

28TH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE IRISH CENTRE

INTRODUCTION

My Lord President, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I present to you the report of the London Irish Centre for the calendar year January to December, 1982. You - The Council of the Irish Centre, are the highest governing body of this establishment. Since I have come here, just over eighteen months ago I have taken every opportunity to point out that this Centre is the property of the Irish people in this city and is held in trust for them by four individuals. The Centre is administered by a committee which is elected, by you its council, each year at this annual general meeting. I therefore ask each of you, who are here to represent your organisation, to give your careful attention to the matters that are raised and to feed in your advice and suggestions to the incoming committee with a view to helping the Irish Centre through what can only be described as a very difficult era of its existence.

Under the heading of 'Welfare', I will be reporting on the official opening of No. 50, Camden Square, as our new welfare department. At this stage I feel that I ought to mention especially the concern expressed by His Eminence Cardinal George Basil Hume, our chief Patron, in relation to the type of work that the two priests at the Centre are daily involved in, namely, the secular administration of the Centre. His Eminence asked that the priests be freed from this task of administration and fund-raising and be allowed time to do their priestly work. No priest can be totally free from all administration or even fund-raising but some very serious questions have to be asked when a priest finds himself so involved that the most important aspect of his life has to take second place. Later in my report I will be putting forward some suggestions. (Under Administration).

In concluding my introduction I would like to ask you to keep in mind that at all times the Irish Centre, whatever its activities, should always be about people. This Centre was founded 28 years ago for the welfare of Irish people in London. Our priority must always remain 'our people'.

WELFARE REPORT

A separate annual welfare report has been produced. This document gives a comprehensive account of the exclusively welfare work that is done at our three premises known as 'Irish Centre Community Services', Conway House Men's Hostel and St. Louise Hostel for women. I wish to place on record my thanks to those who prepared such a fine report. Once again it is the story of how the Irish Centre serves people and how it has done so throughout 1982. Every part of this report is important and should be studied by all who have the best interests of the Irish at heart. However, some portions of the report have to be brought to the attention of this meeting. A great emphasis must be given to the opening section of the report which is entitled 'A domiciled people growing old'. The figures quoted in the report indicate that problems associated with ageing have been with us in 1982 and are going to be increasingly with us in the near future.

Some realistic planning has been done in this regard during the past year and our new committee will have the task of hopefully bringing to fruition some of these proposed schemes.

The reports from our welfare department and our hostels show that our total intake of new people showed an overall increase of 13%, reversing the 1981 trend when numbers of new users of our services decreased by 20%. It must be remembered that the figures given are from our recorded statistics. The numbers^{un} recorded are also very much greater.

One group of statistics of interest to most people is 'The Counties Distribution' set of figures. The relevant passage from the report states - 'Apart from the cities of Galway, Dublin and Cork which showed increases of 65%, 34% and 28% respectively, the only counties which showed a very significant increase were Derry (118%) and Waterford (127%). Interestingly and for whatever reason the Limerick intake has over the past few years gradually declined - this year by 12%, while intake from Kerry has increased annually, currently by 61%.

Undoubtedly, the major change from 1981 is our splendid new premises at number 50, Camden Square, which we have been operating from for the major part of the year. The solemn blessing and opening took place early in November and was conducted by His Eminence Cardinal George Basil Hume, O.S.B. and His Excellency the Irish Ambassador Dr. Eamonn Kennedy with the Mayor of Camden and many other noted dignitaries in attendance.

It is with great pleasure that we can report as a reality the new dimensions to the 1981 services which have been looked forward to for so long. Thanks to our new premises we can now boast of the following awaited expansions - Housing Advisory Service, Marriage Counselling, Literacy and Basic English Classes: Irish Language Classes and the beginnings of a very good Reference Library.

I wish to record my thanks to a very dedicated staff and to a wonderful welfare sub-committee who give of their time and energy to further the good works of our Welfare department.

OUR HOSTELS: (Irish Centre Hostels Limited.

Conway House, Quex Rd. NW6.

It is very tempting to immediately report on the re-developments that have been so much part of life at Conway House over the past year. However, firstly must come the report on our services to the people who are deserving of our best efforts.

