

# British Association for Irish Studies

# Newsletter

Issue No 11 Summer 1997



**Mary Kenny has a  
problem with Irish  
Studies in Britain**



**SEE INSIDE  
FOCUS INTERVIEW**

MARY KENNY

*Mary Kenny is now a leading columnist and senior  
writer on the Daily Express*

**Also: Features – Letters –  
Noticeboard – Reports**

## **BAIS NEWSLETTER 11 SUMMER 1997**

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### **EDITORIAL**

Welcome to Issue 11 of the Newsletter brought to you by the new editorial team. We would like to begin by thanking Dr. Lance Pettitt for his energetic and innovative work on the Newsletter over the past two years. We have decided to make changes. The most important change is one of emphasis. We plan a sharper focus on news in the Newsletter. We aim to carry news reports of the many activities among Irish organisations in Britain, Ireland and across the world. We aim to include features and articles which will chronicle the newsworthy shifting perspectives of the current debate about Irish culture. There will be newsletters for Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter: each of which will be distributed to members as companion to the current issue of *Irish Studies Review*.

In this issue we have an interview with Mary Kenny about her recently published book *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* and an article about the British Library's modern Irish Collection on a future website. The topicality of these pieces is our benchmark for future issues.

Also in this issue is a letters page in response to articles by Shaun Richards and Edna Longley which were featured in the last Newsletter and we hope that the letters page will become a regular feature of the Newsletter. Reports are included – in particular, a report about the very interesting BAIS day Conference at the Hammersmith Irish Centre "Language and Nation".

Of course, the top priority for a BAIS Newsletter must be to provide a forum for the development of BAIS. The great debate about the future of BAIS rumbles on in the Letters page. From now on there will be summary reports from Council officers once a year for our readers. There will be even some coverage of discussions at Council meetings. The campaign for new members must go on. The main thrust of our appeal for new members is a pressing invitation to individuals and institutions to join an active organisation which has a track record of practical commitment to projected initiatives in the expanding field of Irish Studies. These initiatives (as well as the available information about the activities of kindred organisations) will continue to be previewed, recorded and debated in the pages of the Newsletter.

We are in urgent need of volunteers to become news reporters and feature writers who will represent a broad range of approaches and opinions among our members. Contributions may be written in the Irish language on condition that an English translation is also included and printed. The deadline for all contributions to Issue 12: Autumn 1997 is 31 August. Please send items for publication to **Jerry Nolan, 8 Antrobus Road, Chiswick London W4 5HY. Tele/Fax: 0181-995-1532.**

**Mary Doran, Madeleine Casey & Jerry Nolan**  
Co-Editors

**THE FOCUS INTERVIEW IN THE AUTUMN NEWSLETTER WILL BE WITH GEAROID O CAIREALLAIN, PRESIDENT OF CONRADH na GAEILGE.**

## **COUNCIL MATTERS**

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

#### *Bais Newsletter*

In welcoming the new Newsletter editorial group of Madeleine Casey, Mary Doran and Jerry Nolan, I also wish on behalf of the Association to thank Lance Pettitt for his stewardship and development of the Newsletter. I hope that all members of the Association will support their efforts to develop the networking function of the Newsletter.

#### *Irish Studies Review*

ISR is edited from Bath College of Higher Education, one of a number of third level centres in Britain where Irish studies has been developed since the mid-80s; and it was my pleasure, on behalf of the Association, to attend the lecture delivered by Owen Dudley Edwards in April to mark the inauguration of Bath College's Irish Studies Centre. From the outset, the editors of ISR have set themselves the task of combining quality and accessibility in its contents. BAIS's decision to provide a set-up grant for ISR has been well rewarded through the availability of this leading Irish Studies publication as a benefit of membership.

#### *Members' Survey*

We are grateful to Bob Bell for developing and processing the members' survey. Returns have given us some indication of members' views and expectations. If you have not yet completed and returned your questionnaire, please do so, as we would like a greater volume of information to inform Association development.

#### *Finance*

Thanks are due also to BAIS Treasurer Domhnall MacSuibhne. Knowing that ex-Treasurer Tom Dooley is keeping an eye on us from Khulna University, Bangladesh, we are glad to report that the finances are in a healthy state.

#### *Day Conference on "Language and Nation"*

Eleanor Burgess, Cait Thompson and Domhnall MacSuibhne were chiefly responsible for the organisation of this informative and enjoyable event which took place at the Irish Centre, Hammersmith on 31 May, 1997; and it is my pleasant duty to thank them on behalf of the Association. The bilingual format, and the combination of lectures, debate, poetry and song, contributed to the conference's success. Thanks are due also to the Irish Embassy, represented by Geoffrey Keating, for the provision of a drinks reception.

#### *BAIS Biennial Irish Studies Conference*

Preparations for this weekend conference on the subject "The Irish and Britain" are in the capable hands of Mervyn Busteed and Frank Neal. Details are contained elsewhere in the Newsletter. Please ensure the success of the conference by signing up and attending.

