

THIRTY FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LONDON IRISH CENTRE
(REPORT FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 1985)

INTRODUCTION

It is at our Annual General Meeting each year that we look back on what has happened in the last twelve months. Periodic assessment and re-evaluation must be an integral part of every institution especially one such as our own. The aims and objectives of the Charity which are set out in its Constitution would seem to be as relevant today as they were over thirty years ago. Over the years there has been much growth and development in the furtherance of these aims and objectives.

In attempting an over-view of the history of the Centre some definite patterns can be seen. The ebb and flow of emigration from Ireland has to a greater or lesser degree dictated the response that the Centre has had to make over the years. As we have come to the end of the first half of the 1980's a glance at the graph indicating the pattern of emigration to this country and especially to London, tells us that for the last five years the flow is very much in one direction. It is generally accepted that emigration from Ireland over the last few years and especially in the last year has risen very significantly. The figures from our Annual Welfare Report for 1985 shows an increase of over 18% of new clients to our Community Services Department in comparison with the year 1984. This represents an average of 40 young people per week arriving here for the first time. This pattern is reflected also in our Hostels Report. This report will speak again of this increase under the Welfare Department but it is mentioned here as part of the introduction because it "shouts out at us" as it were from the records of 1985.

Although we have taken on extra staff at the Centre during 1985 there is a great awareness of the tremendous pressure that has been placed on our personnel here at our Welfare Department as well as in our hostels. Accordingly, costs have increased putting further pressure on our already stretched resources. Fund-raising remains a constant priority and we are grateful to so many people for keeping us 'on the road'.

REPORTS

WELFARE

The Annual Welfare Report for 1985, which is issued separately, documents very accurately the statistics in relation to those coming here to our Community Services Department as well as those staying at our two hostels, St. Louise at Medway Street which accommodates 135 girls and Conway House in Kilburn which accommodates 100 young men. To quote from the report:

*"The forecast of a continual emigration upsurge
has been confirmed at our Community Services*

Department in 1985 when 2,136 new clients arrived here seeking help and advice".

We accept that this increase is something that will be with us for a number of years to come. The experience in 1985 leads us to make even stronger appeals to those who decide to leave Ireland and come here to prepare for their arrival by ensuring that they have all necessary documentation as well as some money to get them over the initial two or three weeks.

HOSTELS

Irish Centre Hostels Limited comprise of two large hostels as referred to. We can rightly boast of first class facilities at both our hostels. They have been full to capacity throughout the year. The age range for both hostels is between 15 and 25 years. Unemployment proves to be one of the great enemies of our time. It brings special problems for those running our hostels as well as being a frustrating experience for the individuals concerned. Of the 100 residents at Conway House at one stage during the year up to 80% were unemployed. Having such large numbers in the hostel during the day put extra pressure on the staff. It was decided to employ further staff to help cope with the sociological problems arising from this. To the staff at each of our hostels we record our heartfelt thanks. They have given of themselves above and beyond the call of duty, even to the point of putting their own health at risk.

HOSTEL DEVELOPMENT

In last year's report we were able to record that a new site had been purchased by Irish Centre Hostels Limited for development of specialist accommodation for single elderly people. This year we have moved a step nearer in this regard. The Department of the Environment through the Housing Corporation have now given their sanction to the development and funding has been sanctioned. The cost of this project will be in the region of half a million pounds. Eighteen units will be provided and work will commence in 1987.

EXISTING SERVICES, IRISH CENTRE COMMUNITY SERVICES, CAMDEN SQUARE

The list of services provided remains as follows:

1. Services to the newly arrived;
2. Services to the domiciled Irish;
3. Educational Services;
4. Information Services;
5. Marriage Counselling Service;
6. Group work with women;
7. Missing Persons Service.

Continuation Sheet 3.

As referred to earlier the increase in the number of callers to our Community Services Department has put tremendous pressure on our staff. To each and everyone of them we say a sincere thank you. The Missing Persons Service was operated for most of the year under the guidance of Father Oliver Barry, O.M.I. with the help of a volunteer, Mr. Brian Duggan. This department has functioned very efficiently and has had a very high success rate in tracing missing people. Of the 90 enquiries made 25 were contacted with our assistance, 12 returned home of their own accord, 12 were unsuccessful after full investigations, 5 were not accepted and 36 remain open.

