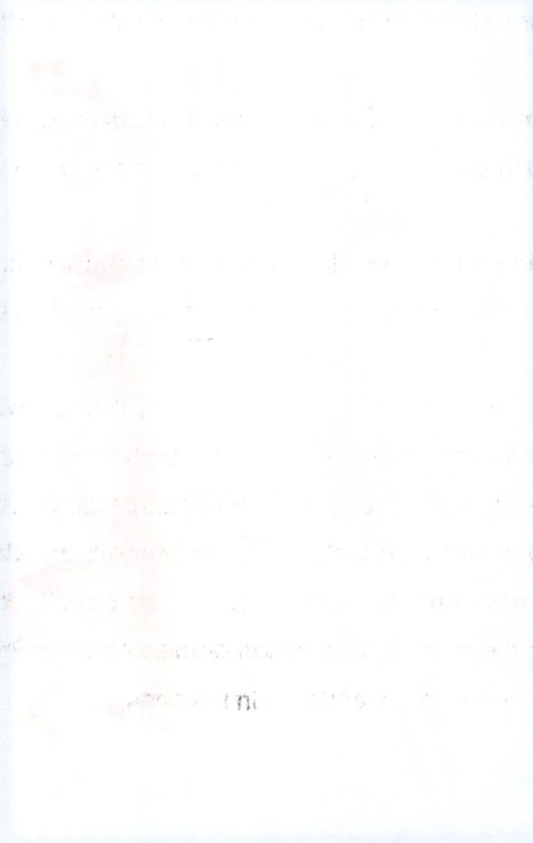
would require a vast amount of time and money to research and implement.

What ever way it was perceived it certainly stirred emotions here in the design world and everyone waited in anticipation for the end product.

Personally, I feel it is ironic that a large UK design consultancy, such as Wolfe Olins, who incidentally received much criticism in their own country for the recent British Telecom Corporate identity, produce a symbol that uses yet another Celtic motif. Had the design been produced by an Irish designer it would have undoubtedly resulted in criticism for choosing an almost clichéd solution with a Celtic symbol.

Perhaps it was a fresh approach for an English firm to take, discovering a motif which suited the Group's business ideology and may also have been the designer's perception of Ireland.

The criticism by Irish designers of the AIB logo may be the result of overexposure to Celtic imagery, and the feeling that there was nothing fresh in this design.

Although AIB's identity scheme was criticised by designers, it has proved successful amongst the general public and there are various suggestions for this.

In a country which has adopted Celtic tradition as part of our national identity, the decision to use a symbol based directly on Celtic imagery seems justified. Certainly it affirms the Group's Irish heritage and suggests its solidity and endurance. The use of the ark for the symbol, in a nation dominated by religion may be successful in suggesting honesty, safety and faith in the bank.
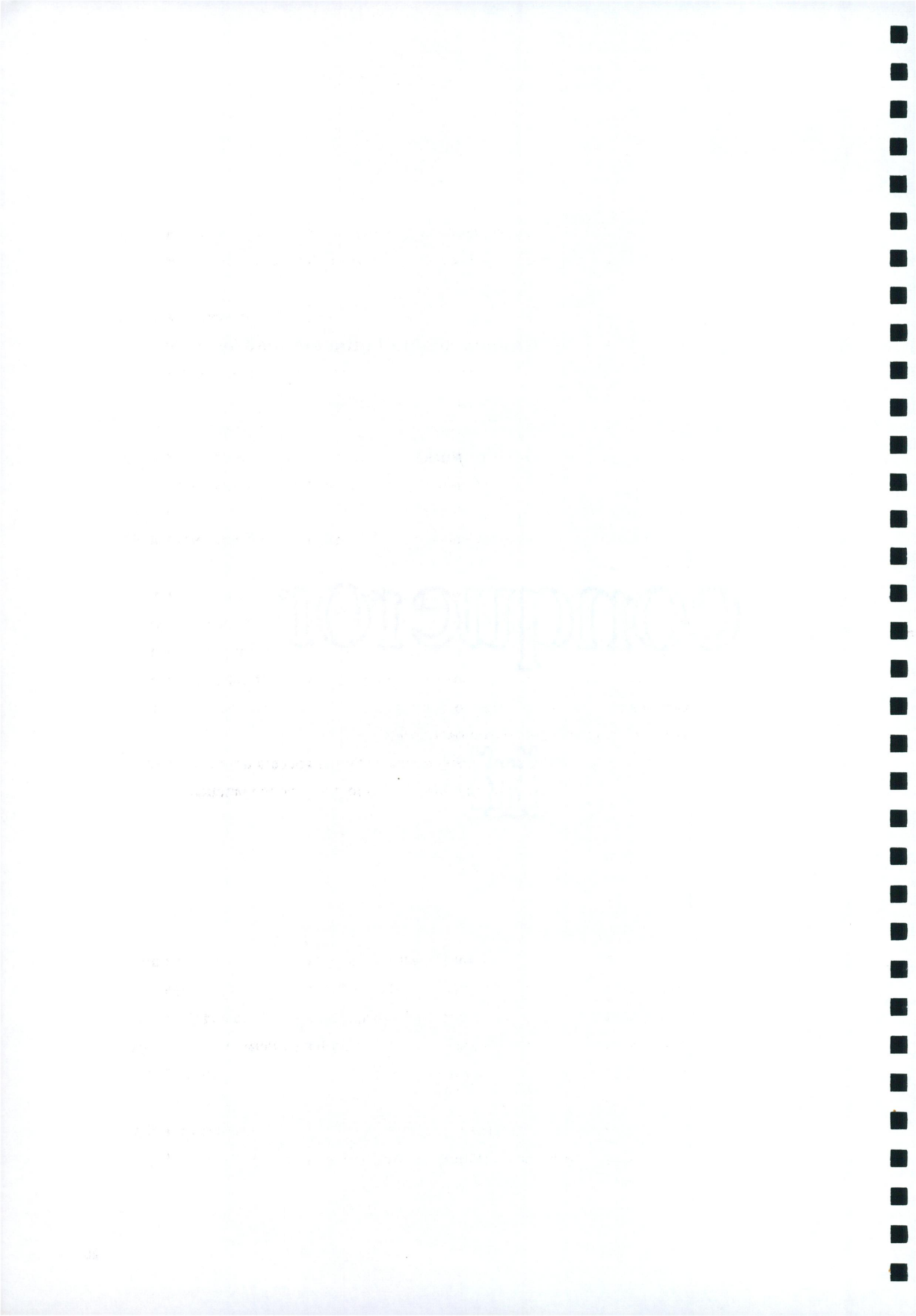
# Chapter 5

**Graphic design in the eighties**

Design Factory

Design Works

In the early eighties, the National College of Art and Design was beginning to release the first graduates from its degree course in graphic design, the first and only of its kind existing in Ireland.

Among these graduates were a number of ambitious young men with ideas of working together and setting up their own design agency. These were not healthy times for the Irish economy as it struggled through a perennial recession which had started in the seventies.