#### *Irish Language*

BAIS recognises the Irish language as a part of Ireland's cultural heritage and includes a substantial Irish language element in its programme. This year, BAIS has again been awarded a LINGUA grant which will be used to send teachers of Irish from Britain on development courses in Ireland. Thanks are due to Cait Thompson for her work on this aspect of the Association's activities.

#### *Membership Procedure*

Thanks are also due to Sandy Trott who administers this procedure so efficiently to the benefit of the Association.

#### *Conclusion*

Council seeks to maintain, and build upon, a programme to support and raise the profile of Irish Studies, and which is within the capacity of a purely voluntary committee. We urge members to make this their society: by supporting its activities, by indicating the services they do (or do not) require, by helping to provide those services, and by promoting the Association among their friends and colleagues (as Lance Pettitt did at the recent ACIS Conference).



## **BAIS NATIONAL COUNCIL**

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**DATE OF NEXT MEETING OF BAIS COUNCIL:** Saturday 16 August.

**BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:** 4 issues of Irish Studies Review and BAIS Newsletter posted to you  
Institutional Membership includes two copies of ISR & Newsletter  
Network of nearly 300 members with Irish Studies interests

**ADVICE TO APPLICANTS FOR MEMBERSHIP:** All overseas applications should include a £2 supplement to cover postage costs. Overseas remittances should be sent in the form of Sterling money order only. For further information about subscription rates, please see application form on the last page. Membership runs for twelve months. Members will receive a reminder of renewal prior to membership elapsing. IF YOU ARE NOT ALREADY A MEMBER, FILL UP THE APPLICATION FORM NOW.



## FOCUS INTERVIEW: MARY KENNY

In the preface to her provocative *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, Mary Kenny has a problem with Irish Studies in Britain. "I was astonished when I looked at the syllabus, at the end of the 1980's, of an Irish Studies course at a British University, that everything except Catholicism seemed to be included....the overwhelming item, the irresistible magnet, the immovable force that had been as essential a part of the Irish mentality as the very earth, the very skies, the very sea – faith- wasn't mentioned." The book sets out a new map of Irish Catholicism, starting from the 1980's, to be included in future Irish Studies atlases. The method employed is a drawing together of a "mixture of observation, memory, family stories, personal experiences, biographies, autobiographies, travel books, some novels and plays, standard public texts and above all, a variety of newspapers, periodicals and magazines." In the course of a two hour conversation with Jerry Nolan, Mary Kenny answered many questions about her central concerns and her main approach to the contemporary problems of the Irish Catholic Church. Here is a summary reconstruction of key points in the exchanges

JN: *There is a sense of militant nostalgia in your memories of Catholic Ireland. At times you seem to be grieving for a dying church. Perhaps the church is painfully developing?*

MK: The Faith is generally under constant attack by news hungry journalists. When a phrase like post-Catholic Ireland appears in the press, too many priests and politicians in Ireland succumb to a kind of cultural cringe. How many times before in history has the relevance of the church been written off? Look at the great anti-clerical periods like the French Revolution and the beginnings of Modernism! I would argue strongly that the Faith has helped the Irish people to define themselves as a nation. When a love of the Faith will be rekindled, I cannot say. I have heard that about 50,000 people gathered together in County Tipperary earlier this year for a novena during Lent. Popular devotion with a turnout not far short of the numbers who went on the first crusade must be a hopeful sign.

JN: *You have a lot to say in the book about the power of Irish mothers as the backbone of the Irish Catholic Church. When you were a feminist in the Sixties, didn't you attack the church as a patriarchy? Have you changed your mind about the subservient role of Irish women?*

MK: I have a great interest in Irish devotional literature, especially in the very popular magazines like *The Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart* and *The Far East* which had many devoted readers. As a journalist I tend to research what was popular in the market. Academics tend to research what the intellectuals were saying. *The Messenger* and *The Far East* were women's magazines from the very beginning. Look at a typical page of

subscribers- two hundred women and three men! There were articles in *The Messenger* about the making of a good home. *The Messenger's* founder was Father Cullen who was a leader in the Temperance Movement. Many women were keen on the Temperance Movement because they wanted to protect the home from the drunken men. The appeal of the foreign missions in *The Far East* was enthusiastically supported by the women who sent in donations and prayers for the little Chinese babies.

JN: *Isn't there a great danger that this kind of approach produces a lopsided view of things? How do you fit in the intellectuals who were not much enamoured by Mother Church, or indeed by Mother Ireland herself?*

MK: Of course, harsh criticism of Mother Ireland and Mother Church was an important stimulus for writers like Joyce and O'Faolain. My main point is about the role of Irish mothers rescuing homes from the drunken fathers. There was an alliance, some would say a conspiracy, between the mothers and the priests to keep the peace in homes dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Inevitably there were female battle-axes who could make Jewish mothers seem like shrinking violets. J.B.Keane's Big Maggie is a good example of that bossy type.

