

TRAIN WRECK: ISSUE AND RE-ISSUE OF IRELAND'S 1984 RAILWAY LETTER STAMP

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Coras Iompair Éireann (Irish Transport Company) is the Irish Republic's state owned national transport company. Set up by the Irish Government in 1945, initially as a private company with some public funding, it was responsible for road, rail and canal services south of the border. In 1950 it was fully nationalized.

It produces various denominations of ticket style labels that are affixed to letters carried on its trains to indicate that the appropriate railway letter fee has been paid. Unlike the Railway Mail Service arrangement of the United States, in which the US Post Office Department contracted with common-carrier railroads to provide Railway Post Office service, CIE is independent of An Post. Ireland also operates an air letter service under a similar private arrangement. As a small island nation with mostly local roads and no superhighways of the type common in the United States, rail and air letter services offered a higher-cost express option prior to the development of international overnight courier services like FedEx.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first Irish railway, known as the Dublin and Kingstown Railway, CIE issued a commemorative railway letter stamp on June 25, 1984. Although its face value is £1, the retail price of the stamp was £1.23, reflecting 23% VAT or local sales tax. A 26p postage stamp was also required on railway letters at the time. [1] First day covers, with no 26p stamp affixed, were prepared and sold; FIG. 1 is an example.



Fig. 1 – Withdrawn CIE stamp, first day cover

The ride over the rails would prove rough, though. On June 26, the day after issue, the stamp was withdrawn. An Post had complained that the design did not specifically mention that the stamp was exclusively for use on railway letters, creating the risk of use on surface mail carried by An Post but not paid for via the stamp. [1] Apparently some post offices were slow to react, because covers dated as late as September 1984 have been found.

CIE also dragged its feet. Not until November 1984 did it re-issue the stamp with an additional overprint reading “Taille lompair” (“Transport Fee”). There are reports that An Post had requested another overprint reading “Fee for conveyance of a letter by rail,” but eventually accepted the shorter version [1]. The earliest known use of the reissued stamp on cover is November 13, 1984. FIG. 2 shows the original and reissued stamp side-by-side.

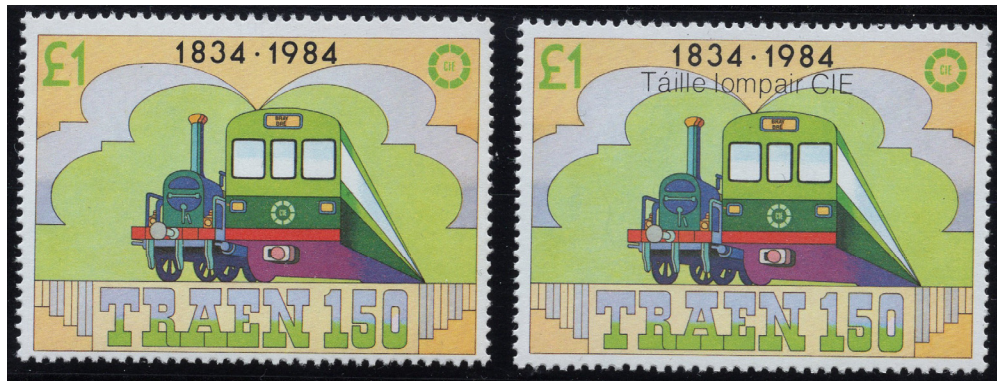


Fig. 2 – Original and reissued CIE stamps

Both the original and the replacement stamp were printed by lithography from a design by Peter Sluis, and issued in sheets of 20, arranged as 5 rows of 4, which were cut down from original sheets of 40. FIG. 3, FIG. 4 depict full sheets in the author's collection. Plate numbers 1A and 1B were used and the perforation gauge is 14.25 x 14.75. The design depicts a Dublin and Kingstown Railway locomotive of 1834 besides Dublin Area Rapid Transity (DART) system railcar of 1984, and are inscribed “Traen 150”. The stamps were printed by Irish Security Stamp Printing Limited in a quantity of 40,000 for the original issue, of which about 5,000 were sold and the rest overprinted. The overprinted issue was withdrawn on December 31, 1984.

In 2007, Britain's Railway Philatelic Group reported a catalog value of £4.50 for the original stamp and £80.00 for a full sheet of either plate. The Group quoted a value of £4.00 for the reissued stamp and £65.00 for a full sheet of either plate. [2] For the stamp canceled on the CIE-produced illustrated first day cover with special CIE cancel on stamp, as seen in FIG. 1, the Hibernian catalog assigned number R-160 and stated a value of €25 in 2014.



Fig. 3 – Full sheet, reissued stamp



Fig. 4 – Full sheet, original issue

References

Images of all philatelic material – author's collection.

[1] "C.I.E. Railway Letter Stamps," 35 The Revealer (J. of Eire Philatelic Association) No. 1, summer 1985, at 15.

[2] Great Britain & Ireland Railway Letter Stamps 1957-2007, A Handbook & Catalogue, Railway Philatelic Group (2007), www.railwayphilatelicgroup.co.uk.