The design scene in Ireland was hardly a stimulating climate either, in fact it has been described as void by some. Much of the design work available was through advertising agencies art departments, along with some insignificant design studios who acted as finishing houses for the ad. agencies when their own art departments were too busy to handle it, but maintained tight design control on their work(36).

So the choices for design graduates at this time in Ireland was limited. There were a few individual designers of quality, but they did not have enough work turnover to make an impression. The scattered and non descript design groups were unwilling to make any stand on design quality. "College leavers had no homegrown standards to aim for. So, the choice was either to go abroad or to set your own standards" (3,p.98).

It was out of this discouraging climate, with the impetus from their college tutors, urging them to strike out on their own, that these young graduates set up their own design practices.

**Design Factory**

In 1985 Design Factory set up with four members - Stephen Kavanagh, Conor Clarke, Terry Greene and Damian Kennan. After graduating all members bar Keenan went abroad - Kavanagh to America, Clarke to Holland and Greene to Copenhagen, while Keenan worked in a publishing house here in Dublin. They shared a premises with another agency, Design Works, in a suburb of Dublin mainly occupied by students.

The business for Design Factory grew steadily but slowly with the first commissions coming from small companies who recognised and were willing to

allow adventurous design. One major break for the group early in their careers was the City Gas job. They had submitted proposals for this project and won the contract despite competition from well established agencies such as Kilkenny Design. "The beginning of the end for Kilkenny Design," according to Clarke(33).

With this corporate job included in their developing portfolio, Design Factory were now able to approach many of their future clients with confidence. Although they sought big accounts they were not prepared to sacrifice design achievements for quality. "Volume was never that important, we weren't in the business of mass producing corporate identities, we wanted to engage clients who would allow us to take their brief, turn it inside out and represent it to them"(37).

Six years ago the Design Factory decided they had to make decisions about the future of the company. They had been offered a five year lease on their present premises in Merrion Square, the heart of Georgian Dublin. This was a turning point for the group, they had what they needed - a deadline. They were committing themselves to working together for five years. Today there are nine members in the company and Design Factory are discussing another move to a bigger premises. Their portfolio now features leisure, food, pharmaceutical and financial business - including the usually self - effacing and publicity shy revenue commissioners.

From the outset Design Factory have pursued a policy of showing off what they have done in carefully targeted brochures and broadsheets. Uniquely these broadsheets are directed not only at prospective clients but also at the design profession through direct mail, the newsletter of the Society of Designers in Ireland and the journals of the marketing and advertising industries. As they put it themselves, "We're not afraid to show other designers everything we do, we are proud of all our work, if we can't stand over it we shouldn't have done it "(37 ).

Design Factory has developed significantly over the years and growth and future development are constantly being discussed. However, the group is cautious and fights recurrent temptations to move into other branches of design - product and interior especially. They consider themselves as ideas people, typographers, graphic designers, and this focusing has meant that much time has been spent on building an infrastructure to supply services of high quality.

The group know a lot about European standards, and one reason for this is the regular communication with the Design Factory's office in Copenhagen. The office has four designers under the direction of Jeane Philip and is the result of a collaboration between Philip and Greene, who had spent time in Copenhagen after

winning a Kilkenny Design Award while still in college.

The Danish operation is largely autonomous, with both offices making use of the others' expertise. Philip worked as a packaging designer in Japan, and Design Factory in Dublin have often benefited from her expertise in this field.

One Design Factory client wanted a new kind of folder to present his customers with loose leaf information, so the brief was given over to the Danish office. The solutions ranged from a tall sensuous, black leather case with brass studs to an extraordinary metal-hinged, metal backed hold-all. "We wouldn't have arrived at those answers; they are more the product of different training and yet they satisfy our  brief perfectly" (37). It is with the likes of this successful collaboration that gives Design Factory a strong foothold on the European market.

Even from the beginning Design Factory were "tagged" with  having a European look but visiting designers saw an Irish dimension in their work too. As Conor Clarke puts it,"We're not aware of it, I'm more conscious of the influence I absorbed in Holland, but if you were born in Ireland, educated here and work here, something of the culture must be present in the work you do"(37, 33 ).

The image of a company should be reflected in its own corporate identity and an interesting approach to the work of Design Factory is to first discuss their own corporate mark.

The name Design Factory evolved from two sources. In 1985 when the group set up, there was a new and progressive record label in England called "Factory". There was also Andy Warhol's famous factory in the United States, so the term "Factory" had become well known in creative circles. It also seemed the right choice for the group's aim - a team of designers producing design - Design Factory.

The main symbol for the group (Fig.16) is a square divided into four with a cross shape separating them. The four squares symbolise the four partners of the group and has a strong resemblance to Swiss or Scandinavian flags. The full symbol(Fig.17) used on promotional pieces suggests wheels of industry in motion and shows a stylised image of a factory. The logotype which accompanies the symbol is a sans-serif typeface and various serif and sans-serif type has been used.

The overall feel to Design Factory's corporate mark is austere and minimilist with strong European influences. Likewise I feel that the group's work in general has been very  much influenced by European design. Conor Clarke states himself
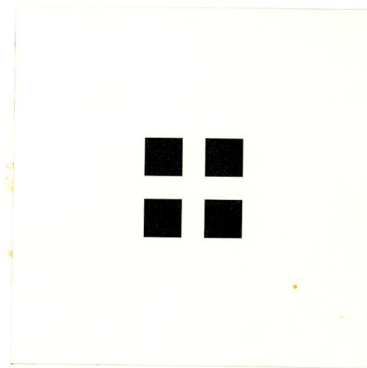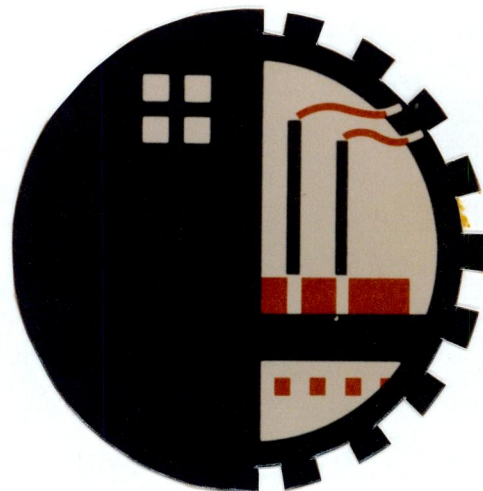
**Fig. 16.** Main symbol for Design Factory.
(Design Factory)



**Fig. 17.** Full symbol for Design Factory.
(Design Factory)

has been very much influenced by European design. Conor Clarke states himself that he is conscious of the influence he absorbed in Holland.

Looking at some examples of their work we can see how the work experience gained overseas, be it Holland, Copenhagen or even America is manifested in much of their work.

**IMMA**

The next example I wish to use is the corporate identity scheme for the Irish Museum of Modern Art, which was opened in 1991 at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham.

The name of the museum is rather long when printed in vertical form and could create problems when used in confined spaces. It was decided, therefore, that instead of abbreviating the name to make it fit, an alternative design solution should be developed (Fig.18). This was achieved by positioning each word of the title separately between horizontal lines that form a square.

The logotype uses an uppercase sans-serif typeface which has comfortable letter and line spacing and makes for good legibility.

