

TRANSLATING TOURISM

Development & Design during the Early Free State



Tourism in Ireland today is one of the largest indigenous industries with millions visiting each year; however, following the formation of the Free State there were many debates in government on the importance of tourism and its expenditure. Tourism had the ability to combine reformulating national identity through branding in the aftermath of the Civil War and opportunity for economic development. However, there were debates on how Ireland should be promoted—who is Ireland as a nation; where is it going; how do we show Ireland as a nation progressing under the new state, while also capitalising on the historical and mythical narratives, and sense of timelessness that appealed to visitors? Tourism promotion to foreigners was controversial in the early years of the Free State. There were several contributing factors. One, the primary tourist market initially was the British, which many Irish felt a distrust towards. Two, the public questioned the cost of building leisure facilities when many in Ireland were quite poor. And third, was the general debate on whether tourism could actually contribute positively and effectively towards economic growth.

In 1937, Sean Lemass established a committee to “advise on matters affecting the design and decorations of articles” manufactured in the Free States. At the time, Lemass was the Minister for Industry and Commerce in the Fianna Fail government, which introduced protective tariffs to ‘shelter Irish industry’ and promote self-reliance. As these industries would be a substitute for British imports, industrial design at home was needed. Lemass understood how design supported economic activity. The committee met 42 times, dissolving in 1939, and produced very few results but left the recommendation that an industry design exhibition be organised. This would not happen until 1954 and 1956.

Ireland began receiving aid through the Marshall Plan in 1947. Much of this money was used to revamp the Irish road network. However, the Economic Cooperation Administration that was in charge of administering the plan thought that tourism would help countries rebuild and that Ireland also had good potential to develop that market.

This created external pressure to grow and support tourism—for economic reasons and to guarantee continued money from the Marshall Plan. Ireland had to show they were willing to increase earnings by the most feasible plan, which many thought was the tourism market. Ireland already had its own national airline, Aer Lingus (now privatised), which was founded in 1936 by Sean Lemass, Seán Ó hUadhaigh and John Leyden.

Early in 1950, stats from within the government corroborated that tourism was the “second most important industry behind agriculture.” In 1951, Ireland received the results of the Christenberry Report (officially the Synthesis of Reports on Tourism, 1950-1951) which ‘acknowledged Irish tourism as an underexploited revenue source.’ In 1952, Ireland finally began to consider tourism as an important priority within governmental work.

