

24TH. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE IRISH CENTRE

INTRODUCTION

"The Council for the Irish Centre is Constituted for the purpose of establishing and maintaining an Irish Centre in London in order to aid and benefit Irish workers recently arrived in Great Britain". Thus reads the first sentence of the Constitution of the Irish Centre.

The Council referred to is you, ladies and gentlemen in this Hall to night. You are the Council and you are the people responsible for the Irish Centre and you are composed of the following ;-

1	The President and Vice President of the Irish Centre	
2	Members of the Administrative Committee	
3	Representatives of Irish Associations appointed by their respective associations as;-	
A	The Gaelic League	1
B	The G.A.A.	12
C	The N.U.I. Club of London	8
D	The Irish Club	8
E	The Legion of Mary Senatus London	2
F	The Irish Centre Club	6
G	The Emigrant Chaplains	1
H	C.C.E.	2
I	Reps. of each County	32
J	Chairman of C.O.I.C.	1
K.	People of special competence	10
L.	Reps. from the Diocese of Westminster, Southwark and Brentwood	6

You are the Council of the Irish Centre. The Irish Centre is yours. One year ago you met and appointed an Administrative Committee to run the Centre in your name and my task in this report is to honestly and objectively put before you the Centre's progress for the calendar year 1978. This is for your appraisal and criticism. Having heard your comments, criticisms and recommendations to give to the Centre, a team of volunteers to run the Centre for another year.

Last year I said in the report that 1977 was a year of planning and decisions. I feel I can sum up 1978 as a year of action. On the 9th. January the big machinery moved in to begin the phased development of the Centre, at an estimated cost in excess of £1,000,000. Rehabilitation of 12 Murray St. begun in July at a cost in excess of £18,000. In October tenders were called and contracts made for commencement of work on the new girls hostel in Medway St. at a cost in excess of £500,000. Plans and drawings have gone to the Department of the Environment and now we await approval for major rehabilitation work at Hope House the boy's hostel at an estimated cost of £300,000. But more about that later.

The work of the Irish Centre can be broadly split into four parts - Welfare, Social, Cultural and Spiritual. All four inter-relate, forming a community Centre whose aim is the total human development of our people.

WELFARE

The human problems and difficulties which concerned our Social workers last year have remained very much the same. The methods

of work are adapted to changing social conditions. It is of the first importance in social work to remain open and flexible and to adjust to changing circumstances so as to be able to offer effective help. What is not changing with the needs and requirements is the physical circumstances in which our Social workers carry on their daily duties. It is of the utmost importance that work commences without delay in the new Social Welfare Department. While Welfare work has also been and still is of prime importance at the Centre, you may ask why this Welfare building should not have begun the development programme. The reason is, that for architectural and engineering reasons, the total development has to be done in stages. The next stage of work to commence is the Welfare building.

All of you will have had by now received a copy of the Welfare Report for 1978. This year like the preceeding ones sees an increase in the complexity and number of the many Social problems presented by the clients. In recent years over-all numbers remain steady but the increase in the work load has been quite dramatic.

Much effort involves crisis intervention. There is no point in telling a mother of three children who has neither money, food or accommodation, and especially late at night, to come back tomorrow for further discussion. Something must be done immediately.

Prevention is better than cure and so instead of trying to pick up the pieces our Welfare Department is throwing out a new lifeline service for our Irish people. Having helped over 2,000 last year, steps are now being taken to link up with British Rail and the Piccadilly Emergency Service to promptly help the bewitched and bebothered new arrivals. A joint information service of posters and notices and involvement with other agencies is aimed to get to those people in time and hopefully to prevent them falling foul of "the lure of the bright lights". A campaign is planned to advertise this. Posters will go on display at all main stations and terminals, encouraging those who have just arrived from Ireland to use the services provided by our Centre in London.