JN: *What happened to break the pattern of women reading *The Messenger*?*

MK: The break happened when Irish women discovered contraception. When the sexual act was no longer seen as open to the possibility of life, women began to see children in the home in a different way. Needless to say, problems in the home remain. A friend of mine has been

telling me about a meeting in Dublin arranged to help drug addicts. There was one man present in a meeting of thirty four women who were the mothers and sisters of the drug addicts. Irish women are still worrying about men in trouble - not all that different to what was happening over eighty years ago in *The Messenger*.

JN: *But isn't a crucial difference that most Irish women nowadays have said goodbye to the Catholic Church?*

MK: The Church no longer exists in the ways that it did. Nevertheless a strong religious impulse remains in Irish women. I meet women of my generation, now grandmothers in their fifties, who have recovered a belief in the need to teach their grandchildren about the once popular religious traditions. There's the much hyped cult of pagan Ireland as shown in the instances of Sinead O'Connor's latest CD and in Riverdance. I don't see these forms of Celtic spirituality as producing anything more than some good music. Then there's the world success story of Mary Robinson's presidency - remember, The Times of London has described her as "Queen of Ireland".

JN: *I was quite startled by your suggestion in a footnote that Marian devotion may be playing an unconscious role in Mary Robinson's quasi-spiritual leadership in Ireland. Was your tongue in your cheek?*

MK: Mary Robinson has shown humanity to all and has well represented her people at home and abroad. I doubt if any presidential successor would have had the independence from party influence to receive the Dalai Lama against the wishes of the politicians of the day. That was her greatest moment. Now I fear it will be downhill, jobwise, for Mary Robinson because any other job that she undertakes on the world stage will be fraught with the politicking and plotting and scheming typical of administrations like the United Nations.

JN: *You write about the capacity for devotion among the Irish. Yet you note in passing how quickly and painlessly the Latin Liturgy was abandoned in the 1960s. Why were the Irish so superficially attached to the Tridentine Mass?*

MK: A bishop told me the story of an old man saying the rosary while the priest was explaining

all about the changes in the New Mass which he was about to celebrate. On being told off for not paying attention by another priest, the old man said; 'Let father get on with the Mass and I'll be getting on with the rosary.' The priests were let to get on with the changes. A few people were upset and confused by the speed of the changes. The Irish have always been more attracted to the evangelical rather than to the aesthetic side of the liturgy. What they did miss was the Latin which was the international language on the mission fields. The theologians used to slip into the Latin in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* when they had to deal with delicate questions of sexual morality.

JN: *Why didn't the priests let individuals get on with their wider reading? Don't you seriously underestimate the extent to which the Irish Censorship Board and the Church Index mentality produced a state of mind where few serious writers could remain practising Catholics?*

MK: The moral theologians in all the Catholic countries at the time tended to be against what they called 'private judgement'. The activities of the Censorship Board were often triggered not by priests but by the little old lady on the library committee who felt very unhappy about the word 'breast' in a story. Irish priests in the fifties like Father Peter Connolly and Father John Kelly argued convincingly in *The Furrow* for a better informed and more civilised appreciation of the arts. Puritanism existed in English society, as one can discover even in the thrillers of Agatha Christie. In Ireland it wasn't just a fear of sex. There was the ideal of the purity for the Irish race which was powerfully advocated by the Gaelic League and remained popular during the de Valera years.

JN: *One of your book's epigraphs is a quotation from the card of dedication carried by an tAhair Peader O Loaghair, the author of the schools classic 'My Own Story'. Obviously you disagree with the view that an tAhair Peader was a dangerously parochial influence on the generations of Irish school children during the pastoral de Valera years?*

MK: An tAhair Peader, who had lived as a boy during the famine years, expressed on that card sentiments which can be shared by all. "I love God. I love the faith. I love Ireland. I hate pride.

I hate ignorance. I hate dissension. I will not boast. I will not quarrel. I will not be intoxicated." This is a credo of non-sectarian ideals which can be shared by Moslems, Jews, whoever.

JN: *You write eloquently about the Irish missionary orders of priests and nuns. But wasn't much of the triumphalist tone of books like J.J. Kelly's **St. Patrick's Spiritual Empire** in the 1940s an aspect of Ireland's nationalist reply to the British presence world-wide?*

MK: The Irish missionaries preached Christ throughout the world. People at home were keen to follow their progress. There was great human interest in the Chinese, for example, in **The Far East** and **The Messenger**. The readers, mainly women, loved reading the Chinese proverbs and cooking recipes. I remember missionary nuns visiting my Loreto School in Dublin and telling us all about how interesting life was in India. In **The Irish Catholic** during the 1920s, there were many pages full of detailed accounts of missionaries. There were interesting features about life in the mission countries. The popular Catholic press of these years show just how internationally aware the Irish were. It is clear that what the missionaries brought back home was a great affection for the different peoples of the world, quite unlike the modern dissenting missionaries who bring home the scraps of Marxism.