Of the total hostel intake of 376 during 1982, at least 90% did not have sufficient money to book accommodation elsewhere. There are always problems in the running of a Hostel such as Conway House. Every effort is made to give unfortunate individuals a chance of living a decent life in what sometimes can be a very cruel city. The unemployed are very much the underprivileged of today's world. The unemployed who are living in hostels such as ours make extra demands on resources and personnel and call for expert management. We are very fortunate in having an experienced and dedicated staff at Conway House. Fifteen per cent of those accommodated left owing rent and returned to the circuit of homelessness, unemployment and drifting. The boredom and frustration of young people, anxious to work and unable to do so leads sometimes to trouble for some. We recorded an increase in the number of young residents being charged with petty theft of items of food, clothing and the like. One of the Centre's social workers visit the hostel each week where a full workload awaits her.

I repeat again the special needs of the elderly. Our hostels are primarily for young people. We must seriously consider further facilities for the needy elderly.

In relation to the buildings a first class extension has been added to the hostel. Most of this work has been done throughout 1982. For most of 1983 the bed spaces will be reduced from 100 to about 40 in order to carry out the final phase of re-furbishing 20/22 Quex Rd. The end result we hope will be a first class hostel in every respect.

St. Louise Hostel For Women Medway St. S.W.1.

1982 has been the first complete year of functioning at our girls hostel. St Louise Hostel accommodates 130 girls normally in the age group of seventeen to twenty five. In the main the hostel has been fully booked throughout the year. Again a social worker from the Irish Centre visits the hostel each week and follow-up visits to the girls who have been referred there through our own office are made. The sisters and staff there see themselves providing a warm, homely, supportive and friendly atmosphere from which the girls can go to work or attend their courses. Just as at our mens hostel in Quex Rd., unemployment is one of the greatest problems for the residents. The comment most often heard from parents who visit their daughters at St. Louise's is that they feel that their daughters are in 'a safe place'. The welfare report relates a true story that is worth retelling. A girl, from the south of Ireland left a note for her parents saying that she was going over to London to find work. The distracted mother and aunt took a plane and arrived at the Irish Centre late one evening. They were received by one of the priests who phoned our girls hostel asking if they could accommodate both for the night before starting the search for the daughter. This was agreed. When the mother and aunt arrived at the hostel to spend the night imagine their joy when they discovered that the missing daughter was upstairs safely asleep. During 1982 two of the sisters - Sr. Edna and Sr. Benedict completed their two years undertaking to the hostel. They were duly assigned to other work and we wish to thank them both for a job well done. A special welcome was extended to Sr. Una, Daughter of Charity, who has joined Sr. Anthony in continuing the invaluable task of managing our girls hostel.

A regular feature this year has been the celebration of Mass on Wednesday evenings. The two priests attached to the Centre - Frs. Malone and Butler and Fr. Ryan from the hostel alternated the weekly visits. There was always a good response from the girls who often came along for a chat afterwards.

The statistics for the year show that 162 Irish girls, 92 British and 225 girls from 33 other countries were accommodated. Many of these other girls found themselves being invited to visit Ireland and as has happened so often in the past some became more Irish than the Irish themselves.

Another Hostel

In last years annual report we stated that an application had been submitted to the Housing Corporation, through, Irish Centre Hostels Ltd. for a special hostel for the elderly Irish in the community who were in need of shelter. This application did not meet with success and discussions are currently in hand to see what our next approach should be.

The particular needs of the 'down and out' Irish people who somehow seem to have 'fallen by the way-side' and are no longer capable of helping themselves must also be something to which we ought to be applying ourselves if we are truly to be a caring community.

Social Club

During 1982 we have been able to do quite a few improvements to our club premises. This was due mainly to the initiative shown by a small group of 'Irish Centre people'. Just as in our other reports the important dimension must always be people. Every aspect of the Irish Centre is meant to serve the needs of the Irish community. The rich social lives of those who spend time at the Irish Centre Social Club enhances not only themselves but indeed all with whom they come into contact. Hospitality has long been one of our greatest Irish characteristics. To the members of our club and most especially to the social club committee of 1982 we owe a debt of gratitude, for giving themselves so wholeheartedly to the building up of a social club such as we have today.