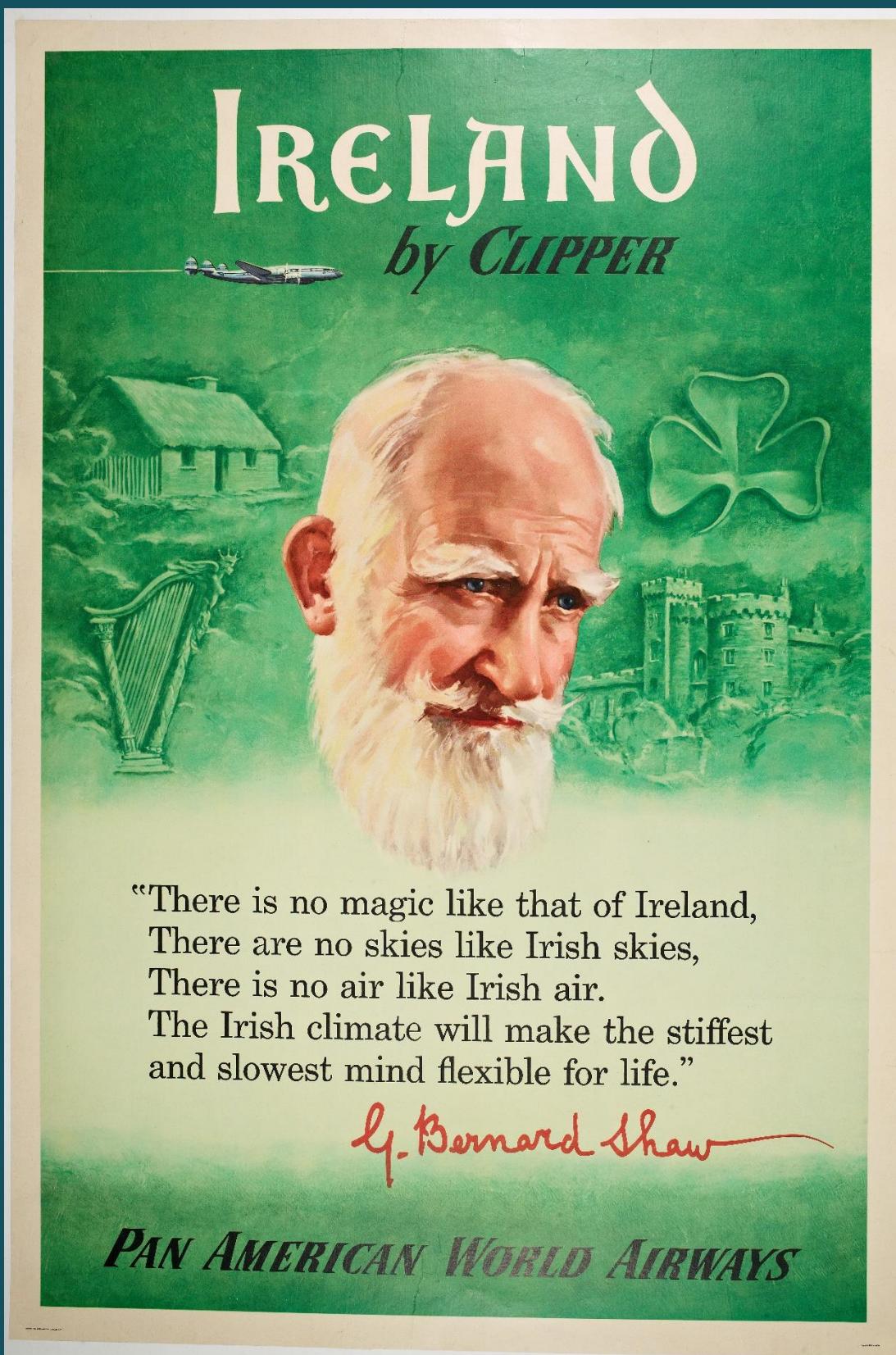


INTRODUCING AN TÓSTAL

“An Tóstal: Ireland at Home was the single largest tourist development project undertaken in the 1950s and it stands as an excellent example of how Irish identity was influenced both from within and without Ireland.”

As we saw in the discussions of the Marshall Plan and the Christenberry Report, several of the suggestions to develop and expand tourism in Ireland to reach its full potential came from outsiders. The same can be said for the An Tóstal Festival—a proposal put forward to Sean Lemass by the president of Pan American Airways (PanAm). The aim was to extend the tourist season and encourage those with Irish ancestry to return to the homeland. An Tóstal translates to ‘a gathering’. International travel, and specifically what was called ‘ancestral tourism,’ was a form of diplomacy between 1945 and 1966, combining economic and political incentives.

Promoting flights to Ireland was nothing new for Pan Am—the below is promotional poster disseminated in 1948.



VISUAL ANALYSIS

Look at the PanAm advertisement and consider the following questions.

Who is the intended audience?

What sentiments are the designers appealing to?

How is Ireland portrayed?

What imagery and symbols are used?

Describe your overall impression of the Pan Am Poster.

Some scholars claim that the “absence of a visual tradition In Ireland, equal in stature to its powerful literary counterpart, has meant that the dominant images of Ireland have, for the most part, emanated from outside the country, or have been produced at home with an eye on the foreign (or tourist) market.”

Certain aspects of culture are selected as the markers—shamrocks as a prime example. Ireland is also represented as pre-modern and timeless. The ‘tourist gaze’ is created by setting opposites between the tourist’s home and their host environment—and people are looking for the authentic experience they think they lack in their everyday life, and a returning sense of nostalgia.

Within the American market, PanAm wanted to target church groups, participants in Saint Patrick’s Day parades, and those who had “advanced their nation overseas” and would return home to a friendly welcome. The catchphrase of the festival was ‘Ireland at Home.’

It was thought that 2nd or 3rd generation Irish would be more sentimental and potentially spend more than those born in Ireland or 1st generation.

Imagery would change more drastically from the 1950s—coinciding with when the owner of Sun Advertising Agency in Dublin, Tim O'Neill, travelled to Holland. There was an installation of Aer Lingus window displays ongoing as part of Irish Week promotion that he went to view. Irish Week was a promotion designed by KLM, the Dutch national airline.