The corporate identity programme for the museum extended to a unique signage system using steel and glass. This system, which is used throughout the museum is augmented by flags, banners and plaques.

As with any institution the success of an identity depends on its adaptability and ease of use. This can be seen in the identity marks of An Post, Telecom Eireann and the Dutch P.T.T., all of which have been dealt with earlier. It can also be seen in the identity scheme for the Irish Museum of Modern Art. (IMMA)

Although the design may be successful in this way, it may be argued that it lacks any characteristics that suggests a sense of Irishness. Instead the identity contains elements we tend to associate with the Germans, Swiss or Dutch, of functionalism and severity.

> The alterations to the south entrance of the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, to create a museum entrance hall inevitably met with criticism from conservationists. The French modelled, 17th century architecture was regarded as an Irish masterpiece which should not be violated, particularly after some £20 million had been spent on its restoration in the early 1980's. In the event, the design by Shay Cleary succeeds in opening up the building and the glass staircase up to the main exhibition space

THE
IRISH
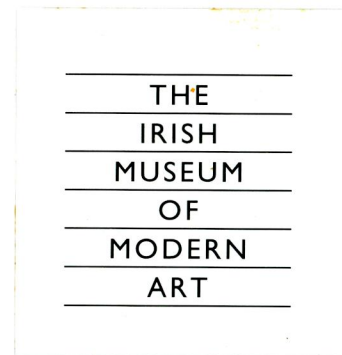MUSEUM
OF
MODERN
ART

**Fig. 18.** Identity Scheme for Irish Museum of Modern Art(IMMA)
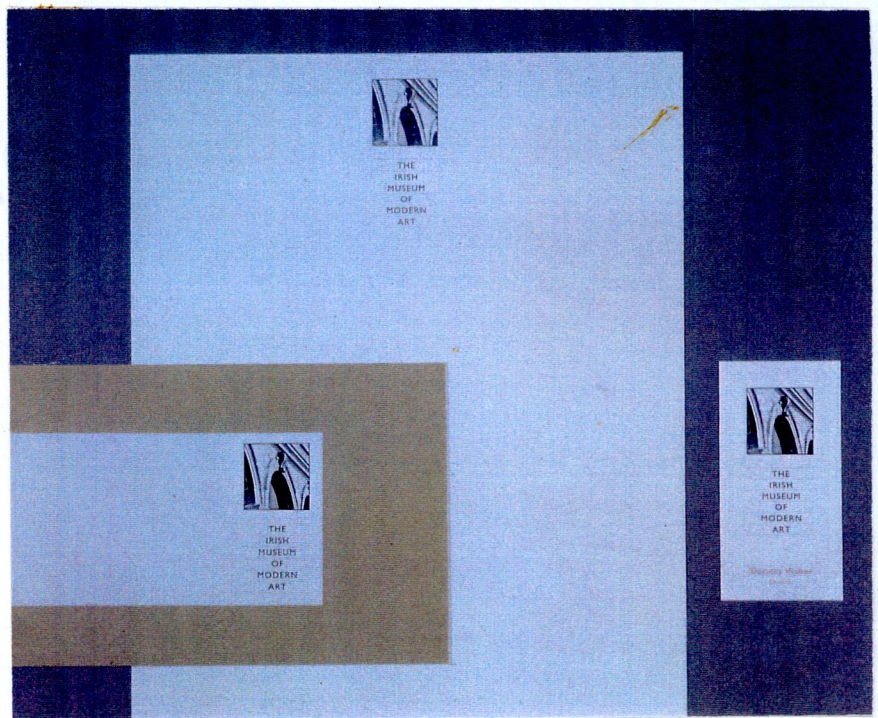(Design Factory)



**Fig. 18a.** Stationary for IMMA.
(Design Factory)

on the first floor is on plain, clean lines that do not attempt to
compete with the older architecture (9, p.32).

Perhaps it is this feature that the identity mark for IMMA was trying to reflect
in its design.

Design Factory may well have tried to combine the old and the new in their
stationary for IMMA. A spindly portico was intended to mark the entrance on the
courtyard side of the museum. It was vetoed by the heritage minders, yet it still
appears in IMMA's graphics. Unfortunately, this combination on the graphics
merely highlights the whole issue of the museum's suitability for its location in the
17th century hospital.

**Page Magazine**

As I mentioned earlier, Design Factory see themselves getting more and
more involved  in design outside Ireland, gaining recognition that will place Irish
design on the map.

In 1990 a german magazine called "Page" invited submissions for a design
competition for which the Design Factory entered. The group were up against
huge competition from European design groups but still managed to gain second
place.

The piece submitted was a double page spread from a brochure on Saint
Michael's House - a special school for mentally handicapped children (Fig.19).
The judges criterion for choosing this design was they felt that the brochure for this
type of social group was sensitively handled, with clean simple use of type and
sympathetic photography.

Very little can be added to this description; the text as we can see is kept to
a straight forward grid system. They type is uncomplicated, with a single typeface
being used in three colours and reversed out of coloured bars for specific text.
There are no large headings used, which would probably have competed with the
main image on the left hand side.

The line spacing is large and tends to spread the text so that it fills the page.
However, there is still a good feeling of space in relation to the page and yet well
balanced when offset against the large photograph.

The blue bar positioned at the bottom right-hand side of the photograph
gives it anchorage and with the column of text, helps to frame the image stopping
it from floating.