JN: *Anthony Clare has said that the acute vocations crisis is not so much a problem for Irish society as for the Catholic Church who need to understand exactly why the scale of the crisis is so great. How is the Church shaping up to this challenge?*

MK: I reviewed a play in Dublin earlier this year entitled **Sour Grapes**. All the priestly characters in it are vile. This degree of anti-clericalism in a well-crafted play reminded me of well-crafted anti-semitic literature in which all Jews are poison. The real crisis in the Church has very little to do with the priests portrayed in **Sour Grapes**. Modern Irish priests have failed to inspire the young to follow Christ through self sacrifice because they are too much into a happy bunny-rabbit sort of religion. The crisis in Irish society is that the young deserve to be better informed and more challenged.

JN: *But the Irish Church in real life continues to apologise for sins committed. Have you read about Brother Edmund Garvey's public apology for the abuse of boys by Christian brothers in their schools in the past?*

MK: Such pathetic apologies merely intensify the myth of the Irish Church as decadent and corrupt. It has become impossible to admit that occasionally a priest or nun or brother might have sinned, without being drawn into the current anti-clerical campaign which has strong echoes of the witches of Salem trials, with money to be picked up from the press by some outraged victims whose dissatisfaction with mere repentance is too often rather convenient.

JN: *Are the anti-clerical brigade winning then? Is it literally goodbye to Catholic Ireland? You're beginning to sound as pessimistic as your title suggests!*

MK: The book's about stimulating discussion and research. I was encouraged by the discussion last January at the L & H in University College Dublin when I took part in the debate on the motion 'The Catholic Church is past its sell-by date.' Father Pat Buckley, the liberated and celebrated priest from Larne, took part. There were ferocious attacks on priests by some of the students. Some young women spoke up for priests in rural Ireland by saying that they were good men. The grassroots response was at odds with the self-confessed Marxists. Amazingly the motion was defeated. Ireland badly needs holy and caring priests. I'm told by a Holy Ghost father that they are turning away candidates in Sierra Leone because there is no room left in the seminaries. Ireland needs to be better informed about what is now happening in the former mission fields. The future of Catholic Ireland may well depend on its young people drawing hope from the universal church-not as unlikely as the theorists of a post Catholic Ireland would hope!

JN: *Your main point - that Catholic Ireland was not insular and reactionary but enlightened and internationalist - is at present a minority view.*

MK: Then I challenge the majority to do the research!



## LETTERS: THE BAIS DEBATE

The LETTER PAGE will be a regular feature in future newsletters. Letters are invited on topics of interest to BAIS members. In this issue of the newsletter, the letters are in response to ideas discussed in the contributions of Shaun Richards and Edna Longley on the subject of the past and future of BAIS itself as appeared in the pages of Issue No. 10.

### Anglocentric or International?

As a new member of BAIS I thought I would respond as something of an outsider to the first issue of the newsletter that I have seen, and specifically to the directions suggested in the short essays of Shaun Richards and Edna Longley. Looking through the newsletter, I was struck by just how Anglocentric it was. As for the BAIS National Council, all of whom are based in England except for one in Wales, *shurely shome mishtake? What ish my Nation?*

There are three possible futures for BAIS. In one of these, we get rid of the 'British' and Irish Studies takes its place alongside Welsh, Scottish and English Studies. 'British Studies', already an internationally recognised subject, remains a kind of fifth province, the area in which individual studies of the four nations come together. In the second possible future, Irish Studies gets itself internationalised, and we go from BAIS to IAIS, replacing 'British' with 'International'. Since BAIS in one sense grew out of the International Association of Anglo-Irish Studies(IASAIL) - soon to be renamed as International Association of Irish Studies (IASIL) - this might mark its return, though less as an offshoot than as a distinct forum for interdisciplinary Irish Studies, as advocated by Edna Longley. This would also be in keeping with Shaun Richards' suggestion that the Association switch its support from the *Irish Studies Review*, based in Bath, to *Bullan*, which is now moving to Notre Dame. (Although on personal note, I would have to say that I find the range and regularity of the former journal salutary.) In a third scenario, BAIS becomes the Association for Anglo-Irish Studies(AAIS). By nature no stranger to compromise solutions, I'm ready to play an active part in any of these possible futures.

Finally, Shaun Richards mentions that a number of potential or actual BAIS members - myself included - chose to speak in Glasgow at the Irish

Studies section of the European Society for Studies in English (ESSE) conference in September 1995 rather than at the BAIS Conference in Sunderland. I'd like to think that this was due not to any disaffection with BAIS or with Sunderland, but was influenced, rather, by the attractions of Glasgow. For myself, I'd like to see an Institute of Irish Studies set up here, perhaps in collaboration with the Department of Scottish Literature.

**Willy Maley**, Lecturer in English at the University of Glasgow.

### Platforms in the Marketplace?

The recent articles looking backward and forward pinpoint the organisation's shortcomings after the first ten years of BAIS. Shaun Richards highlighted a narrowness in the range of members who are mainly academics concerned with the 'cutting edge' of scholarship and university teaching. Edna Longley confessed to a personal nightmare of entrapment in infinitely recurring conference papers too much preoccupied with self-proliferating mirrorings of Irish identity. Happily positive things were mentioned: the broad church tendencies as displayed in conferences, lecture series etc. and the growing awareness of the value of interdisciplinarity as an approach to Irish Studies.