A.G.I.Y. (ACTION GROUP FOR IRISH YOUTH)

An Irish youth in London survey 1985 was carried out by the Action Group for Irish Youth. Several members of our Irish Centre staff are associated with this group. We can feel justly proud of the input and the contribution made by the Irish Centre to such a fine report, which has been commented on and used at various conferences throughout the year. A successful conference to present the findings of the report was held here at the Irish Centre during the year. We congratulate all who were associated with this venture.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Irish Language Classes

Here at the Irish Centre we can boast of one of the most successful Irish Language Classes in London. There is a great revival of interest in the Irish Language among the children of Irish people and an increasing number of Irish adults who learned their Irish at school and have not been using it for years have come along in great numbers. Saturday morning classes for children are well attended and the Friday evening classes for adults are attended by between 30 and 40 people. To the Irish Language teacher, Siobhan O'Neill, we express our gratitude and state how proud we are of having someone of her calibre as our Irish Language teacher. The Inner London Education Authority contributed £725.00 to this project in 1985.

NUMERACY AND LITERACY

We continue to hold these classes but note that they have not been so well attended.

COMPUTER COURSES

The case for the application for funding for computer equipment to the GLC has been well documented and commented on. It is sufficient to record in this report that no grant was paid to the Irish Centre for computer equipment. This is a real need since to have worthwhile computer courses would equip some of our young people with valuable skills and thus give them a better chance of being employed.

CARE OF THE ELDERLY - PROVISION FOR YOUTH CLUB - PREMISES

It has been a year of negotiations in trying to line up funding to develop the basement of 51/52 Camden Square as a Day Care Centre for Elderly people with provision for Youth Club activities in the evening. The year went by without definite funding. However, at the moment as a result of what happened during 1985, we are very hopeful that there will be a break-through.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

1. Music and Dance

Sadly, our records will show that 1985 was the last complete year in which the **Tommy Maguire School of Music** was supervised throughout the year by its founder and teacher **Mr. Tommy Maguire**. It was a most successful year for the School of Music who meet for tuition twice weekly at the Centre. The up-keep and maintenance of the Douglas Hyde Lounge continued throughout the year to be carried out by Tommy and Mai. (Tommy died suddenly early in 1986. To his family we extend our deepest sympathy. May he rest in peace. The School of Music continues under the name of Tommy Maguire School of Music).

2. Crean School of Dancing

Part of the tradition of the Irish Centre has been the teaching of Irish Dancing and for over 20 of the 30 years of our existence this has been under the tutorship of **Mr. Paddy Crean**. The **Paddy Crean School of Dancing** continues to have successful dancing classes twice weekly at the Centre.

3. Uilleann Pipers

The Thursday evening classes for Uilleann Pipers have grown in fame and number. We are proud to have them here at our Centre.

4. Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann

As the Centre for the North London Branch of Comhaltas we welcome on a regular basis the members of the branch. For a long period of 1985 the Comhaltas branch organised the Sunday morning sessions at the Douglas Hyde Lounge. Comhaltas continue to meet at the Centre and staunchly support all our activities.

5. Ceili Dancing

Throughout London the Sunday evening Ceili at the Irish Centre is known and acclaimed. Ceili dancing as part of our heritage is well and truly kept alive by a group of dedicated teachers and leaders.

6. Karate Classes

We continue to have weekly classes in Karate for those who are interested. Classes are very well attended and it is yet another activity for our children and youth.

OUR YOUTH UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF MISS KATHLEEN FITZSIMONS

Our youth group have continued to meet and stay together in spite of not having proper premises. As a group they have won many sporting events throughout the year and have proven themselves to be second to none. As referred to earlier in the report we are hopeful once again that we will be able to provide premises. We appeal once again to the parents and adult members of our club to give their support to our Youth Leader especially in the supervision of Discos for our youth. They can only take place with proper supervision provided by the adults. We renew our pledge to do all in our power to involve our youth more and more in our Centre.

SOCIAL CLUB MEETINGS

The Social Club Committee have taken full responsibility for the organising of entertainment in our halls and in the bars. The new floor in the Kennedy Hall, funded by the Council of Irish Counties, has proved a great help and in general a high standard of maintenance and cleanliness has been maintained throughout the premises.

Three times per week we have Bingo Sessions for the members. These, although not "full houses", provide an important social event and meeting place for a good number of our members. This is especially true for our 'singles'. To the Social Club committee and the Bingo Committee we express our thanks.

Regular Card evenings have been arranged by another Sub-Committee. These are proving most enjoyable and we record our appreciation and thanks to those involved.

It is hoped that in the current year we will be able to make an effort in re-designing the Small Lounge for members. New efforts have to be made to attract our members to use the facilities of the Club more so than before.

VOLUNTARY WORKERS

In our report each year we express our gratitude to the very many people who give freely of their time and energy to help out in the running of the Centre and in our Welfare work. We depend greatly on the contributions of these voluntary workers. To those who help out in the clerical matters, reception work and welfare work, we express our thanks and appreciation. It will be easily understood by those who are regular users of the Centre why Miss Mary Kenny must be singled out for special mention. Mary would have to be described as a "full-time voluntary worker". Thank you Mary.