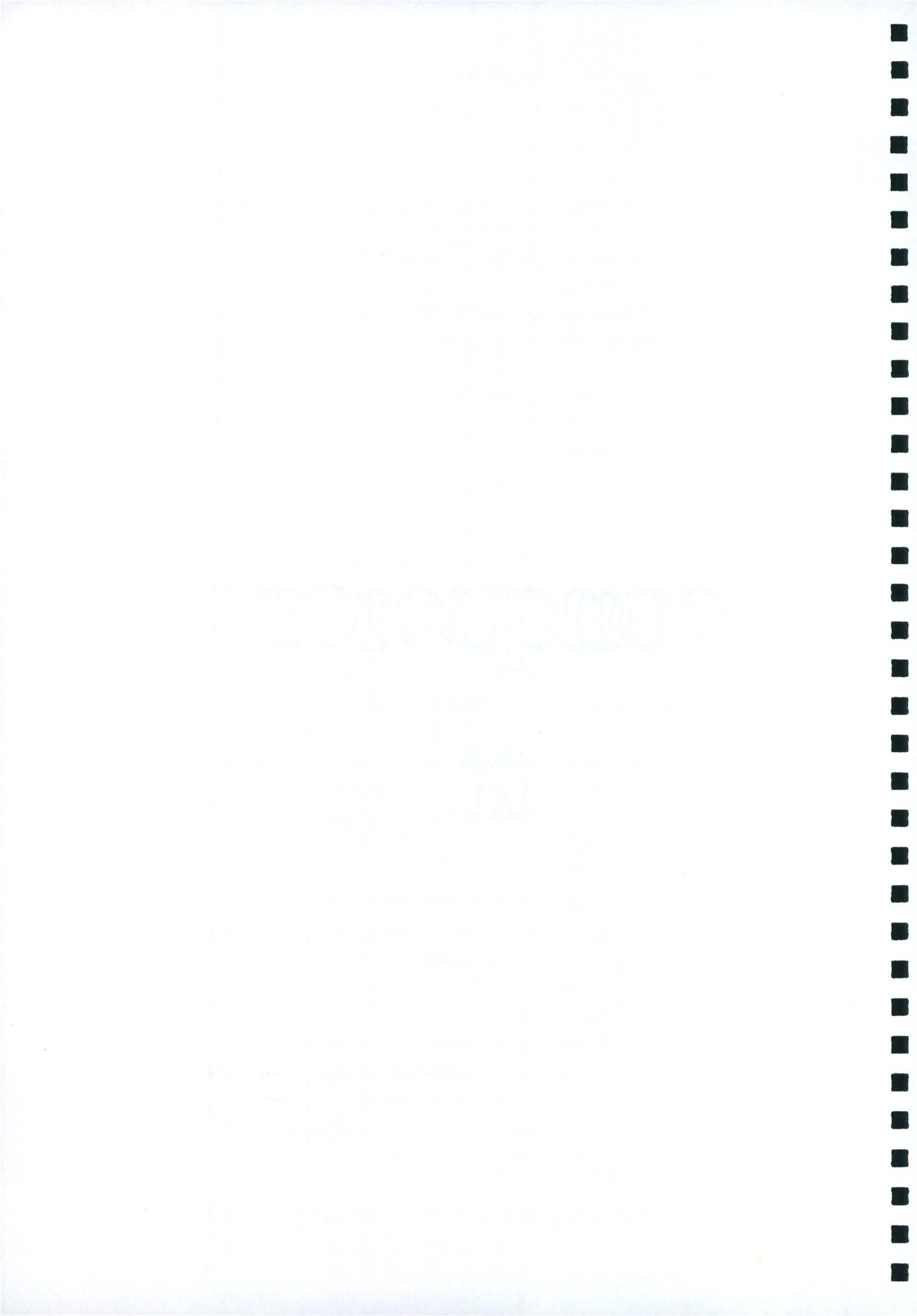This is a perfect example of how good design projected to the right people

**Fig. 19.** Double page spread for Page magazine.
(Design Factory)

can alter how the rest of the world perceives Irish graphic design. This quality of design lifts the image of Ireland high above the shoddy look of ill-used Celtic motifs and patterns that seem to be synonymous with us.

However, this piece of work raises the issue again over Irishness in Irish design. Design Factory would argue that their work is a combination of world wide influences, but with an individualistic approach to each piece of design. They see this as the evolution of Irish Graphic Design, where change and progression are seen as one (35).

**Design Works**

Design Works was established in 1984 by the two partners, Thomas Meenaghan and Martin Gaffney. They had obtained their undgergraduate design education at different Dublin colleges: Meenaghan at the National College of Art and Design, Gaffney at the College of Marketing and Design.

The two partners met at a graduate design for industry course given by management consultants under the aegis of the Government.

> It covered accountancy, business planning and practical design
> projects, where we had to bring the client right through from
> briefing to production - the kind of thing you don't get in college
> (3, p.96 ).

When Meenaghan and Gaffney first left college, they took their portfolios around, and like most post-graduates, went through the "rejection" phase. "Most art directors found our work wild and impractical, full of ideas perhaps, but demanding unrealistic budgets. They saw that we had no advertising experience and thought we were working in cloud-cuckoo land"(3, p.97 ).

The design climate was discouraging - Meenaghan has described it as a void. There were a few individual designers of quality, but they did not have enough turnover to make an impression, and the scattered and non descript design groups were unwilling to make any stand on design quality (36).

If the Dublin Design establishment was negative in its influence, Meenaghan and Gaffney did receive impetus from their college tutors, in particular two Dutch designers, Anton Mazer and Jan de Fouw, émigrés who maintained their own studio in Dublin and served as part-time lecturers at the National College of Art

and Design. Mazor and de Fouw urged them to establish their own company - "Before they got caught up in the stultifying security of the Dublin Ad Agency environment" (36).

So un design-orientated was Dublin at the time Design Works set up that when they talked business to bank managers, they always described themselves as printers. With £3,000 in their pockets Design Works established themselves in a basement premises in Rathmines, sharing it with another group - Design Factory. They began by taking on small jobs for their acquaintances, charging only tiny fees, but because of this they were under no pressure to conform to established standards. They were given a chance to develop their own ideas while gaining essential production experience.

Their first breakaway from letterheads and business cards came through a Meenaghan family friend who was managing director of Macks Bakeries, a west coast of Ireland family business which was beginning to market its goods countrywide. Design Works started with a Halloween poster and went on to baked goods packaging, most notably the Big Chief sliced loaf wrapping, which had high visibility, sales success and design plaudits. Macks is still one of Design Works major clients, having recently commissioned a whole new corporate identity programme.

Like many other successful design firms, Design Works credits this first important breakthrough to the enlightened attitude of the client. "The family connection was important," says Meenaghan, "Because we were able to research the whole concept of a family bakery before taking it into the wider national arena. Our client understood the potential power of good design, was excited by our ideas and let us develop them freely(36 ).

The success of "Big Chief" brought offers of work from competing bakeries "which we used," says Meenaghan "to encourage our original client to move further in new directions. This also gave us the impetus to broaden our base, as we didn't want to get known as the designers who changed the shape of sliced bread" (3,p.101).