Surely the broad thrust of an attractive BAIS programme has to be focused not just on student academic needs but aimed at anybody anywhere in the world who happens to want to learn more about Ireland. An important touchstone of future BAIS success has to be the growth of a broader membership and the development of public platforms or events for potential members in the marketplace. Practical suggestions for setting up BAIS platforms, alongside other Irish Studies platforms, should be always welcome.

**Jerry Nolan**, Chiswick, W4 5HY

REPORT

**A WEEKEND OF IMAGINATION AND DEBATE**

**Cairde na nGael** (Newham and District Friends of Ireland) organised an Open Day on Friday, May 30 which was opened by representatives from various bodies including Edward Barrington, the Irish Ambassador in Britain; a local M.P Tony Banks, Minister of Sport; the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Newham. For some seventeen years **Cairde na nGael** operated from a small hut in Windmill Road, Stratford where they had about a few hundred clients each year looking for help. Then in 1991 a new home was found for the organisation in Durning Hall Community Centre in Earlham Grove, Forest Gate where the number of visitors during 1995-6 was 1221.

The celebration on May 30 marked the acquisition of new self-contained premises(57, Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate) where an attractive shop front is bound to raise the profile of **Cairde na nGael**'s offer of advice and help to the Irish community in East London, especially at this time of increasing welfare and counselling needs. At the reception on the Open Day, there was a strong feeling of a well-rooted community enterprise inspired by the need to cultivate high self-esteem among the Irish emigrants. This material progress has been achieved over the years with core funding from the London Borough of Newham, support from local organisations(such as the Sir John Cass Foundation, Stratford City Challenge), help from two Dublin-based organisations( The Irish Youth Foundation and DION) and an injection of funds from the National Lottery Charities Board. **Cairde na nGael** have convinced many bodies that they put their resources to excellent use in dealing with such problems as homelessness, illness and discrimination among the Irish who visit their centre.

An example of the depth of imagination at work in Forest Gate can be seen in its Schools Policy. There was a recent Schools Project Peace Initiative which involved over 4000 Newham school children and climaxed in an exchange visit between pupils from St.Patrick's National School in Coolgagh, County Sligo and pupils from Park Primary School, Stratford. Last year

St.Patrick's Day was used as an occasion for a two week schools project in partnership with the London Borough of Newham Education Department when 11 schools took part in workshops ranging from Irish dancing, music, mythology, GAA football and were supported by a pack containing Irish books, tapes, fact sheets and videos. On St.Patrick's Day itself, there were workshops for everybody at Newham Leisure Centre when over a thousand people attended, 250 of whom stayed on for the night's Ceili.

If depth of imagination best characterises the activities of **Cairde na nGael** at Forest Gate in their quest of raising Irish self-esteem in East London, the quality of debate characterised what went on in the Irish Centre, Hammersmith during the one day BAIS Conference on "Language and Nation" which was held on Saturday 31 May.

The morning sessions of the Conference were planned as a preparation for the debate in the afternoon. The first speaker was **Reg Hindley** who talked about his many years of research into minority languages and concluded that there is little correlation between nationality and language, that since 1800 the policy of "one nation, one language" has been an artificial construction for political convenience and that factors other than language, most notably social geography, help to define nations. **Gearoid O'Cairellain** described how the initiative for the revival of the Irish Language had passed away from the nation state and was being taken up by families and local communities, a process clearly seen in the growth of Irish medium schools throughout Ireland (now with some 30,000 pupils) and in the expansion of business enterprises in Ireland and Europe where Irish speakers have an advantage. **Brendan Bradshaw** analysed the role for the Irish language in creating an Irish identity during the post-colonial period and went on to argue strongly against the racist nationalism of an utopian attempt to return to a perfect pre-colonial social model and against the modernist, revisionist agenda for a secular, pluralistic,

affluent and cosmopolitan Ireland; Brendan Bradshaw's own preference was for a country where a genuine cultural liberation would include the revival of the Irish language as one of the most distinguishing marks of Irish identity. **Padraigin Riggs** gave a summary account of the activities of the London based societies during the Irish Revival Movement (1890-1915) and demonstrated how the various societies operated at different levels to help the Irish in London to resist wholesale assimilation into English manners and customs and to build up a sense of Irish identity by means of a cultural awareness which included more than lip service to the ideal of reviving the Irish language.