While recommending that you read the complete Welfare Report, I must express here my tremendous appreciation for our two full-time Social workers - Sr. Joan and Stacia Crickley and also Frs. Butler and O'Keeffe for their "after hours" work. The conditions under which they work are unbelievably bad. Its only their great patience and dedication that keeps them at their work. I would dearly love to be able to state that this time next year, they would have the necessary and desired comfort to carry on and intensify their work and that the clients would have the privacy and climate deserved of all Gods children. Here too I would thank the London Borough of Camden, who appreciating the work at the Centre, have made a donation of £14,000 towards the £28,000 needed to provide the new Welfare offices and rooms.

HOSTELS

An integral part of the Welfare work of the Irish Centre is the running of three hostels. Our hostels were founded to provide accommodation in a caring environment for young Irish people new to London. We feel that it is important also that they reflect the localities in which they were situated, so while every attempt is made to accommodate newly arrived emigrants, placements are not confined to these. Where possible, referrals are accepted from local voluntary and statutory agencies including the probation service. Length of stay at the hostels is not pre-defined but they are designed as a temporary base only. Those with personal difficulties may need the security this type of accommodation can offer for longer than others. Some presenting themselves in need of accommodation have not the money to pay for it, or encounter financial problems during their stay. Most use the hostels for while and having 'found their feet' move out into alternative accommodation, often with friends made during their stay.

During the year 657 boys and girls were accommodated at Hope House and Hornsey Lane Gardens for various periods ranging from a few nights to a few months or even more.

The wardens as well as managing both hostels look after the day to day care of the residents and are available to help with the problems and loneliness many may feel on arrival. Social Workers from the Centre attend weekly and all are free to consult them on matters of concern. Residents are encouraged also to use and establish contacts with services available in the community.

Early in the year Fr. Ryan moved from the Irish Centre to replace Fr. Dunne as warden at Hope House. 483 boys were given accommodation there in 1978 and the 100 places available were full nearly all the time. The hostel has now been in operation and in full use for five years, so it is not surprising that considerable redecorating and repair work had recently to be undertaken. A further assessment of the accommodation and facilities presently available and an appraisal of present and future client needs revealed a number of gaps; recreation facilities, though improved over the year, could be better, counselling and interviewing rooms are required and most of all the sleeping accommodation, though reasonably comfortable, needs to include a greater number of single rooms.

Plans were prepared and are being presented to the relevant authorities. The renovations will be costly but the work must be viewed as both necessary and urgent if our boy's hostel is to be adequately prepared to meet the challenge of the future.

HORNSEY LANE GARDENS

The 35 places at the girls hostel were full almost all the year, even during the winter when traditionally there is a falling off in the numbers of residents. In all, Mrs. Beatrice and Francis gave accommodation to the 174 girls. A further single room was made available and the girls sitting-room received a much needed redecoration.

The limited numbers in Hornsey Lane Gardens contribute towards the homely atmosphere there but the distance from the places of work and entertainment, pose problems for many. We look forward therefore to the opening of the new Medway Street GHoStel.

MEDWAY STREET

Long hours of hard work from Donie Egan, Richard Marke, Sr. Anthony, with her invaluable hostel experience, and the other members of the Medway Street Committee have meant considerable progress with the renovation project over the past twelve months. The hostel is situated in a key city centre area where many of our applicants find employment but where accommodation, if available at all, is very expensive. When completed, it will have places for 132 girls.

During the year financial approval was obtained and a substantial grant was allocated to the scheme. At the time of going to press work has commenced on the premises and the completion date has been set for June 9th, 1980.

SOCIAL

1978 was a difficult year for the Social activities of the Centre. The rehabilitation work has forced the curtailment of floor space, disrupted the use of the Kennedy hall for almost five months and closed half of the Lounge bar. But due to hard working Social Committee, an understanding staff and most patient clients the activities, though less, went on as usual.