In 1992 Design Works are now an eight-person operation and based in a larger premises in the business district of Dublin. With several design and advertising awards to their credit the group now have an impressive list of clients, that include corporate accounts such as: Gill and Macmillan, Publishing; The Irish division of Phillips Electronics; Arthur Guinness, and Wiggins Teape Paper manufacturers.
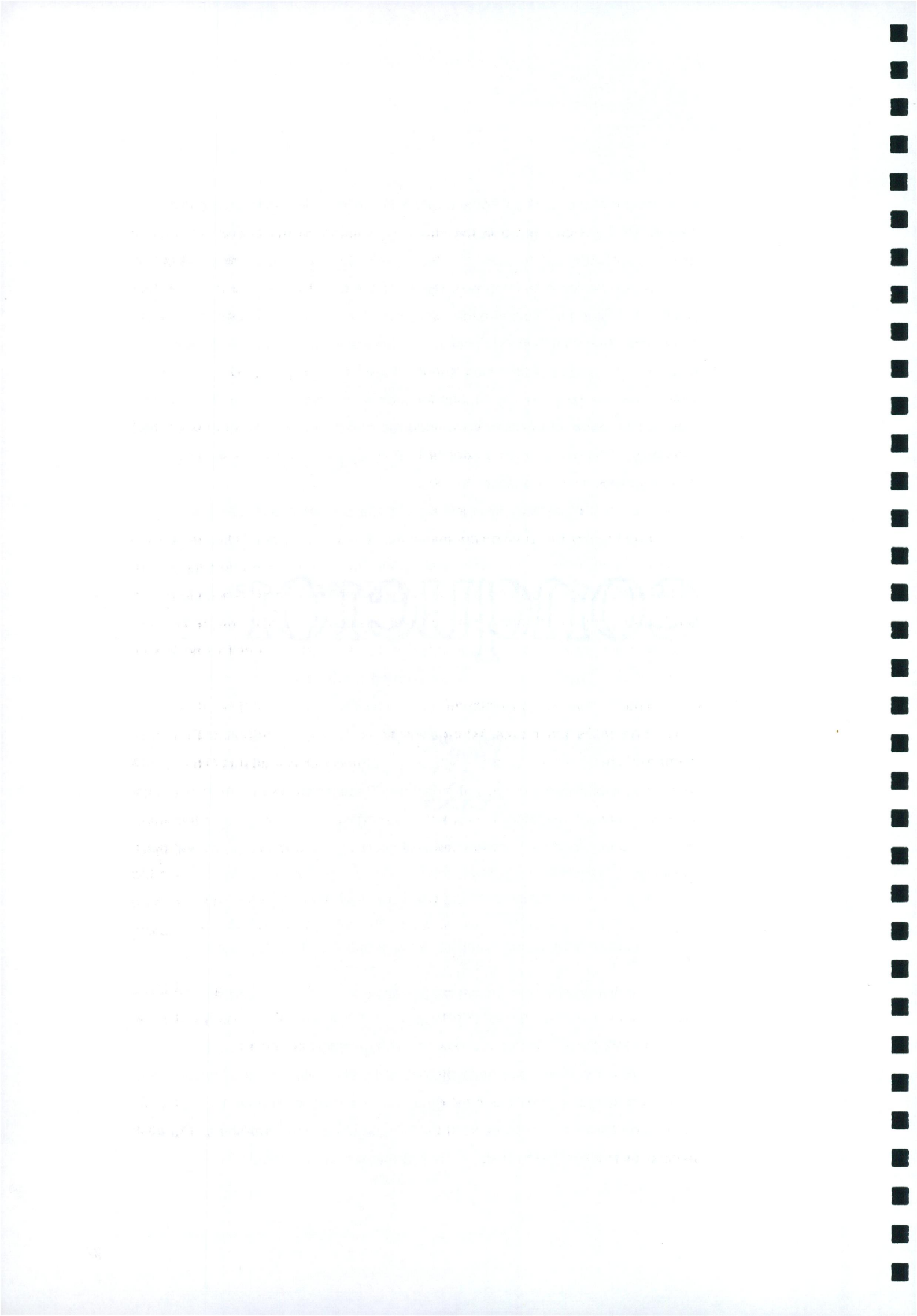
The eight person staff is well-balanced with four designers, one illustrator, two production people and one administrator. Aware of the need to formalise some of their procedures, they have instituted defined project management and quality control techniques and they have invited outside consultants to analyse their operation to see if their repertoire of skills is accurately focused, effectively dove-tailed and efficiently deployed.

Unlike Design Factory, Design Works don't place the same emphasis on self-promotion, Meenaghan feels that the quality of their work speaks for itself and their reputations spreads through the visual impact of their work and word of mouth. To date Design Works have been a remarkable success and they report plenty of work with no sign of the recessionary trend afflicting London and New York. They are also considering moving to a larger premises.

Like Design Factory they are aware that some kind of growth and expansion is synonymous with continued vitality. But, they are wary of over-commercialisation and consequent limitation on design freedom and possible compromises in design quality and integrity. They want broader work and would like to get into environmental graphics, which would give them the opportunity to work with developers, architects and interior designers.

The relative design isolation of Dublin has on the whole worked to the advantage of Design Works. When they set up business the corporate design climate into which they entered was still of the conservative, lean and clean, Swiss inspired, grid conscious type. The New Wave hardly existed. If some saw their work as outrageous, and resisted their intrusion, they had the wave of the future on their side. They could position themselves as the leading edge, pushing down barriers that in England and America had fallen years before. Yet, though the influences of London, New York, Dallas, Minneapolis and San Francisco can be seen in their work, they have been able to pick and choose their mentors, avoiding peer group pressure towards trendiness for its own sake.

Design Works also place high importance on their own corporate identity, a fact that can be illustrated by the introduction of their own new identity, giving the group a fresh look that communicates what design works are about.

The first thing that is noticeable about Design Works is the constant use of illustration throughout most of their work. It is used freely on posters, brochures, corporate identity and stationary, but done in a discernable fashion giving each piece of work a humanistic feel.

