**Remarks by FELIX M LARKIN, Chair of An Post’s Philatelic Advisory Committee, on the occasion of the unveiling of four special commemorative stamps to commemorate the Carnegie Libraries in Ireland**

**Dublin City Library & Archive, Pearse Street, Dublin, 14 August 2019**

It is a great honour for me to chair An Post’s Philatelic Advisory Committee. What we, as a committee, try to do is to showcase the very best of Ireland and the Irish in recommending who or what should be noticed in a special way by a stamp or stamps – and by and large, I think we succeed in doing that.

Ireland is often referred to “The Land of Saints and Scholars”, and we have featured a number of saints in recent stamps – most notably, Our Lady of Fatima and St Kevin of Glendalough. There have been few scholars, however. And that is the reason why I particularly welcome this set of four stamps that we are launching here today commemorating the Carnegie Libraries in Ireland. Libraries are the foundation of all scholarship, where books, newspapers, photographs, prints and drawings – and now digital material too – are lovingly preserved for posterity. And they are preserved not only for use by the elite scholar labouring away in a university, in an ivory tower (so to speak), but for everyone with the curiosity to want to learn more about history, literature and a host of other things – or indeed just to enjoy the pleasure of reading and be enriched by it. Libraries are fundamentally democratic centres of learning, open to everyone – and free.

T W Lyster, the first director of the National Library of Ireland, wrote in 1903 that (and I quote) “in that wide world of the record of mankind which we call a Great Library all things, good and evil, fall into their true place, are seen in their true proportion. Thus keepers of libraries may with truth inscribe above their doors the words of the Governor of the city in the *New Atlantis*: ‘We maintain a trade, not for gold, silver, or jewels, nor for silks, nor for spices, nor for any other commodity of matter, but only for God’s first creature, which was Light’. I love that thought: that the trade of a library is in Light, in the light that comes from scholarship and the pursuit of truth in scholarship – or, in other words, in ENLIGHTENMENT.

So it is right and proper to celebrate the place of libraries in our country, and throughout our country – and this set of stamps does that. It also recognises that at the roots of our public library network in Ireland are some 80 libraries which were funded by Andrew Carnegie between 1897 and 1913 – just a small part of his philanthropic efforts in the United States, Britain and Ireland. Carnegie was born in Scotland, emigrated to the US in 1848 at the age of 12, and rose – without the benefit of much formal education – from very humble origins to become the richest industrialist in America, surpassing in wealth even John D. Rockefeller. In the last decades of his life, he devoted himself to philanthropy – Carnegie Hall in New York City being perhaps his most famous project – and his contribution to Ireland was the libraries that we celebrate in these stamps. His philosophy in this regard was that “surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community” – those were his own words, not mine. He died in 1919, one hundred years ago – and the centenary of his death provides us with the opportunity of celebrating the libraries which he gave to Ireland. He is buried in the gloriously-named Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in the town of Sleepy Hollow in New York state; if we must lie somewhere after we pass from this world, Sleepy Hollow sounds pretty heavenly to me.

A characteristic of the Carnegie libraries is that, apart from their contribution to scholarship and learning, they were invariably housed in beautiful buildings – architectural ornaments in the towns and cities in which they were located. It is appropriate these institutions trading in Light should have buildings as least as grand and as imposing as the buildings of those who trade in gold, silver and such like – banks, big corporations etc. The stamps being launched today show four of the 80 buildings that comprise the Carnegie libraries in Ireland, and they are representative of the types of buildings that Carnegie built as libraries. I’m very glad to say that the exquisite drawings of these buildings that are featured on the stamps complement the excellent design of the buildings themselves. I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues on An Post’s Stamp Design Committee, under the chairmanship of Mick O’Dea RHA, for the wonderful work they have done on this issue – and on the work they do generally in translating our ideas for stamps into the beautiful objects that we see on our envelopes every day and which stamp-collectors all over the world greatly admire and covet. And, of course, the people on the ground in An Post who do all the hard work on the stamp programme also deserve our thanks, and our praise – Aileen Mooney and her team.

In relation to this particular issue, the illustrator of the library buildings – the artist who did the drawings – was Dorothy Smith, and I would like to congratulate her on her work. And a word of thanks also to Gillian Buckley who photographed the drawings for us and to Anne Brady, of Vermillion Design, for her work on the final design of the stamps.

Just one final word: My committee is always open to suggestions about suitable subjects for stamps. If you have any thoughts about this, please let us know by writing to An Post. I guarantee that we will consider every suggestion. But the production of a stamp takes quite a long time, so you need to get your suggestions in early – at least eighteen months before the year in which your stamp would appropriately appear.

**THANK** **YOU**