The Kennedy hall got a new bar which has proved itself most satisfactory to those at either side of the counter, the hall never-the-less is slightly smaller. The new block of toilets adjacent to the Kennedy and the Kennedy itself are yet to get some finishing touches. The Douglas Hyde room did well to cater for many functions associated with the Kennedy but it certainly put great pressure on the staff - an example of a Sunday in the Douglas Hyde lounge - Staff to clear and clean the lounge after Saturday night, usually finishing at 3 a.m. for the morning masses. After 11 a.m. mass prepare hall for ballad session.

After ballad session clean and rearrange the hall for evening masses, after 6.30.p.m. mass rearrange again for Bingo at 7.30 and then prepare for ballad session at 8.30.. The Bingo patrons and the mass goers some elderly people were most patient as they had to climb stairs so often during that 5 month. stretch.

The Social Club led by chairman John Tatum and the evergreen Mary Kenny performed a magnificent years work.

Under the management of John O'Shea the bar trade reached a very high peak of efficiency. Both he and his staff were always most courteous and co-operative, dovetailing so well with Jimmy the chef catering was of a very high standard.

Despite the many problems and difficulties the Centre continued to provide facilities where our people most enjoy one anothers company, to organize functions, to provide cultural and social entertainment. Irish organizations held over 600 meetings during the year. Apart from the regular entertainment provided by the Centre Social Club, the main part of which was music and ballad sessions four times a week, and bingo, three times weekly there were over 200 social events by county and parishes and other organizations. This volume of work speaks most highly for the efficiency and managerial ability of John O'Shea and his staff.

I would like to mention here the London Irish Festival in which the Irish Centre equally with the Council of Irish Counties is involved. This Festival is now an established annual event. The Centre is proud to be associated with the Irish counties in the Festival. Here one has ample proof of the power of the Irish community to organize itself and provide a Festival day which is the envy of every ethnic group in the United Kingdom. Moreover in these days when the media is only too swift to sensationalize the riotous behaviour, the vandal or the violent, the Irish community has shown great virtue and community values that not a word has been spoken regarding its conduct or behaviour in the midst of a carnival spirit. Irish people respond well to a cause, the cause of the Festival is the welfare of our brothers and sisters. Towards that end in the four years of its existence, 200,000 people have contributed £25,000 to welfare work and the Irish Centre has been the recipient of almost 50%.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE IRISH CENTRE

The development programme of the Irish Centre is proceeding more or less according to plan. A severe winter has retarded work on site. However the building contractor is endeavouring to make up for lost time by keeping next October as target date for the completion of the McNamara hall.

Two contracts, namely, Contract C which was necessary for preparatory work on the British Rail site and Contract D2 the new toilet block are nearing completion. As I said above Contract D1 the McNamara hall and kitchen is scheduled for completion in October of this year.

The above three contracts will consume the financial facilities at our disposal and future contracts will depend totally on a successful fund raising campaign. During the year 1978 as you will see from the Statement of Accounts /£350,376.00 was expended in the development work. These monies were made available by a Bank of Ireland loan, loans from Breweries with which we trade and donations to the Building Fund.

I can sum up the present situation both as to building progress and costs by saying :-

A Anticipated final build costs for contracts currently in progress i.e.

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|---|--------------------------------------|---------|
| 1 | Foundation work on British Rail site | 250,000 |
| 2 | Level 1 and 2 toilets | 108,000 |
| 3 | McNamara hall and kitchen | 513,000 |

Total to which we are committed	£871,000
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Anticipated build costs for future contracts :-	
1 New Welfare Dept.	68,000
2 Completion of Murray St Bdns.	210,000
3 51,52, Camden Sq.	175,000
4 Decor J.F.K.&Douglas Hyde	25,000
Total	£478,000

The task before us is a gigantic one. We are not striving after luxury but we are endeavouring with all strength and conviction to give to our people a community centre that they deserve and a building worthy of the dignity of our race, who for too long have suffered with too little. The Management Committee has shown great courage in all this and they and myself have every confidence in seeing the total project through to completion.