**Fig. 20.** Design Works stationery.
(Design Works)
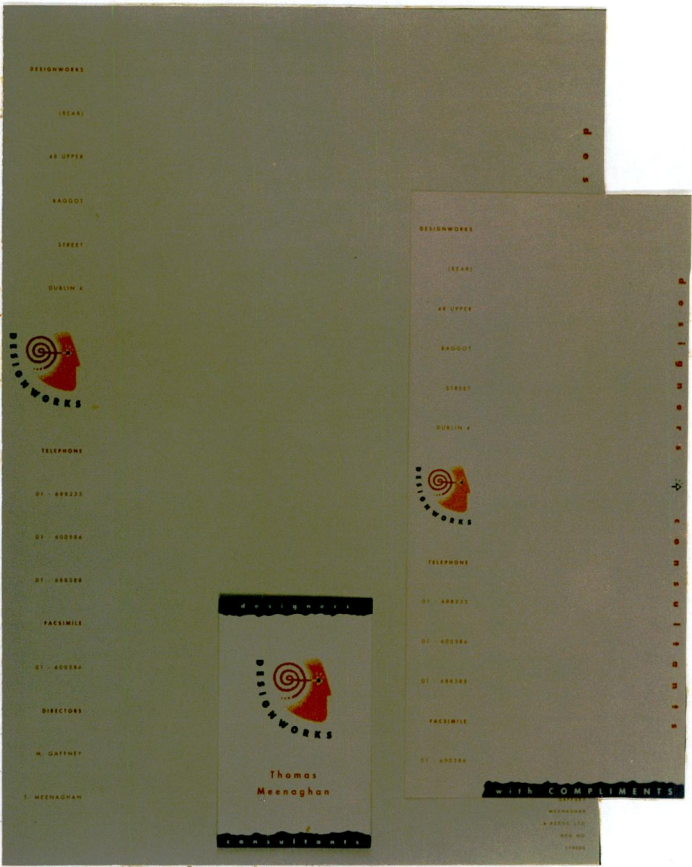


**Fig 21.** Symbol for Design Works corporate identity.
(Design Works)
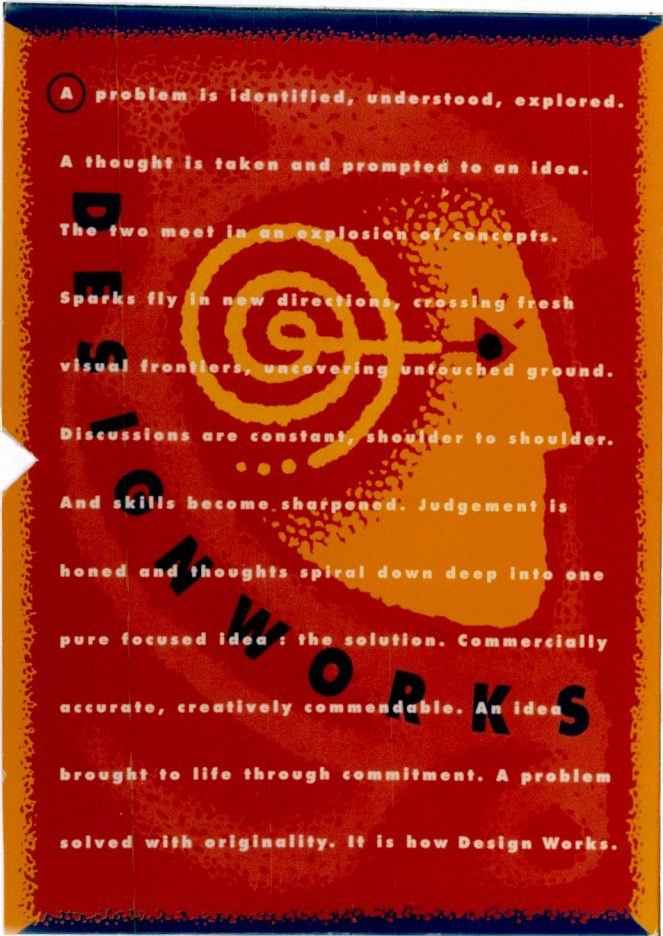
**Fig.** 22.     Design Works stationery (reverse side)
(Design Works)
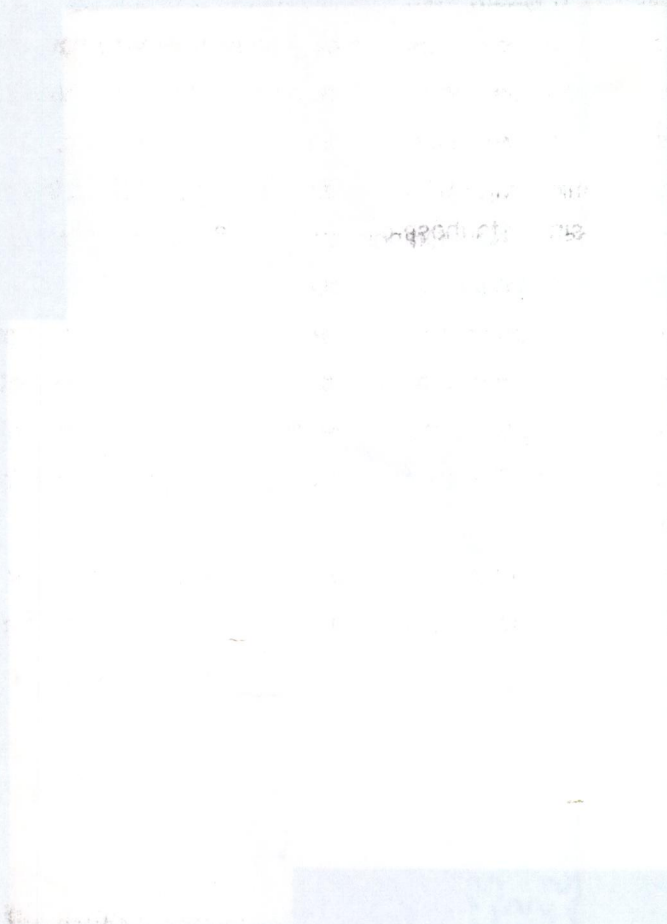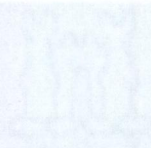
No more evident is this than in their own corporate mark and its application to the group's stationary (Fig.20). Tom Meenaghan, one of the group's partners, also loves colour and knows how to use it well. The symbol they have developed uses three colours, red, orange and blue. It represents communication based on the group's philosophy of creative ideas and visual language (Fig.21).

It is quite a dynamic image with suggestions of early Celtic imagery, the spiral being similar to those of New Grange, and the head has similarities with the Celtic treatment of human forms on high crosses.

The logotype uses a bold uppercase san-serif typeface and curves from left to right around the back of the symbol. It interacts well and helps to strengthen the symbol, while the wide letterspacing makes the logotype easy to read at this angle, creating a sense of direction. The use of the arrow in the symbol reinforces the idea of communication.

The application of colours is not only used on the corporate mark and text but is applied in unusual way to the back of all stationary for decorative purposes (Fig.22).

**Guinness**

The designs carried out for the giant brewing company Arthur Guinness is not what one would immediately expect for the folder of an annual board meeting in such a monolithical organisation. In all four cases the approach taken was to use a simple visual pun with a sense of humour. The illustrations used have a friendly feel to them breaking away from the use of rational type and photography that we tend to associate with corporate jobs like this.

The designs shown in Fig.'s 23, 24, 25, 26, are pretty self explanatory, they are not complicated or fussy, have well proportioned illustrations, with minimal and simple use of type. All designs use the familiar Guinness colours and using visual pun to suggest the board meeting in each case. At the back of each folder, a further illustration is used to suggest that the meeting has come to an end(Fig.25a).They reminded me of the posters used by Guinness in the 30's with similar humour that even today are popular. Meenaghan states that he did approach the work with the same attitude but with one difference - these were Irish ! (36).

Guinness folders for annual general meeting.
(Design Works, after 3, p.101)

GUINNESS PLC BOARD MEETING
DUBLIN JULY 14 1988
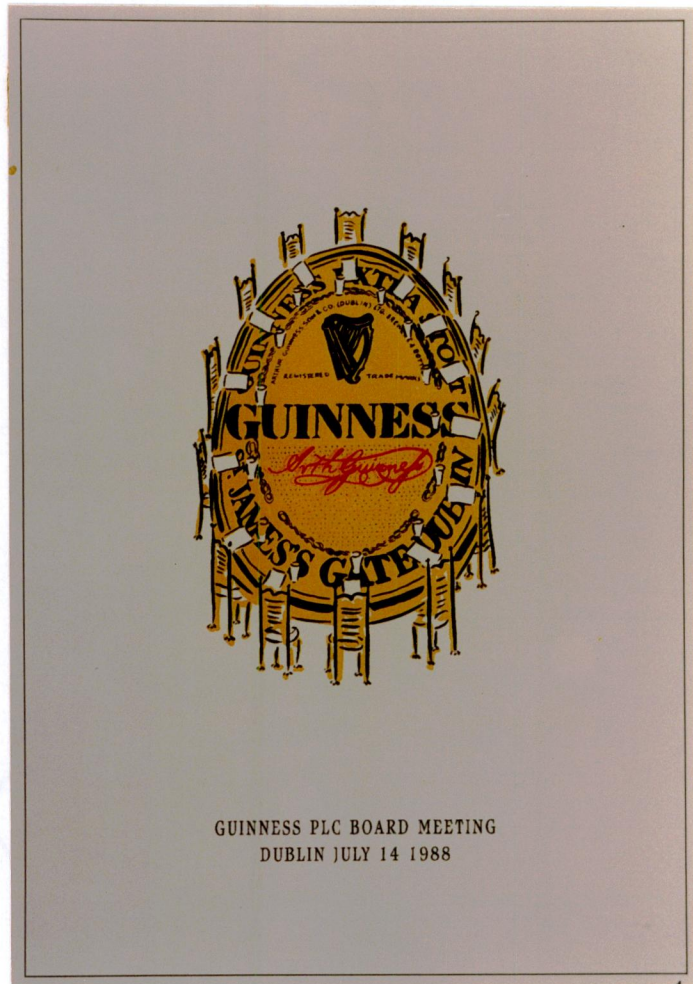
Fig. 23.