While there, he asked designer Guus Melai to come to Ireland to work as his studio manager. Whether intentional or not, this action fell in line with suggestions that were put forth by art historian Thomas Bodkin in 1948 in his 'Report on the Arts in Ireland.' Bodkin discussed Irish tourism saying that, "Both design and typography are unusually neglected in modern Ireland. So, I would suggest that a few outstanding foreign firms...should be given the opportunity to re-design and re-set, according to their own high standards, some half dozen of the existing [tourist] folders, if only to provide models for Irish productions."

Melai arrived in Dublin in 1951, and few other Dutch designers followed suit including Peter Sluis. Several other organisations were also requesting work from the quickly popular Dutch designers including the Irish Tourist Board and the CIE (transport authority).

Prior to their arrival, advertising has consisted of 'commercial art', but the Dutch introduced the term 'graphic design' to Ireland. Scholars attribute this void to a lack of Irish experience in large, corporate or international accounts that was related to both "protectionist economic policies, limited industrial production and inadequacies in the contemporary art and design education system."

They also 'reformulated how the Irish national identity could be visualised for both national and international consumption.'

DESIGNING FOR AN TÓSTAL

The Irish Tourism Board wanted a tourism plan or incentive that was more “orthodox,” one they felt would be more sustainable and beneficial in the long term; however, Lemass was supportive of An Tóstal and thought the commercial grounds with PanAm were good as well as the publicity.

The project was announced in the Irish Times in February 1952.

The tourist image was still underdeveloped at this time, but the arrival of the Dutch designers the year prior would help align visuals more with the ‘international advertising conventions’ of the time. The designers were given lots of freedom in their designs.

The An Tóstal logo was designed by Guus Melai and the organisers “commissioned the design of an emblem that was to symbolise ancient Irish festivals and gatherings.” Melai’s design took the traditional Irish harp, and added ornamentation from the Book of Kells, which was in turn inspired by engraved Celtic decoration on old Irish harps.

The design “graphically linked this very modern tourist gathering to the distant pasts, it also linked modern Ireland symbolically to the musical and artistic outpourings of a previous age.”



This is the official emblem of
an tóstal

The design is based on the traditional Irish Harp, symbolising ancient Irish Festivals and Gatherings.

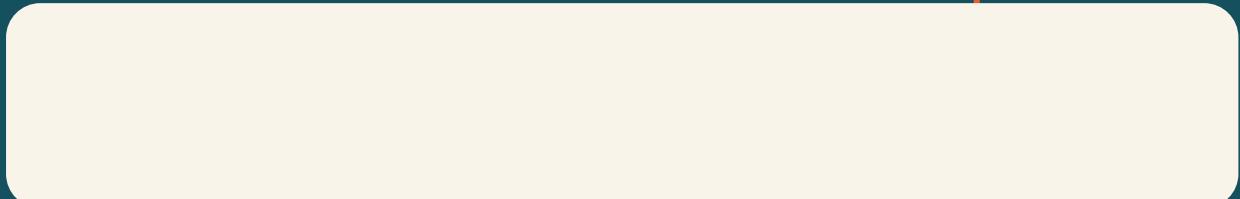
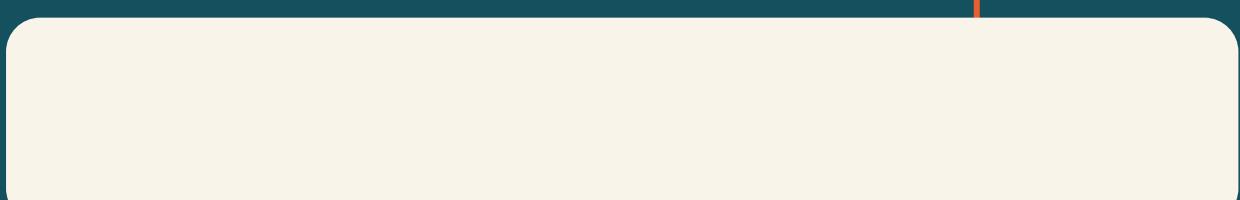
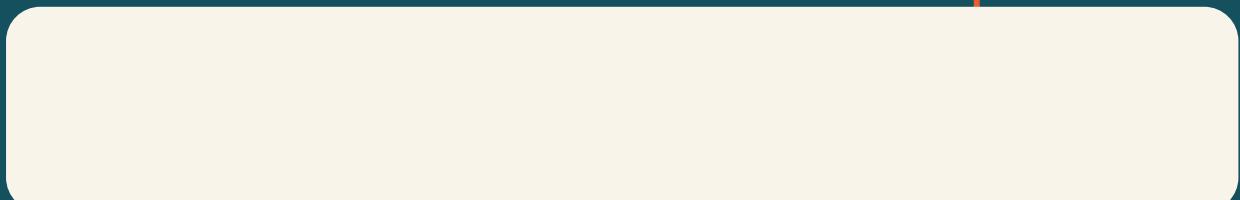
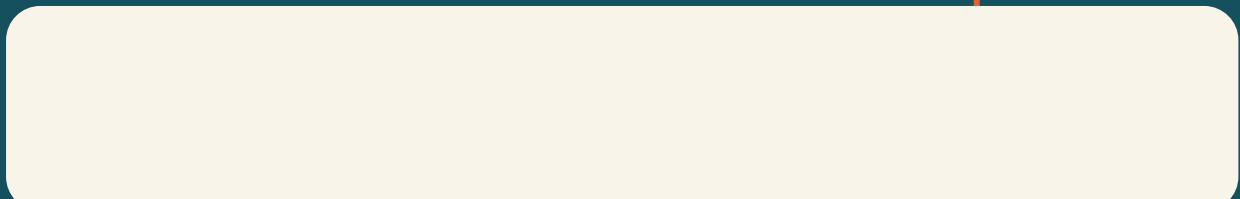
The forepillar and head of the Harp are woven into an ornamentation taken from the Table of Canons—F.5R—in the Book of Kells.