Where will the money come from is the question in all our minds. It is my preoccupation 24 hours a day. We are working on two fronts. First of all we must do our part, we must help ourselves and secondly we must be ready to go out and seek outside help. The former by efficient use of and economy in the daily use of the Centre plus the tremendous efforts made by the Social Club Committee and the county associations. The latter are outside sources, for example early this year the Sea-Link.U.K. donation. Our professional Fund Raising Committee is now at work chasing the more substantial donations. One has to say here and regretfully, that our Irish Government has not yet made a decision or reply to our pressing application. We do have a flicker of hope yet and indeed it has been rekindled by the enthusiasm and real practical interest publicly shown by our Ambassador Dr. Eamonn O'Kennedy and his Excellency's presence here tonight.

FINANCE

It will be noted on the Revenue Accounts that there has been a considerable reduction in Income during the year 1978. This was due a major part of the Centre being closed down for building and redevelopment during the period June to October 1978 (inclusive). Expenditure, however, over the whole year remained reasonably static. This has resulted in a deficit on Revenue Accounts of £2,110 as against a surplus of £20,807 in the year 1977.

The Development Programme in respect of 51,52 Camden Sq. reveals an expenditure in the year of £350,376, whilst £7,956 was expended on major and necessary improvements on the property at 12, Murray St. This expenditure has resulted in a Bank Surplus of £70,053 at 31st. December 1977 being converted to a Bank Loan of £191,900 together with Building Development Creditors of £57,662.

The Accounts show that our Liabilities have increased by £253,632 to £273,969, whilst Fixed Assets have increased by £357,370 to £542,929. It should be pointed out that Fixed Assets represent Capital Expenditure to date less Depreciation and bear no relation to the aggregate current market value of the properties.

In reviewing the reliability of our Sources of Revenue it will be noted that the total received during the year from Covenants and Building Fund Donations together with Management charges and Deficit on Revenue Accounts amounted to an overall Surplus of £46,612.

COVENANTS

M.Brunton	149	
McCann & Looney	104	
E.Kennedy	70	
Mrs.W.J.Smythe	30	£428

DONATIONS - BUILDING FUND

London Irish Festival 1977	7,077
London Irish Festival 1978	6,000
C.O.I.C.	3,000
Car Raffle - Festival 1978	5,679
Guinness & Son Ltd	5,000
Lord Moyne	1,000
Carlow Association	765
Waterford Association	550
Fermanagh Association	400
Portsmouth Irish Society	300
North London Comhaltas	220
Laois Association	180
Limerick Association	115
Newcastle West Association	106
Monaghan Association	100
St. Patricks Day-Standing Orders	234
Sundry, Anon and under £50	4,083

34,809

CONCLUSION

Finally my very sincere debt of gratitude is expressed to the Staff of the Centre, to the Manager and the Manageress of the hostels for the quality of its performance during the year. To all those who gave of their time and energy in a voluntary capacity to support the works and ideals of the Centre.

The Management Committee is deserving of the highest praise for its most detailed attention to the progress of the Centre under the careful, painstaking and kindly Chairman Martin Moroney. To the Social Club Committee, to the Council of Irish Counties to the Irish Chaplains, to our Auditors also my appreciation and thanks. To Paddy O'Brien and Matt Brunton for their invaluable help and advice to the Committee re. the new buildings, to Donie Egan, Richard Clarke, Liam Martin, Sr. Anthony and Fr. Ryan for their watchful eye on the progress of the Hostels.

To Johnny Nee, and Sean Igoe, both of whom have returned to Ireland but whilst here particularly John Nee for many years of selfless work as Secretary.

And as a reminder the Good Lord visited us during 1978 and took to his home in Heaven and to their reward for exemplary lives the beautiful persons of Paddy O'Connor, Sr. Thecla and Tess Moroney. May they while resting in happiness continue to inspire us here below to spend ourselves as they did in helping our fellow man.

Thank you for your patience in listening to me.

W.J.Cagney, O.M.I.