Fig. 24.

Guinness folders for annual general meeting.
(Design Works, after 3,p.101)



the business in hand
GUINNESS PLC
**Board Meeting Dublin**
*September 13 1990*

**Fig. 25.**



**Fig. 25a.**



*"meeting in progress"*

**Fig. 26.**
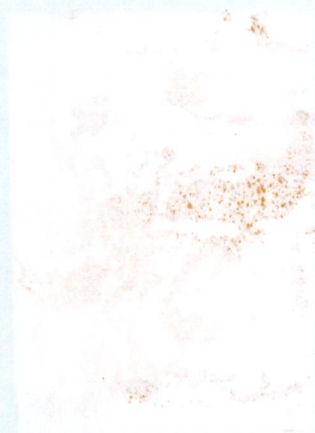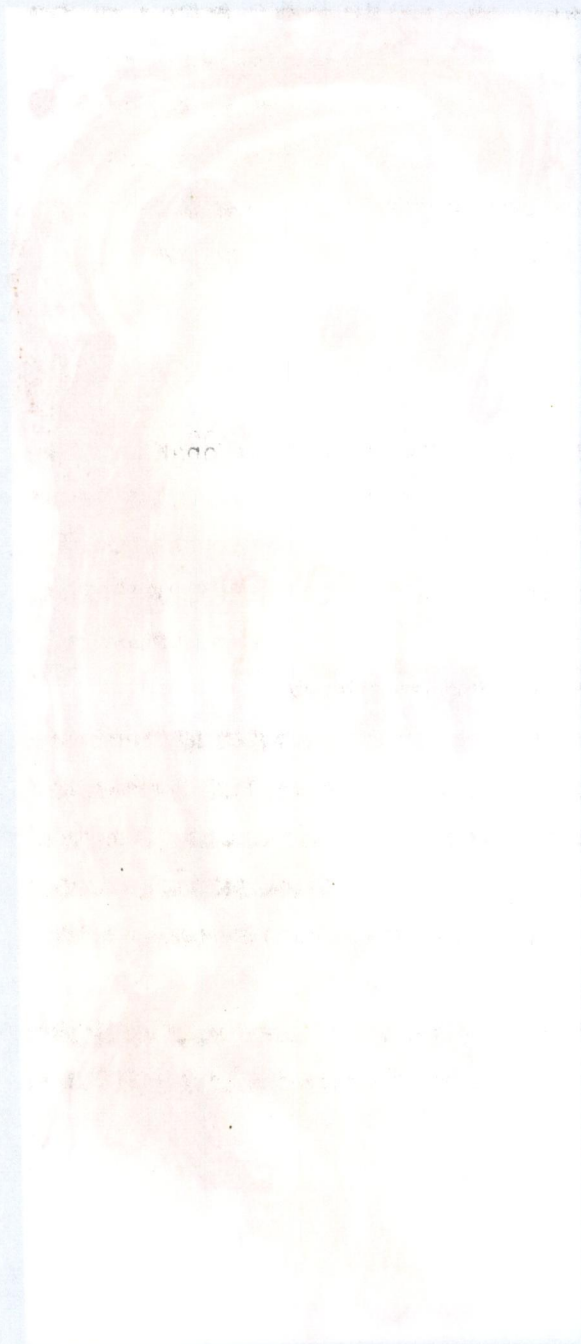
This is a good case in point about the issue of Irishness in design. The design shown here works well in communicating the idea and that is the primary function of their work. But it is the approach they took and the attitude in the work, that sense of humour which has been associated worldwide with the Irish personality. I'm not saying that a sense of humour is unique to the Irish but it is certainly noticeable when compared with the Germans, Dutch or even English and Americans. If this characteristic could be incorporated into some of our design, then perhaps, Ireland could produce work with an element of distinctiveness.

**Overseas Work**

Design Works have been approached by many international corporate clients to produce work for them. Many corporations have offices based here in Ireland since we became the "silicon valley' of Europe. Meenaghan attributes this, and the fact that the American companies need to have a "Pan European" look to their design in order to compete in the European market. Some American design can look as far off European standards as it is geographically.

The establishment of so many computer manufacturers in Ireland has meant that the printing business here, which has a long history, had to invest and upgrade its equipment and quality control. As a result Ireland now boasts some of the finest printing in Europe. In fact a recent visit to printing and separation houses revealed that the work here was being produced for American companies quicker and with a better quality than some printing firms in the USA.

With the assurance of quality printing and good design such as Design Works, it is hopeful that many more multinational companies will put their faith in Irish design.

**AGFA**

One corporate company, AGFA, which have a base here in Ireland, approached Design Works to design packaging and promotional pieces for a new product about to be launched.

AGFA were trying to establish themselves in computer software and were releasing a series of post script typefaces aimed at the German market. To help launch this product a promotional piece was needed and Design Works suggested a calendar.

Fig.27 and 27a show two pages from the calendar. The main purpose in the design of the calendar, besides providing the necessary information of dates, days and months was to show how the various typefaces looked. It is divided into six pages, each page containing the dates and days for two months with a different colour and illustration on each.

The background colours used on the individual pages suggest the time of year and blown up images associated with that time are then printed on top. The examples used here show how a yellow/orange colour was used for May and June with an enlarged image of a footprint and shell on the sand printed on top. For the Autumn months, September and October, an orange colour was used with an image of fallen leaves printed on top.

All the pages are overprinted with a metallic ink, its transparent qualities manage to "quieten" the vibrant colours printed below and create an interesting variation in the overall colours with a metallic shine.

Once again illustration is used in the design, this time with typography. The type in the image is taken from the typeface is question dealt with on the page and used in a playful manner to form the main image. For June/July an image of an icecream cone is used to reinforce the feeling of summer. For September/October a bare tree with falling leaves is formed from letters in the typeface.

The dropped shadow gives each illustration a three dimensional effect. A contrast is created by allowing some of the background colours to come through for details, such as the lines on the cone and the graphic motifs of the sun and moon. Although computer generated symbols such as these are normally avoided, it is used here for its connections with the product.

