

THE IRISH IN BIRMINGHAM....

Birmingham Irish Community Forum Ltd Newsletter

Issue No. 10 - Spring 2001

CENSUS 2001 - COUNT ME IN!!

In 1801 two events took place, which were profoundly significant for the people of these islands. The first was the Act of Union, which saw the abolition of the Irish Parliament in Dublin, after less than two decades of a measure of Home Rule. It was also the year of the first Census of modern times in Britain. Every ten years since then (in Ireland, since 1821), a full headcount of the population has taken place on a single day. The only exception was 1941, when, due to the Second World War, no Census took place.

In modern times, Census is used to provide information to plan the development of public services. These include housing, transport, health, training and investment for employment.

An Irish category for the first time

This April, the Office of National Statistics will include an Irish ethnic category in the Census for the first time. In the past, only Irish people born in Ireland could be identified statistically from the Census, using the place of birth question. In this way, the Irish population of Birmingham is frequently reported as 3.8%, when it is, in reality, over 10%. This time around, the White category has been broken down into three: British, Irish and Other. The Federation of Irish Societies pressed for the Irish category to be separate from the 'White' label, but they still welcome the change as a major improvement.

Other changes to the Census will include: a question on religion, and the opportunity for same-sex partners to record their partnership.

An accurate picture depends on all of us

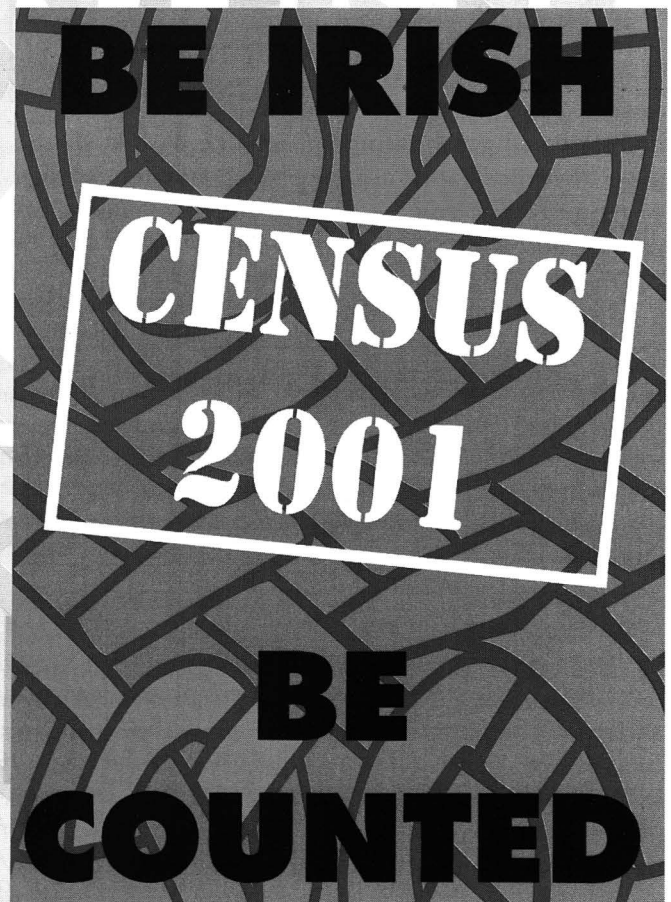
Now that we have an Irish category, there are still significant risks of under-representation. Therefore, the following advice may be useful:

* For those born in Ireland: If you have lived in Britain for some time, you will remember times when it was not easy to stand up and be counted. In this case, however, ticking the Irish box will help the case of organisations campaigning for better services for the Irish Community. Remember, too, that your census details are confidential.

* For Birmingham Irish: This is a question of ethnic and cultural background, and not of nationality. If your culture and roots are important to you, then you have every reason - and right - to tick the Irish box. Time to put those who would call you a "plastic paddy" in their place!

* For people of dual heritage: If your heritage is Irish and (white) English, you could write in both in the White category. If you are Irish and, say, Asian, the new Mixed category has a space to write in your dual identity.

It is also important that individuals who complete the Census form on behalf of others (including managers of residential homes) ensure that they ascertain the wishes of those household members and, if necessary, explain the precise meaning of the Ethnic question.