The main speakers in the afternoon debate spoke to the motion: **IRISH POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT THE RESTORATION OF THE IRISH LANGUAGE IS MEANINGLESS**. **Gearoid O'Caireallain** (proposing the motion) redefined the wording of the motion by suggesting that Irish political independence had to be holistic, therefore a successful Ireland in the new global market would in time develop the revived Irish language as a necessary part of Ireland's distinctive contribution to the world at large. **Owen Dudley Edwards** (opposing the motion) was in favour of the Irish language and an appreciation of its literature but was utterly opposed to the full range of bullying tactics too often used by Irish language enthusiasts to inflict their will on their fellow countrymen. **Stiofan O'Direan** (seconding the motion) put his main emphasis on the need for emigrants in England to assert the value of Irish culture, including the Irish language, in the context of the long history of English contempt for Irish ways. **Aisling Foster** (seconding opposition to the motion) spoke of her personal experience of the failure and hypocrisy of compulsory Irish in Irish schools which had left many of her generation disillusioned by the "let's pretend" culture of the Irish language revivalists who continue to demand too much taxpayers' money to forward their campaign, when that money could be better spent on fostering the successful teaching of modern European languages throughout Ireland.

In the lively debate which ensued, many speakers from the floor spoke as if the motion was primarily about the role for the Irish language in Irish cultural independence, given the obvious fact that the independence of the Irish Republic could not be dismissed as "meaningless". **Owen Dudley Edwards** and **Aisling Foster** were clearly opposed to the compulsory aspects of the Irish language revival, while some of the supporters of the motion implied a strong sympathy for a compulsory approach; however, it never became clear if the opponents of the motion would accept the need to persuade the Irish people rationally to cultivate their native language as an essential part of their national identity. **Gearoid O'Caireallain's** summing up was a superb sleight of word as he insisted on his theme that a holistic political independence had to include a cultural independence. What had not really been discussed was whether the association of the Irish language with an Irish identity, not in a protected farmers' republic but in a global economy, might not indeed prove to be a remarkable exception to **Reg Hindley's** finding that there was little correlation between language and nationality.

The debate ended on a somewhat muted note of "well, it all depends on what you mean by the motion". But there was no mistaking the main thrust of the message coming out of the clearcut victory for the proposers of the motion: the fifty or so people present at the Conference felt that the revival of the Irish language would probably become an essential characteristic of a fully independent Ireland in the global context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In Forest Gate, there was a strong sense of the important role of local Irish communities in building a better future for Irish people throughout the diaspora. In Hammersmith, there was a strong sense of the present outward growing role of Irish culture in making a significant contribution to politics and the culture of the world, always on the condition that the Irish can live at peace with themselves. A striking overall optimism, at the turn of this century, characterised both absorbing events.

JN



## A NEWSLETTER FEATURE

### THE BRITISH LIBRARY'S MODERN IRISH COLLECTIONS, 1915-

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom with collections built up over the last two centuries. It contains over 150 million items representing every age of written civilisation. Every printed and written format is represented, every written language and every aspect of human thought included. The Library exists to serve scholarship, research and innovation. The British Library was established in 1973 bringing together a number of bodies, the oldest and most important of which being the British Museum Library, the British Museum itself being founded in 1753. The Modern Irish Collections, in the British Library's Reader Services & Collection Development directorate, encompass a wide range of subjects in the humanities and social sciences areas in mainly book, journal and pamphlet form. Coverage of historical and literary subjects is particularly strong. The output of academic publishers and institutions in the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland is well represented.

Under the Republic of Ireland's (and previously the Irish Free State's) legal deposit legislation publishers in the Republic are required to send a copy of each item published to the British Library, in return for Trinity College Dublin Library having the right to claim material published in the United Kingdom. Publishers in the Republic are also required to provide copies of works, if claimed, to the other four UK copyright libraries (Cambridge University Library, Bodleian Library Oxford, National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales). Publishers in the Republic are also required to deposit copies of works with the National Library of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin Library and six other university libraries in the Republic. In common with publishers in Great Britain, publishers in Northern Ireland are required to deposit a copy of each work published with the British Library and, if

claimed, with the other UK copyright libraries and Trinity College Dublin Library.

#### *Historical and literary material:*

Works on all periods of Irish history published during the twentieth century are held, including works on the Great Famine, the debate and discussion on revisionism in Irish history, Irish women's history and social conditions, the history and political and social conditions of Ulster in particular, the history of Irish economic and social conditions, Irish emigration, the connections, disconnections and upheavals in Irish-British relations on political and social levels. Literature is also one of the strengths of the collections with a representative range held of works by Irish (Northern and Southern) authors, playwrights and poets published in Ireland (North and South) and in Great Britain, including the Nobel prizewinners W.B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney, as well as other writers such as James Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Brian Friel, John Montague, John Hewitt, Eavan Boland, Roddy Doyle, Colm Toibin, Mary Lavin, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian.

#### *Irish language material:*

Material is also held in the Irish language, including works published by Conradh na Gaeilge (Gaelic League), the Irish Texts Society, Clo Iar-Chonnachta, An Clochomhar, and works by individual writers such as Mairtin O Direain, Mairtin O Cadhain, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill.

#### *Literary, historical and cultural societies:*

The published output of literary, historical and cultural societies is also an important part of the collections. The Library holds material produced

by, for example: the Irish Historical Society, Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, Irish Labour History Society, Ulster Society, Ulster Society for Historical Studies, Ulster Archaeological Society, as well as by societies focusing on a particular Irish author, such as the Oscar Wilde and James Joyce societies.