The copyright of this Emblem is vested in
An Bord Fáilte, 13 Merrion Sq, Dublin.

Here at the NLI we have a copy of the 1954 An Tóstal poster featuring this design.

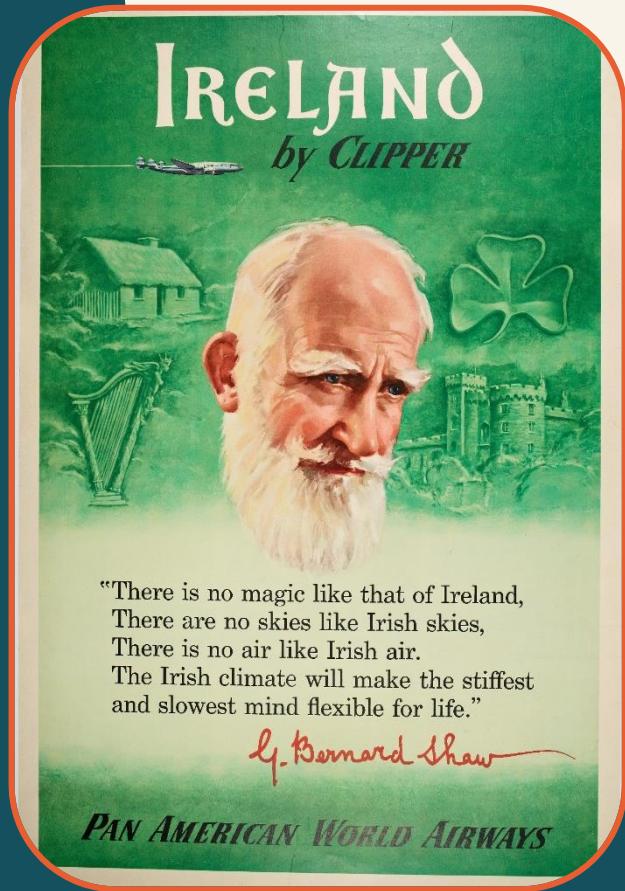


What other symbols do you see in the poster? Use this space to identify the various emblems within the 1954 poster design and consider why they are included.



Melai, Sluis and other Dutch designers were interested in the landscape and social practices of Ireland—and they also viewed and represented this as outsiders. Their “subjectivity was not fuelled discourses of a collective, diasporic memory or nostalgia” such as other marketing materials previously made for promotion in America.

Review the two posters we have seen so far.