The following is a list of the activities during 1982 -

Conferences 7, Meetings 222, Dinners 58, Dances 48, Benefit and fund-raising dances 9, Disco's 22, Ceili dances 57, Ballad sessions 104, Bingo sessions 156, Private parties 12, Weddings 16, Music lessons 104, Dancing lessons(children)52, Ceili lessons (adults) 52, Comhaltas sessions 7, Concerts 4, Film shows 2, Plays2, Card Drives 4, Quiz's 12, Amature boxing 9, Sale of Goods/Jumble sales 4.

To the many individuals, too numerous to mention, who are dedicated to keeping the Irish Centre alive, and I am sure that I will be forgiven for mentioning Miss Mary Kenny, Mrs. Theresa Doyle and Mr. Martin Doyle, a very sincere thanks not only for their work for the social club but also for the days that they spend each week working here at the Centre in a voluntary capacity.

To our management team Mr. John O'Shea and Mr. Eddie Hickey I express my sincere thanks for their loyalty and hard work in everything that they undertake. A special word of thanks to Eddie for the many improvements in the form of decorations and alterations.

To our Chef Mr. Jimmy McCluckey for the hundreds and thousands of meals that he has turned out throughout the year, each one better than the next, our deepest appreciation and thanks.

The London Irish Festival, 1982 was not the financial success that we had anticipated due to adverse weather conditions and some very strong competition. However the Irish Centre together with the Council of Irish Counties Association did a fine job in setting up and running a first class festival. Our thanks to all concerned.

DEVELOPMENT

A report on the completion of No. 50 Camden Sq. has already been given. For many people connected with the Irish Centre the year 1982 will be remembered as 'The Year of the New Entrance'. I refer to the new entrance to the McNamara Hall at No.51 Camden Sq. Most will remember that this new entrance was sponsored for the most part by the Waterford Golf Association. In no small measure due to the efforts of one man, Mr. Tony Beatty a golf day was organised which raised the magnificent sum of £10,000. Tony was subsequently presented with a new award which was initiated at the Irish Centre at the end of 1982. This was 'The Irish Centre Person of the Year Award'. I would like to record a special word of thanks to Tony and take consolation in the fact that his success of 1982 has only served as a spring-board for his 1983 efforts.

In the line of buildings we have already referred to the extension at Conway House. Even though this property is owned by Irish Centre Hostels Ltd. we are very proud of a job well done in the completion of the new 'Link Block' and we wish all concerned every success in bringing the next and final phase of the redevelopment to its completion. There remains a whole phase of development to be done here at Camden Sq. but as we shall see later, this will have to be dependant on some radical solutions to our financial commitments.

ADMINISTRATION

The present structure of the administration is as follows ; -
This body - 'The Council of the Irish Centre' elects eight lay members (i.e. non cleric) to serve with eight appointed members according to article 6 of the Constitution.

These appointments are as follows :- 4 appointed by the President, 1 - the Chaplain appointed by the bishop of the diocese, 3 clerical representatives - one of whom shall be appointed by each of the Patrons.

The Administrative Committee, thus constructed, has the power to carry on and control the business and work of this Council in accordance with and in furtherance of the objects set out in the Constitution. (Article 8)

The Administrative Committee elects a chair-person, vice-chair, a secretary and a treasurer. The practice over the years has been that the committee have elected the appointed chaplain as treasurer and he in effect becomes the director of the Centre looking after the day to day administration and business of the Centre and reporting to the Administrative Committee at their monthly meetings. The practice at the moment is that an assistant chaplain has been appointed to share the burden with the chaplain and treasurer.

Over a period of 28 years the Irish Centre has developed almost beyond recognition. What started out as a property worth a few thousand pounds has developed into a very modern centre with a book value in excess of a million pounds and liabilities of almost one million. The Income and Expenditure accounts for the last year shows a gross profit of over £100,000 which is insufficient to meet the running costs of the Centre. We are talking in terms of very big money. We are talking in terms of very big administration. The nett result from the priests point of view is that there is very little, in fact, precious little time, for the priests to do their priestly work. In my introduction I referred to the Cardinal's words expressing his anxiety about this precise point. Tonight I add my own anxiety and that of my colleague Fr. James Butler on the same point. I am suggesting to you and especially to the incoming Administrative Committee that a new look be taken at the Administrative structures of the Irish Centre and that it be done within the next year. Perhaps the administration could be headed by a paid lay person. Because I have held the office of treasurer and director for the past year I know that this cannot come about unless a realistic solution is found to the financial problems that currently face the Irish Centre.