#### *Irish studies in the United Kingdom:*

Works published on Ireland (North and South) and the Irish Diaspora by academic publishers and research institutions in the United Kingdom, are also held including: **The Irish Studies Review**, produced at Bath College of Higher Education for BAIS, **The Irish World Wide Series**, published by Leicester University Press, works published by the Irish Studies Centre (University of North London), Institute of Irish Studies (University of Liverpool), Institute of Irish Studies (Queen's University of Belfast), Manchester University Press, Centre for the Study of Conflict (University of Ulster at Coleraine).

#### *Periodicals:*

Major academic and literary periodicals are held including: **Irish Historical Studies**, **Studies**, **Poetry Ireland Review**, **The honest Ulsterman**, **Krino**, **The Bell**, **The Irish Review**. An important resource for research on Northern Ireland, **Northern Ireland Political Literature: Periodicals**, is also held. This microfiche set has been produced by the Linen Hall Library in Belfast from its renowned Northern Ireland Political Collection. Daily, weekly, fortnightly publications (such as **The Irish Times**, **The Irish Independent**, **The News Letter [Belfast News Letter]**, **Irish News**, **Belfast Telegraph**, **Fortnight**) are held in the British Library's Newspaper Library, Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5HE (Tel: 0171 412 7353).

#### *Catalogues:*

There is no separate catalogue for the Modern Irish Collections. Works, in English and Irish, are listed in the British Library's **General catalogue of printed books to 1975** and the

**Current catalogue** (for items received after 1975), both now available on the world wide web at: <http://opac97.bl.uk/> Copies of the British Library's catalogues (usually in printed form) are also often available for consultation in larger public reference libraries in the UK and in national libraries and major research libraries abroad. For information about local access to the Library's catalogues and databases, please consult the librarian in your own institution or your nearest public library.

#### *Access:*

The British Library is now in the process of moving its collections into its new building at St Pancras in central London. Book moves began in December 1996 and are scheduled to finish in 1999. During this period the Library will move some 12 million books, manuscripts and other items and transfer nearly one thousand staff from a large number of London sites. The first St Pancras reading room (Humanities) will open in November 1997. Until October, Irish material in the humanities and social sciences can be consulted in the British Library's Main Reading Room in the British Museum building on Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG. Access is by pass only and intending readers should contact the Library's Reader Admissions Office (0171 412 7677). The British Library's world wide web site at: <http://www.bl.uk/> gives details on the Library's collections and services and is also updated regularly with information on the move to the new building. Text on the Modern Irish Collections is in the process of being prepared for the web site and should appear there later this year.

#### *Enquiries:*

Enquiries about the Modern Irish Collections may be made, in the first instance, to the Main Reading Room Enquiry Desk (0171 412 7676). For detailed help enquiries may be made in writing to the Curator for the Modern Irish Collections at the British Library, Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG, or fax: 0171 412 7557, or telephone: 0171 412 7710.

**Mary Doran, Curator for Modern Irish Collections.**

## REPORT

### IRISH STUDIES PROJECTS IN BRITAIN

#### AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH LONDON

This year's Irish in Britain Research Forum ran from 20 February to 13 March and consisted of four seminars covering a broad range of issues currently being debated within the Irish community in Britain.

The Forum was organised by the Irish Studies Centre and launched by Sarah Morgan, a researcher working in the Centre. Sarah delivered an engaging talk (culled from her current doctoral thesis) about press representations of the Irish in Britain and provoked an animated discussion afterwards. This was followed by papers about Irish identity. Dr. Joseph Bradley from Glasgow Caledonian University revealed the complex issues at work among supporters of Celtic Football Club and how this relates to the particular nature of Irish and religious identity north of the border. Oonagh O'Brien reported on the recent research she has been conducting into the question of HIV/AIDS and the Irish in Britain. She explained the differences in epidemiology compared to the host community and highlighted the continuing need for culturally specific responses from the relevant agencies in Britain. The Forum was closed by Breda Gray of Lancaster University who gave a thought-provoking talk about the differing senses of identity amongst Irish women in Ireland and Britain and the way in which prevailing ideas of Irish motherhood inform such ideas.

The Irish Studies Centre recently learnt that it was successful in its bid for a research project on the Irish community in the London borough of Lewisham. The Project will consist of an investigation into the current position of the Irish community in the borough. The research will assess how far council policies and service provisions (e.g. education, employment, community safety) cater for and impact on the

Irish as an ethnic minority and will make recommendations as required. The programme runs from 1 April to 30 September, 1997 and Dr. Mary Hickman, Sarah Morgan and Dr. Bronwen Walter (Anglia Polytechnic University) will make up the research team.