VISUAL ANALYSIS

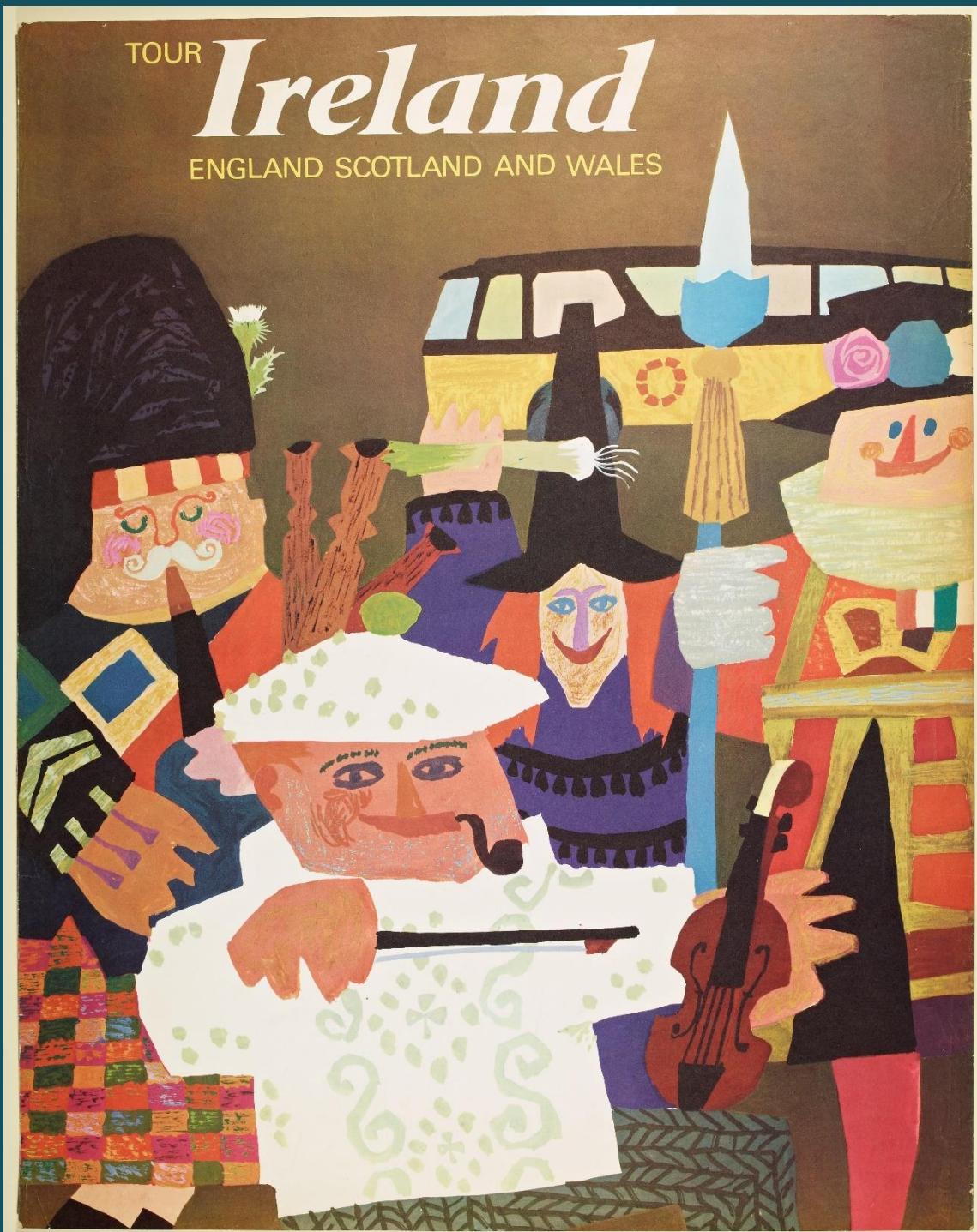
What are similarities and differences between these publicity graphics? Be specific.

Who is the intended audience?

While the purpose for both is to promote tourism in Ireland, the designs are very different. Why?

Which design do you find more convincing or appealing and why?

The Dutch design posters were referencing the “internationally popular aesthetic of bold colours, geometric shapes, collage and strong outlines” which originated in America. Historical and tourism references were formulated within the modern designs.