The Irish Forum, Irish Welfare and Cara Irish Housing are trying to spread the word in Birmingham. If you have any ideas on how or where we can do this or wish to find out more information on the Census 2001 Campaign contact us on (0121) 622 4102. If you want to be a Campaign Volunteer, please contact us on (0121) 604 6222

Sunday 29th April - Census 2001 - Be Irish, be Counted.

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THE IRISH IN BIRMINGHAM

L.E.A.P. (LEARNING, EMPLOYMENT AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION)

Jacky Mulveen has been appointed as the new Administrative Assistant on the L.E.A.P project. Born in Birmingham to Irish parents (Galway and Cork), Jacky is looking forward to raising the profile of L.E.A.P among Birmingham's Irish Community.

L.E.A.P is a community-based project that works with individuals and groups in the Irish community offering advice and guidance on all aspects of employment, education and training. L.E.A.P is in the process of organising free assertiveness training/confidence building for women. If you would like to register an interest in a course starting soon ring Jacky on 0121 622 1168.



In her spare time Jacky runs a Website which can be found at www.birminghamirish.co.uk and if you have any information relating to Birmingham's Irish community that you would like added, e-mail it to jackysweb@hotmail.com or send it to: LEAP, Cara House, Birchall Street, Deritend, Birmingham, B12 0R

CARA IRISH HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Cara Irish Housing Association are pleased to announce the appointment of a new Regional Manager for the Midlands, based at their office in Digbeth.

Louise Jordan who joined the Association on the 2nd January 2001, commented 'I am delighted to be working for the Irish community and plan to develop many new schemes in the Midlands with Cara'.

In the last year Cara has completed two schemes, one in Coventry and one in Birmingham, for single people and families respectively. Cara are currently working on a further scheme in Birmingham, and is playing a prominent role in the recently reported Digbeth Feasibility Project.

Louise Jordan, originally from Dublin, has previously worked as a Regional technical Officer with Stonham Housing Association and Maintenance surveyor with Moseley and District Health Authority.

She has an honours degree in Building Surveying and a keen interest in Housing Law, Energy Efficiency and Irish music!

Should you require any further information about Cara in the midlands, please contact Dave Fisher, Co-ordinator on 0121 622 5806.

ONLY IRISH MARKETS IN THE MIDLANDS

We are in the process of setting up an indoor market on every 2nd Sunday of the month at St Anne's, Alcester Street, Digbeth, Birmingham. There will be 10 stalls. The cost will be £15 per 8 x 4 site for the first market on Sunday 11th February 2001.

We will have 7 stalls on a 12 month hire basis at £120.00, cutting the cost to £10.00 per market and 3 stalls on a daily basis at £20.00. The market will run from 10.30am to 3.30pm. All stall holders must be ready for trading by 10.15am, no traders will remove goods before 3.30pm.

We will promote the market on the Radio and through the media to all Irish in the Midlands. This will give you a base to trade directly to the Irish community.

Paddy Foy, Irish Market Co-ordinator
For further information you can contact Paddy Foy on 07950 943758.

BIRMINGHAM 32 COUNTIES ORGANISATION

The newly formed Birmingham 32 County organisation held their first social event on 16th December 2000. This was a Christmas Party in fancy dress. The party was a great success, with the proceeds going to charity and the Irish Centre refurbishment programme. Our next public meeting to report back will be held at the Irish Centre on Sunday 18th February at 8.00pm.

Our next social event is a St Patrick's Day Celebration Dance to be held at the Irish Centre on Sunday 11th March at 8.30pm., when we are hosts to the Irish bands and groups taking part in the St Patrick's Day Parade, who would like to visit the centre. Proceeds to go to the Irish Centre Refurbishment Programme.

In order to develop the organisation further and support the Irish Centre, we require representatives from more of the County Associations.

For further information please contact the Forum office on 0121 622 4102.

Irish Business Group Annual General Meeting

The Irish Business Group held their first Annual General Meeting at the Celtic Court Hotel on Wednesday 28th February 2001, to commence at 7.00pm.

There was a great turnout with over 50 members present. Nominations for the committee were received and two new committee members elected. The new members are Kevin Dooley and Mike Sloyan. Frank Mooney was also voted in as Chair. The current membership stands at 466 with new members contacting Tracy and Angela everyday.

If you would like any further information please contact The Irish Business Group - 0121 693 6931.