Mr. and Mrs. Jock and Rose Rutherford are deserving of our appreciation and thanks. This comes especially for being the two people who set up the Sunday morning arrangements for masses here in the Kennedy Hall week in, week out. This is in addition to the various other activities in which they are involved.

FUND-RAISING

We have had many successful fund-raising ventures throughout the year raising in excess of £80,000. To the special individuals who acted as organisers and to the vast army of ticket sellers and supporters, we say well done. Without your work we would not be here for next year. Once again we gratefully acknowledge the contribution made in this field by Mr. Tony Beatty especially in relation to the outstanding success of the fund-raising Golf Day.

COUNCIL OF IRISH COUNTIES

The County Associations make up the largest group on the Council of the Centre. The Counties are involved at every level of organisation and activity. At their monthly meetings a report from the Centre is presented and support is always forthcoming.

ADMINISTRATION/MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

The "governing body" of the Centre is in practice the Administrative Committee which is made up of 16 people, eight of whom are elected at this meeting and eight are appointed by the President and Patrons. The Administrative Committee meets once a month in relation to the business of the Centre. The responsibility undertaken at this level must always be acknowledged and appreciated. 1985 was different from any other year at the Centre in that for almost all of that year the Centre had a full-time Administrator, Mr. Paddy Keegan, who is also responsible for the accounting procedures at our two hostels viz Conway House and Medway Street.

FINANCE

The Income and Expenditure Account for the year under review reveals a Sales increase of 5% over the year 1984. Welfare expenditure both in salaries and disbursements showed an appreciable increase due to the employment of extra staff required to meet the considerable increase in personnel using the Welfare services of the Centre. The Surplus for the year amounted to £66,022 (1984 - £61,514). This surplus - achieved with the help of various fund-raising activities throughout the year - made it possible for the Centre to honour for another year its obligations to its Bank (Bank of Ireland) with a capital repayment of £65,000 thereby reducing the indebtedness to the Bank to £300,000.

A further liability of the Centre has been loans obtained from Brewers in the early stages of development of the Centre. These loans with interest amounted to £158,547 on 31st December, 1984. During 1985 negotiations were initiated with the Brewers and a satisfactory agreement was concluded. During the year capital repayments of £11,070 were made to the Brewers which with waiving of accrued interest resulted in outstanding loans of £124,750 still for repayment.

The potential of the Centre as a venue for various activities both by day and by night is still far from realised. Considerable efforts were made by publicity both personally and by advertising and some results such as hiring of halls by Theatrical Agencies during the day and Boxing Tournaments with the promise of conference dates are the main results of publicity. This latter is an on-going effort as the concrete results in the form of bookings may take months if not years to materialise.

The following is an analysis of Income received from various sources:

	£	
<u>GRANTS</u>		
London Borough of Camden	35,480	
Irish Government	<u>28,205</u>	
		£63,685
<u>DONATIONS</u>		
Waterford Golf Society	20,000	
London Irish Festival	15,000	
Proceeds of Estates	4,509	
Clare Association	1,300	
Galway Association	600	
Irish Centre Golf Society	600	
Cavan Association	550	
Meath Association	500	
North London Comhaltas	465	
Offaly Association	300	
Leitrim Association	300	
St. Patrick's Church - Soho Sq	250	
Tyrone Association	200	
Ballyorgan Parish	200	

Donations Contd.

	£	
Abbeyfeale Association	200	
Dublin Association	100	
Miss Golden	100	
Sundry (Under £100.00 and Anon)	<u>1,242</u>	
		£46,416
<u>COVENANTS</u>		
Bank of Ireland	5,103	
Allied Irish Banks PLC	5,102	
McCann and Looney	70	
E. Kennedy	<u>50</u>	
		£10,325

CONCLUSION

The summary of the Accounts as outlined paint a very clear picture. We depend for our survival on our grants and fund-raising. To all who contribute we express our thanks. In particular the report records the gratitude to the Centre to Camden Borough Council for the substantial grant given. Never before have we had so much direct financial support from the Irish Government. This is in no small measure due to the interest, involvement and reporting back that is done by our Irish Embassy here in London in relation to our work. To the Irish Ambassador, Mr. Noel Dorr, we express our gratitude. It is only fitting that we express a special word of thanks to the Irish Liaison Officer at the Embassy, Miss Orla O'Hanrahan, for the wonderful work that she has done for the Irish Community and the Irish Centre over the last three years. Orla is returning to Headquarters and we express our good wishes for a happy and successful future.

It is not possible to mention all the people who are deserving of our gratitude. Sometimes the greatest contributions are made 'behind the scenes'. To the multitude of people who never 'get a mention' we also say thank you and ask that you continue to give the Centre your support.

Our final tribute goes to all those great men and women who over the thirty years of our existence have brought us to what we are today.

FR. CLAUDE MALONE, O.M.I.
Director