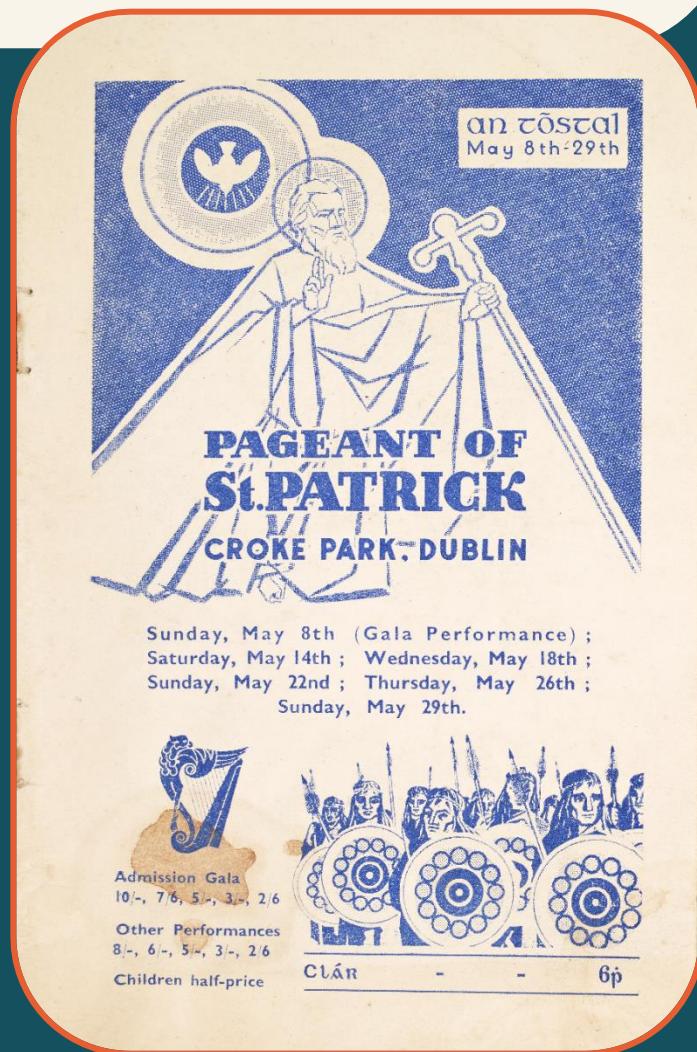


The Dutch typically used the Sans Serif typeface for the primary information—easily readable and suitable for screen printing which is how many of the posters were produced.

Reviews of their work by contemporary scholars state that – the Dutch design work “avoids cliches and expresses an interest in minutiae of Irish life.” General signifiers of their work include – “clarity of form, hierarchical organisation of type and image, use of clear grids and an emphasis on primary shapes and colours all derived from modernist sources.”

AN TÓSTAL

An Tóstal was structured so that the success of the festival depended heavily on the individual citizen and local councils to create community and events. Taoiseach de Valera put notices in the papers to call the Irish people to action. There were certainly grand events such as large-scale pageants held at Tara and Croke Park, occurring in the first few festival years and encouraging local participation and audiences, that celebrated Saint Patrick and Cu Chulainn, but the organisation for the festival was not centralised.



The first year of the festival was considered to have a ‘shortage of events of national and international standard’ and received some negative press in the English newspapers.

In Dublin, *The Evening Herald* said it was a “notable gesture,” but, that it was “obvious that the amount spent abroad on advertising and organisation was greater than the total receipts from foreign visitors.”

Despite this, the festival continued on till 1958 and overall, it helped demonstrate the importance of tourism development to an Irish public who had been previously sceptical.

Travel promotion continued on into the 1960s. The below poster was designed by Dutch designer Peter Sluis to promote Irish Week in London which was sponsored by the Irish Export Board, Aer Lingus and the Irish Tourist Board. This design features geometric shapes and strong outlines, typical of the Dutch designers, cleverly transforms the classic symbol of the shamrock into a bird with a flower in its beak.



This resource has now introduced to you to the discussions that occurred over the importance of tourism as an industry for the new Irish government. You have also seen and analysed several different examples of graphic design intended to draw tourists to Ireland. Complete the activity on the next page to put your learning into practice.

ACTIVITY

STEP 1

Create your own travel poster promoting trips to Ireland. You can make the focus a specific place, event, or Ireland in general.

STEP 2

Write a paragraph explaining the choices behind your designs. Explain what you drew and why, and be sure to include answers to questions like—who is your audience? What symbols did you use?



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