Irish Quarter

By Katrina Donnelly

Last year representatives of Birmingham's Irish organisations along with members of the city council and South Birmingham College started to look at the possibility of regenerating the Digbeth area. The Economic Development Department of Birmingham City Council agreed to fund a concept study to look into the feasibility of regenerating Digbeth into an Irish Quarter.

Axis Design Collective was commissioned to complete the study, which was ready in the summer of this year. Joe Holyoak of Axis Design speaking about the study commented "The Irish Quarter exists already - and it exists in a very old part of Birmingham, which has many rich layers of history besides that of the city's oldest immigrant community. The development of the Irish Quarter is an opportunity to exploit the areas potential, and to make a district which, while enhancing its Irish flavour, offers a diversity of experience to all citizens."

Birmingham City Council and officers have expressed their support and commitment to the scheme and as a result of a meeting with the Irish community organisations a steering group was set up. Eddie Falahee, Chair of Birmingham Irish Community Forum Ltd, said after this meeting "We are delighted that the study has been widely received with such enthusiasm by the City Council. We hope that the community as a whole will embrace it and many of the ideas and proposals will come to fruition."

The proposal looks at the development of an improved Irish quarter in the Digbeth area. This would mean bringing additional Irish investment into the area to further develop the economy of Digbeth and to improve its appearance. The proposal suggests that a two-level planning strategy is required; a general long-term strategy for the whole area and a more focused development masterplan for what is seen to be the heart of the Irish Quarter.

Some of the proposed re-developments include a four block retail, residential and commercial arcade where the coach station currently stands, the widening of the River Rea which flows through Digbeth but is concealed under streets and

THE IRISH IN BIRMINGHAM

buildings and a pedestrian square which would possibly contain the Kennedy Memorial.

A well attended public launch of the concept study was held in the Irish Centre on Thursday 16th November 2000. The next public meeting, which will update the Irish community on any further developments will take place in the coming months. Notification will be given in the local press and on local radio. Any more information on the progress of the plans can be obtained from contacting the Irish Forum on 0121 622 4102.

A Friend in Need

The New Year sees the Irish Welfare and Information Centre (IWIC) introduce a Befriending Service following a successful pilot scheme. The project aims to recruit volunteers from within the Irish community in and around Birmingham to provide a culturally sensitive and supportive befriending service aimed at isolated and vulnerable Irish people, particularly older Irish people. One of our aims is to work with Irish clients in an empowering way in an effort to promote and encourage independence.

A group of volunteers will be recruited and trained throughout February / March. They will provide emotional support and a listening ear in a non-judgmental way. Visits will normally be made once every week for around an hour or two. Volunteers will have an understanding of the Irish experience in Britain along with what it means to provide Irish culturally sensitive services.

The kind of client work that our volunteers will be getting involved with will be varied; from longer-term emotional support and friendship, to shorter term, more practical based resettlement work. Volunteers may also be available to accompany clients to local activities / services where necessary and appropriate. Volunteers will deliver this service within carefully set out procedures and visiting guidelines. The clients themselves will range from older isolated and vulnerable Irish people to those who may be homeless / insecurely housed and some will be dealing with alcohol issues.

IWIC now wishes to publicise this service to local agencies who may be working with isolated / vulnerable Irish clients who would benefit from a culturally sensitive befriending service which complements current service delivery. IWIC is currently developing a Referral Pack that will be sent out to any agencies who may be interested in making a referral to the project. Whilst recognising that our volunteers numbers will be limited and that referral agencies will be expected to satisfy referral criteria, it is hoped that we can work together to provide increased levels of support, as well as addressing the isolation and exclusion of marginalized Irish people.

If your organisation is working with a client, or clients, who may benefit from IWIC's Befriending Service, or if you feel you may be interested in getting involved with the project as a volunteer, or simply want to find out more, contact David Bradshaw (Volunteer Co-ordinator) at Irish Welfare on: 604 6222 or e-mail: vol-cord@iwic.org.uk

SHORT STORY THE CHILDREN OF LIR

A cold stormy sea it was, and lonely. The swans had no one to listen to their singing, and little heart for singing amid the green curling bitter waves. The storm-wind beat roughly on them, and often they were separated and calling to one another without hope of an answer. Then Fionnuala, for she was the wisest, said: "Let us choose a place of meeting, so that when we are separated and lost and wandering each one will know where to wait for the others."