All the typefaces are set in black and white blocks forming a column on the right hand side of the page. Both the typeface and the informational details are lifted out of halftone colours, separating them form the background. The layout for the days and dates of each months is quite simple with spot colours highlighting

**Fig. 27.**    AGFA calendar, p.1
(Design Works)



**Fig. 27a**    AGFA calendar, p.2
(Design Works)
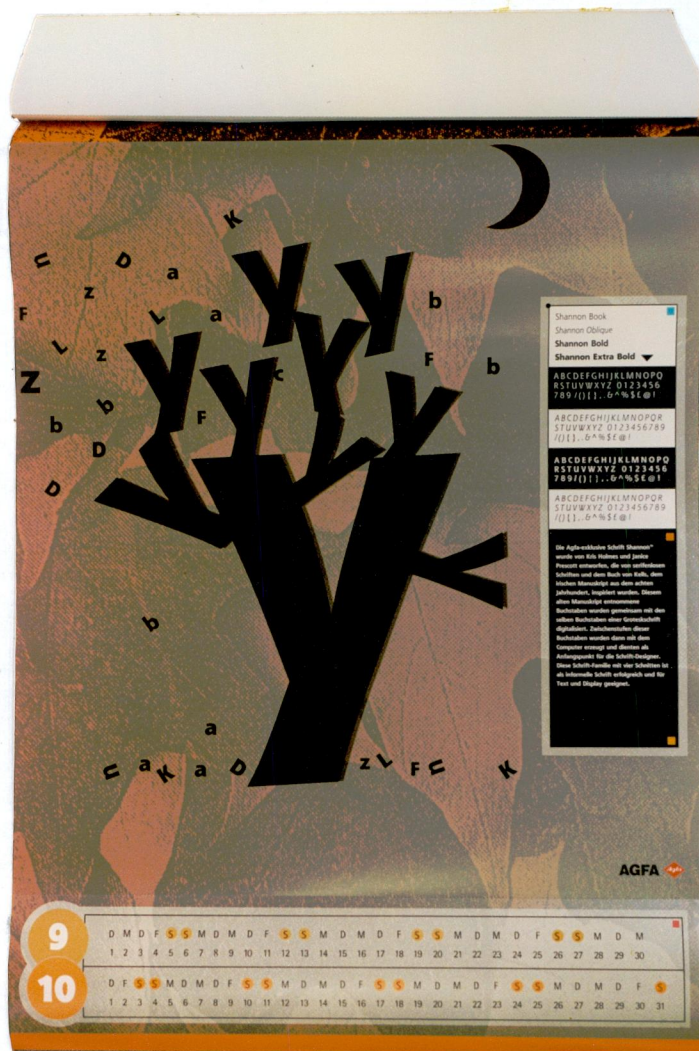
Saturday and Sunday breaking up the weeks. The larger numbers representing the months are reversed out of colour and are taken from the typeface on that particular page

This is a clever and well executed piece of work and Design Works hoped that people would appreciate this. Each page is perforated in two places so that they may be taken out  and the dates and days dropped as the months passed. This had two functions: to keep the page as a piece of artwork to adorn a studio and to be kept as a reference of typeface.

Design Works have developed an individualistic style using a variety of personal characteristics while avoiding strong and direct influences from other nations. However, the quality and ideas behind their work ensure a prominent place for them on the wider international market.

conclusion

Irish graphic design has developed significantly since the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. No longer is it the fringe phenomenon that it was in the fifties. The more progressive attitude in the sixties highlighted Ireland's need for change in order to integrate in Europe and design was seen as an important element for those changes.

The enthusiasm of the sixties to increase design awareness in this country may well have been genuine, but through constant recessionary trends, or perhaps as suggested earlier, because of the Government's lack of real commitment, design never reached its potential status when compared to other European nations.

The government's decision to establish Kilkenny Design was certainly a positive move, but it was a shortlived and unique experiment.

The hard times that followed the short lived boom years of the sixties were to put graphic design back into the periphery. Changes were slow in coming, and it was not until the mid-eighties that design emerged once more with fresh enthusiasm.

Today graphic design consultancies have developed into an important service industry here in Ireland, and have become a more significant element in Ireland's national identity in design.

The issue of national identity in design has been highlighted with the recent developments in the European community. Nations like the Dutch who have high standards of design on most of the country's printed matter fear that this could change with the start of Europe's economic unity. If all the countries of Europe use the same currency, there will be more people to voice opinions on what it looks like "The more opinions offered the less interesting the design"(25, p.114 ).

Will these changes raise interest in Ireland's national visual identity? And what exactly is our definition of "Irishness" in design.? There is no simple answer to this, as design is part of the wider subject of culture. Certainly Ireland has claimed much of the celtic tradition as part of our visual identity. With the establishment of the Irish Government in 1922 Celtic imagery and the Gaelic Script were introduced to create much needed national identity, in visual form, this can be seen in the examples of Irish stamps discussed earlier.

Over the years this perception of Ireland has altered, mainly as a result of outside influences from Europe and America. Irish graphic design was to develop a more "modern" European look. One might argue that because of this Irish design has lost any characteristics may call its own.

This criticism is applicable to many Irish design consultancies today, and Design Factory, whose work was discussed earlier, could certainly be regarded visually as "modern" and "European" but there is a danger that their work will lose its appeal in the deluge of imitated styles.

Design based on style lacks any content, the content is made up from manifold characteristics of a nation. Jan de Fouw suggests, that a sociological profile of the people living in Ireland and Holland may be gained by a topographical analogy between the two countries.

> Dutchmen have what is termed by De Fouw as the "Mondrian mind". They live and work in a flat, regular country with a rigid conformist infrastructure. In Holland, roads are straight, public transport arrives and departs on time, and its economy is efficient, intensive and runs with mathematical precision; thus its people have complimentary attributes of efficiency, accuracy and reliability. In contrast, Ireland is like the Book of Kells. Its intricate networks of roads, and irregular asymmetrical towns and hinterlands somehow mirror the sociology of the Irish, as unsystematic and non-conformist (34).

This theory is surely subjective, many would argue with his stereotypical analysis of both counties. However, it does contain valid points relating to our culture and environment of which design is a component.

So, Irish design it seems is faced with a dilemma. If we are to attempt to go along with international trends, we run the risk of effacing national characteristics, but if we keep to ourselves we could all too easily fall into provincialism.

The solution must lie in individualism, one of Ireland's characteristics, itself passed down form our traditional craft based foundation. Design Works, who were discussed earlier, have shown how they approach design with their individualistic use of wit, charm and lightness of touch and in the process have created a distinctive and successful identity which could be seen as a possible approach in developing Ireland's national identity in design.

In addition other influences from our history; calligraphy, heraldry and folk-art when combined with modern influences may give Irish graphic designs the opportunity to develop a distinctive look to their work, and the technological changes in recent years have enabled experimentation in this field.

Both the British and the Dutch see their design as not one particular style but a style of styles, eclecticisism or total adaption to foreign culture but with the interaction of local tradition. In the same way Ireland has the opportunity to develop its own style through the interaction of international stylistic influences with local tradition. The examples given earlier of An Post and Telecom Eireann show how the adaption of the Gaelic Script and its combination with modern European typefaces and ethics is successful as one example of how Irish graphic design can create it s own distinct visual identity.

Graphic designers, like other artists must work to create solutions that move thought, perception and culture forward into the future, rather than wallowing in the "golden age" of the past. It must be remembered however, as Al O'Dea states: **"Unless design reflects the artist's origins it is nothing"(1.)**

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