The Irish in Britain Forum has met regularly since 1986. The Forum acts as a means by which researchers of Irish Studies in Britain can network and mutually benefit each other's work. Postgraduates working on masters or doctoral dissertations are especially welcome to present their work. Please contact **Tony Murray** at the Centre 166-220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB (tel.no: 0171-753-5018)

#### WOMEN ON IRELAND ACADEMIC NETWORK

A new network of women academics who are researching issues relating to Ireland or Irishness has recently been established here in Britain. The first meeting of the Group took place in the Camden Irish Centre on 10 May. It was evident from contributions at the meeting that researchers in this field often feel isolated through being the only one in their University or Institution working on this theme. This applies especially in Universities in the North of England and Scotland. The network aims to provide opportunities for these researchers to exchange ideas and information through study groups, conferences and newsletters. The next network meeting will be on Saturday 19 July.

For further information, contact **Kathy Cremin** (University of York) 01274-549053 or **Louise Ryan** (University of Central Lancashire) 01772-893982 or **Clare Bonnington** 0171-235-8483).



## **STOP PRESS NOTICEBOARD**

### *The Irish and Britain*

The Sixth Biennial BAIS Conference at the European Studies Research Institute, **University of Salford: 5 – 7 September**. A Multi-disciplinary conference on the general theme "The Irish in Britain". Subsidiary themes include: The Northern Ireland Question, Ethnic Identity, The Irish in Britain, Irish Women in Britain, Irish Writers in Britain, the Irish in Scotland, the Irish in London, Writing Ireland Abroad, the Irish in the North West of England, the Irish and the Media. There will be Irish films on Friday evening and Irish music on Saturday evening.

**CONTACT: Wendy Pickles**, Conference Administrator for further details concerning the programme, bookings, accommodation, fees etc.  
Tel: 0161-745-5615/ 5275  
Email: w.a. pickles @ esri.salford.ac.uk

### *.St. Columba Conference*

A high profile conference at the **University of Strathclyde: September 20 –21** on the theme "Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish Connections 597-1997". Among the many speakers and participants will be Seamus Heaney, Eilean Ni Chuilleanain, Marianne Elliott, William McIlvanney, James McMillan, Fintan O'Toole, Iain Crichton Smith, Colm Toibin, George Watson. Organised by the Irish-Scottish Academic Initiative (ISAI).

**CONTACT: Mrs. Margaret Hastie** for information.  
Tel: 0141-5484531  
Email: m.hastie @ strath.ac. uk

### *Women's Academic Network*

Study Day at the **University of York** during November. Women from all disciplines are invited to bring questions and thoughts arising out of work in progress. There will be a guest speaker and informal structures.

**CONTACT: Kathy Cremin** – 01274-549053  
Or **Louise Ryan** – 01772-893982 for further information.

### *Irish Emigration*

A conference at **University College, Cork** during September about Irish Emigration entitled "The Scattering".

**CONTACT: Marianne Elders**, Conference Administrator, for further information.  
Tel: 3532-1902898  
Fax: 3532-1271980

### *Social Exclusion*

Conference at **Queen's University, Belfast, September 10 –12** on the theme of "Social Exclusion, Disadvantage and Discrimination in Ireland".

**CONTACT: Dr. Rob Kitchin** for information  
Fax: 01232-321280  
Email: r.kitchin @ qub.ac.uk

**Organisations and institutions with programmes of conferences, seminars, symposia, public lectures, cultural events etc. with a significant dimension of Irish Studies on offer are invited to draw attention to their work on our Noticeboard. and to give a named contact to deal with further enquiries.**

## **NEW IRISH STUDIES CENTRE AT BATH**



*At the launching of the new Irish Centre at Bath College of Higher Education. From left: Dr. Frank Morgan (the college director), Owen Dudley Edwards, Dr. Neil Samuells, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities.*

On 22 April, the Faculty of Humanities at Bath College of Higher Education hosted a reception to inaugurate the college's new Irish Studies Centre. Although Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, the intended guest of honour and one of the distinguished patrons of the Irish Studies Centre, was unfortunately unable to attend the launch, the occasion nevertheless attracted a large attendance from staff and students of Bath College of Higher Education and guests from outside the college, including representatives from the Irish Embassy, the British Association of Irish Studies and the Irish Post. The inaugural lecture by Owen Dudley Edwards, another of the Centre's patrons (who also include Professor Terry Eagleton, University of Oxford; Joanna Bourke, Birbeck College; Professor Paul Bew, Queen's University, Belfast; and Van Morrison, singer and songwriter) was on the theme of "What is Irish Studies?" In his wide-ranging and lively lecture, which touched on such diverse subjects as British and Irish attitudes to Europe, Garret Fitzgerald's foreign policy and the portrayal of Irish history in film, and particularly in Neil Jordan's recent "Michael Collins". Dudley Edwards reminded the captivated audience of both the eclectic nature and the relevance of Irish Studies inside and outside of academia. The inaugural lecture was followed by a buffet reception.

The opening of the Centre marks a new stage in the development of Irish Studies at Bath College of Higher Education. The Centre will provide a recognised focus for Irish Studies nationally and internationally. In particular, it will be the focus for the further development of a range of facilities and activities for those interested in studying Irish history, politics and culture at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

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