The swans, her brothers, said it was a good thought; they agreed to meet together in one place, and the place they chose was Carraig-na-Ron, the Rock of the Seals. And it was well they made that choice, for a great storm came on them one night and scattered them far out over the sea. Their voices were drowned in the tempest and they were driven hither and thither in the darkness.

In the pale morning Fionnuala came to the Rock of the Seals. Her feathers were broken with the wind and dragged with the saltiness of the sea and she was lamenting and calling on Aodh and Fiacra and Conn.

"O Conn, that I sheltered under my feathers, come to me! O Fiacra, come to me! O Aodh, Aodh, Aodh, come to me!"

And when she did not see them, and no voice answered, she made a sore lamentation and said: "O bitter night that was blacker than the doom of Aoife at the first to us! O three that I loved! O three that I loved! The waves are over your heads and I am desolate!"

She saw the red sun rising, and when the redness touched the waters, Conn came flying to her. His feathers were broken with the wind and dragged with the saltiness of the sea. Fionnuala gathered him under her wings and comforted him.

To be continued....

WATCH THIS SPACE

Small Grants Workshops (National Lottery). We have had two very successful workshops where practical advice and assistance is given on how to get a £5,000 grant for your organisation. Some of our affiliated organisations have been successful in getting grants. If you would like us to run another workshop, please contact the Forum Office on (0121) 622 4102.

Would you like to set up an Irish Group, perhaps a County Association. If your part of Ireland is not represented on our County Associations we can help you and support new and existing groups.

Irish Language Classes are available at:

Monday - The Irish Centre - 622 2314

Wednesday - SS Mary & John - 373 0263

Thursday - Worcester College - (01905) 725543

Friday - Mount Carmel, Redditch - (01527 591248.

Mass is celebrated in Irish on the second Sunday of each month at 5pm at SS. Mary and John, Gravelly Hill North, Erdington.

A **Taste of Auld Ireland** are a new Mail Order Gift Company set up to offer the Irish communities across the UK and Europe genuine Irish made goods by either catalogue or the internet. Contact John McGhee on (01902) 562051.

The **Galway Association** are holding a dance in aid of St Mary's Hospice at St Dunstons on 31st March 2001 - 8pm til late. Music by Celtic Gold. Tickets are £2.50 or £3.00 on the door. For further information contact the Irish Forum on 0121 622 4102.

The **Birmingham Donegal Association** are holding a Grand Charity Dance on Friday 16th March 2001 at the Irish Centre. Music by the Haymakers and Pat & John - 8.30pm til late. Tickets are £6.00, including a buffet, and are available from Rose Harvey on 0121 743 3123.

The **Tyrone Association** are holding a Buffet Dance on Wednesday 28th March 2001 at the Irish Centre, Digbeth, Dancing to Sam Anderson band. Tickets £7.00, available from Margaret Coogan on 0121 350 0653.

The **Carlow Association** are holding a St Patrick's Day Dance on Saturday 10th March 2001 at St Anne's, Alcester Street. Music by Sam Anderson band. Tickets £2.00-£3.00 and are available from Anne Dunne on 0121 326 8314 and Jim Keogh on 0121 684 5994.

The **Wexford Society** are having a Grand Dance on Saturday 10th March 2001 at St Francis', Wrentham Road. Music by Irene and Full Circle. Tickets £2.50 - £3.00 and are available from Eddie Dunne on 0121 258 0938.

The **Birmingham 32 Counties Organisation** are holding a St Patrick's Day Dance on Sunday 11th March 2001 at the Irish Centre. 8.30pm 'til late. Music by Little Jimmy and Friends. Tickets £2.00 - £3.00. For further information please contact the Irish Forum on 0121 622 4102.

BIRMINGHAM IRISH YOUTH GROUP

The **Irish Youth Theatre Project** will be holding classes on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons for 11-14 yr olds and 15-17 yr olds. Free places are available. The classes will start week commencing 26th February 2001 from 4.30pm - 6.30pm. For further information please contact the Irish Forum on 0121 622 4102.

IRISH CENTRE

At the time of writing the newsletter, we have learned that the **Irish Centre** has gone into receivership. However, it is continuing to trade as normal.

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