It is my duty to inform you that over the past year the Administrative Committee has been acting on advice received in considering ways out of a very difficult situation. We must now seriously explore and investigate every possible solution. As the accounts show, time is not on our side. Serious talks are already taking place to investigate the possibility of what is called a 'Sale and Lease-Back' in relation to our properties here at Camden Sq. As nothing definite can be arranged without bringing the whole matter to this Council nothing further can be achieved by giving any explanations in this report. An extra-ordinary General Meeting would be called to consider the whole matter if it became a possibility. I would ask that you would not see these words as coming from a 'profit of doom' but rather as an honest attempt at being a witness to the truth.

FINANCE

The following figures have been extracted from our audited accounts :-

The accounts show that our liabilities have increased by £78,880 to £999,902.

Current assets have decreased by £36,780 to £115,461. This results in a decrease in working capital of £115,660.

Fixed assets have increased by £81,451.00 to £1,591,799.00. Such increase representing the redevelopment of No. 50 Camden Sq. out of the Grant awarded by the Irish Government.

The interest payable by the Centre during the year amounted to £86,580. This substantial charge for interest is a very heavy burden on the operations of the Centre. There is a very urgent need to reduce the debts outstanding, so that the interest accruing would correspondingly be reduced on the running costs of the Centre.

During 1982 the funds of the Centre were augmented by amounts contributed from, Grants, Covenants, Donations, Charity Walks, Car Raffle and Management Income.

The net loss as per the income and expenditure account was £34,209 after interest payable.

The Grants, Covenants and Donations are gratefully acknowledged and I take this opportunity to appeal for extra financial help either in the form of Grants, Covenants or Donations. For the Centre to remain financially viable it is essential that we have the continued support of existing sources of finance and also to increase such sources.

There is a need to increase the turnover of the Centre. I appeal to all Irish organisations to use the facilities of the Centre and help in marketing the substantial function halls available.

GRANTS

London Borough of Camden	£32,500.00	
London Borough of Camden (listed buildings)	5,700.00	
Irish Government	<u>9,249.00</u>	£47,449.00

COVENANTS INCOME

Bank of Ireland	5,118.00	
Allied Irish Banks	5,118.00	
M. Moroney	100.00	
M. Brunton	100.00	
Looney & McCann	70.00	
W. Smyth	20.00	£10,526.00

DONATIONS

London Irish Festival	10,000.00	
London Irish Festival Interest	944.46	
Leitrim Association	5,001.43	
Cavan Association	3,146.00	
Waterford Golf Day	9,970.20	
Srs. of Charity per Sr. Joan	2,300.00	
Clare Association	500.00	
Galway Association	477.00	
Mr. Maguire	617.14	
Rev. Fr. Gordan	390.00	
Comhaltas North London	310.00	
Christmas Bazaar	382.40	
Irish Chaplains	300.00	
Dublin Marathon	248.00	
G. Spillane (Canada)	230.13	
Mr. T. Ryan	100.00	
Cork Association	100.00	
Mr. J. Durkin	100.00	
Westmeath Association	120.00	
Armagh Association	100.00	
M. Moroney	100.00	
Sundry	<u>9,111.37</u>	£44,548.13

CONCLUSION

I thank you for being so patient in listening to such a lengthy report. The outgoing Administrative Committee wishes you to be as well informed as possible in relation to the affairs of the Centre.

Once again I would like to express my thanks to so many individuals and groups. If you feel that I have left out some very important matters of 1982 you are probably correct. It is always difficult to know what to include in, and leave out of, an annual report.

I wish to thank our Irish Ambassador, Dr. Eamonn Kennedy for his very special support and concern.

To the outgoing Administrative Committee, to all the sub-committees, to a very dedicated and loyal staff, to the London Borough of Camden, to the Irish Government and to so many individuals and groups I express a heart-felt word of thanks.

My final word of thanks go to my brother priests and my fellow Oblates for their fraternity and above all to my fellow chaplain Fr. James Butler, O.M.I.

May God continue to be with us in all our undertakings.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh go leir.

(Claude Malone, O.M.I. - Director)