REGISTRATION OF DEEDS STAMPS

RAYMOND MURPHY

Ireland has used the Torrens System to record land ownership in rural areas since 1892. This was due to Land Reform as a result of the Great Famine of 1848, when over a million people died, and about 1.25 million emigrated. Prior to the 1880's, most farmland had been owned by about 750 English families, whose ancestors were leaders in Cromwell's army who seized the land from the Irish. The Irish were left as tenant farmers on the English-owned land with little rights, and were often evicted for no reason. Most of these large plantations were run in absentia by paid overseers interested in obtaining maximum profit. In England, many of the land-owners were "land-rich" but almost financially bankrupt. Documentation was almost non-existent other than showing it was awarded for services rendered in the 1600's.



Figure 1: "Eviction" painting Based on photo in Lawrence collection.

The existing deed system in use in England was localized and to a degree corrupt. Ownership disputes were referred to the courts and often litigation extended over many years. Sir Robert Torrens developed and implemented a deed system that corrected many of the shortfalls in the earlier system. Instead of issuing a deed to the landowner, a Certificate of Title Was provided which was a mirror image of what was recorded in the folio for the particular property in the Title Registration office. This included easements, permissions, restrictions, mortgages, and other pertinent information. This certificate was guaranteed by the State as being true and correct in all respects. This made the government responsible for the accuracy of information recorded for each piece of property, rather than only notes or additions recorded on the deed in the hands of the owner. Since this was a new and separate system, a Registry of Deeds also existed to manage older deeds and deeds not included in the Torrens system, which was not mandatory in the urban areas of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford until 2010.

While this is quite interesting and important to sellers, potential buyers, lawyers, and the tax man, why should a collector of stamps or postal history care? There are two clear reasons. First, this operation is run by a separate agency, the **Registry of Deeds**, *Tailte Eireann.* While it was the job of the Irish Land Commission to break up the large estates into smaller farms to be sold to the tenant farmer, it did not issue a deed to the farmer, but rather a certificate of title. The deed, and associated documentation was given to the Registry of Deeds to retain. The Land Commission arranged the particulars, and set-up the long-term loans. This function was paid for

by a revenue stamp marked for the I.L.C. Issuing the Certificate of Title and recording all the details fell to the Registry of Deeds. Anytime a detail in the certificate was changed, for example, paying off a loan, changing of fishing rights in a waterway, or a road easement, a new certificate was required along with appropriate new revenue stamps. Thus, Deed Registry stamps are not scarce. There were also paid revenue stamps marked **Deed Registration** or *Claratat talmun*, in Irish. The Irish Land Commission was shuttered in 1999 since all the loans were paid-off, most of the land divided, and for additional reasons. The *Tailte Eireann*, Irish Land, today, is an ongoing agency with offices in county seats. The payment was by revenue stamps, which were last updated in 1971, to accommodate.



Figure 2: "Reigning monarchs, Edward 1901-1915 and George V, 1915 to 1922"

Decimalization of the pound. Today it is all computerized, and stamps are no longer used.

Like the stamps of the Irish Land Commission, the initial stamps were mainly changed to update the portrait of the British Monarch. There are earlier stamps marked Deeds Registry, but these were not specifically for the Torrens System which began in 1892.

1923 saw a *Saorstat Eireann* overprint on the British stamps of King George V reflecting the establishment of the Free State of Ireland.



Figure 3 "British stamp with overprint"

These were superseded in 1925 by a new design of the Free State of Ireland (*Saorstat Eireann*) with wording now in Irish.



Figure 4: "1925 New design and Country Name Change"

This design was updated in 1941 to acknowledge the creation of the Republic of Ireland, and the stamps were further updated in 1971 for the decimalization of the pound. They were not reprinted after the stock was used up.

Secondly, of interest to the collector is that these were official documents created by solicitor or by the agency and sent via the



Figure 5 "Issue of 1941 showing the 1939 Independence and 1971 issue with pound decimalization"

mail system. Mail to and from the government qualified as official mail, thus all the markings of official mail may exist. Logos, meters, and rubber stamps can be found as on other official mail. Note the date 19 December 1921, fifteen days after the treaty was signed. The use of the unmodified OHMS is appropriate since the Post Office wasn't turned over to the Provisional Government until 1 April 1922. OHMS material overprinted *Rialtas* or *Saorstat* was used until attrited. The Provisional government approved the use of *Rialtas* on covers 19 January 1922 which was accepted by the Post Office.

For land that was being registered by the Land Commission for the first time, a special set of instructions was provided, explaining terms and procedures.

Is this off the "beaten path"? Most certainly, but it is a part of both Irish revenue stamps and Irish postal history collecting. It also shows some of the changes involved in modernizing and transitioning the country from a colony to an independent state.

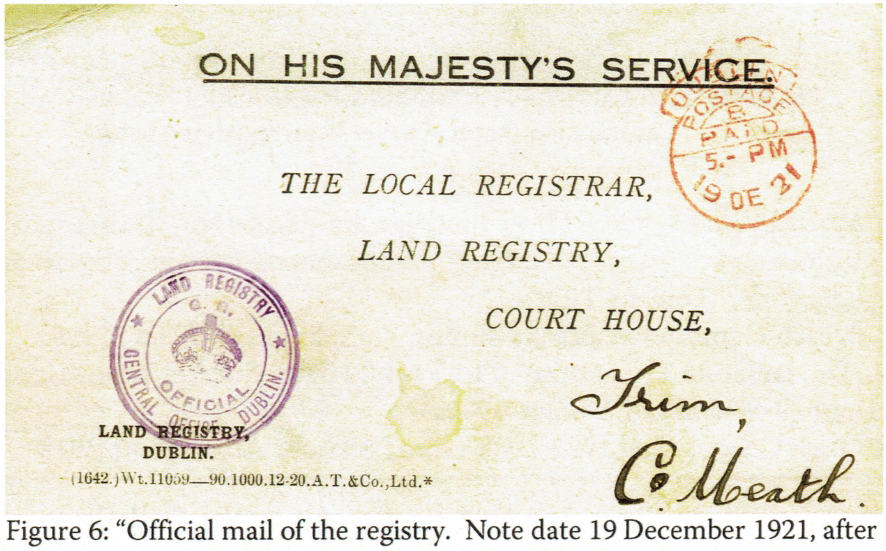

Figure 6: "Official mail of the registry. Note date 19 December 1921, after treaty was signed but valid since the PO would not be turned over to the Irish until the end of March 1922."