

The Free State and the Republic: 1922 to date

Following the treaty of 6 December 1921 and the partition of Ireland, two new ‘Ordnance Survey’ organisations were created: the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) on 1 January 1922, for the six counties remaining within the United Kingdom, and the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) on 1 April 1922, for the twenty-six counties that were at first the Irish Free State and then, from 1949, the Republic of Ireland. (The parent organisation became the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain (OSGB).) The economic constraints of the inter-war period affected Ireland even more than they did Britain and, as in Britain, this was reflected in large-scale map revision: three counties in hand in 1922 were completed, but thereafter revision was piecemeal. OSI inherited large stocks of small-scale maps from the UK OS, and moderate public demand ensured that there was little reprinting or development until after ‘the emergency’ of 1939-45: the continuing valuation justification ensured priority for the 1:2500. The one-inch coloured edition was allowed to go out of print after the 1950s, and thereafter cover at that scale was maintained by the outline map, unrevised since 1914, and four ‘district maps’. By 1945 the dominant small-scale map in Ireland was the half-inch.

An advisory committee set up in 1964 recommended a new structure of 1:1000, 1:2500, 1:5000, 1:25,000, 1:50,000 and 1:100,000 or 1:125,000, and national sheet lines based on the Irish metric grid and a standard sheet size of 80 × 60 centimetres. The 1:1000 was given priority, and now covers most places above about 1500 in population. Work continued at 1:2500, now recast in national sheet lines, and from 1980 both this and the 1:1000 began to be produced by digital methods; by 1984 OSI was ahead of its British counterpart in plotting from air photos direct to computer, without an intermediate analogue pencil-plot. In 1986 work began on the 1:50,000 series, using digital technology and air photos: the first few sheets were produced in an arrestingly spare style that seemingly owed nothing to any model, but the production ‘Discovery’ series of 1993-9 was in a more conventional style, compatible with the earlier 1:50,000 mapping of Northern Ireland. A change of policy after 1992 resulted in the restriction of the 1:2500 to suburban and periurban areas, and the complete remapping of rural areas at 1:5000, using aerial photography and a heavy reliance on outside contractors: this formidable operation was completed in 2004. Basic revision cycles are 1 year for 1:1000, three years for 1:2500, and five years for 1:5000 and 1:50,000.

In 2002 OSi, as it was then styled, became a ‘commercially mandated state body’, and thus no longer part of the civil service. In 2006 OSi had sales of €19,700,000 and a grant of €6,250,000 from the Irish parliament. In 2008 employed 320 staff. On 1 March 2023 OSi ceased to exist as an independent body; it is now the National Mapping Division of Tailte Éireann, an independent Government agency under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Tailte Éireann provides a property registration system, property valuation service, and national mapping and surveying infrastructure for Ireland.