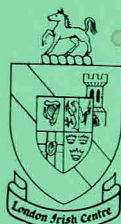


# London Irish Centre

## 35th Annual Report 1989



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Ambassador of Ireland

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# Administration and Staff

President: Rt. Hon. The Earl of Longford  
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Chairman: Mr Tommy Dunne

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Assistant Director: Rev. Dennis Cormican OMI  
Chairman Welfare Advisory Committee: Mr Raymond Heavey  
Member Welfare Advisory Committee: Sr. Carmel McGowan  
Member Welfare Advisory Committee: Mr Anthony Meredith  
Member Welfare Advisory Committee: Dr Larry Morton  
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Social Advice Worker: Ms Theresa McDonagh  
Social Advice Worker: Miss A McDonald  
Social Advice Worker: Mr K Reynolds  
Social Advice Worker: Mr Nicky Murray  
Researcher: Miss Josephine Vaughan  
Administrator: Mr Paddy Keegan  
Missing Persons Section – Volunteer: Mr Brian Duggan  
Receptionist – Volunteer: Ms Mary Kenny  
Youth Leader: Mrs Kathleen Fitzsimons  
Day Centre: Mrs Una Cooper  
and Helpers  
Conway House: Rev. Frank Ryan OMI  
and Assistants  
St Louise's: Sr. Gertrude Gormley  
Sr. Brenda O'Neill



# Message from His Excellency, Mr Andrew O'Rourke, Ambassador of Ireland

I am pleased to have the opportunity of saying a few words about the work of the London Irish Centre charity. Since its inception in 1953, the Irish Centre has continued to extend its charitable work amongst the Irish and the community at large.

The work of the Irish Centre Hostels is well known and today we saw a further extension of this vital activity with the opening of its latest endeavour, An Caislean, housing 20 elderly men. This is in addition to the existing facilities at Conway House catering for 100 young men, and St Louise's in Westminster, where 131 girls are accommodated in pleasant and homely surroundings. Much credit is due to the priests, nuns and staff of the hostels for their dedication to the well being of those seeking their assistance.

The Centre's latest innovation, in association with the migrant training scheme, is the establishment of a training facility which will enable young people to undertake an intensive course in basic computer, word processing and office skills ensuring the participants enhanced job prospects and appropriate financial gain.

The London Irish Centre, under the guidance of the Oblate Fathers, has served the needs of the community, both young and old, for 35 years. All concerned deserve our thanks for their endeavours and our support in facing the challenging times ahead.

Grosvenor Place  
London SW1  
May 23rd, 1990



# Director's Report

It would be pleasing to be able to report that the completion of the Centre's thirty-fifth year saw a lessening of the demand for its services. The contrary is the case.

During 1989 the pressure on all aspects of the Centre continued to increase. This situation reflected the implementation of new social services legislation in the United Kingdom and the continuing emigration from all parts of Ireland.

Our social advice team at Camden Square continued to provide assistance across a wide range of difficulties to a constant stream of callers. The hostels at Kilburn and Victoria operated at capacity throughout the year.

An encouraging aspect of 1989 was the Centre's ability to launch new professional services in the research and training fields. These initiatives were made possible through the generous support provided by Aer Lingus, and by the European Community/London Boroughs Migrant Training Scheme.

Our community services role embraces a wide range of activities including services for the newly arrived and the domiciled Irish. These services include a missing persons bureau, a research unit, and hostels which are the subject of in-depth comment elsewhere in this report. Additionally cultural, educational and traditional activities undertaken include the following:

## **Education Services – Irish Classes**

The Irish Centre has hosted Irish Classes weekly on a regular basis during school term time since 1981, under the auspices of the Inner London Education Authority and Camden Adult Education Institute who appoint and pay tutor fees, other running costs being met by the Centre.

## **Cultural Services – Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann**

We had a busy year hosting the Concert Tour of Britain in February, organising Ceilis and sessions. Most of the musicians in the branch now are second generation Irish and it is a great credit to them and their parents for promoting Comhaltas in all its aspects.

## **Traditional Irish Music Classes**

We can report another successful year and, like last year, a number of our pupils qualified and represented us at the All-Ireland Fleadh, this year held in Sligo. We were able to streamline the classes into individual instruments so that we could all concentrate on the more intricate points of traditional Irish music.



### **The Council of Irish Counties Association**

The Council of Irish Counties Association is a well organised body. Its monthly meetings in the Irish Centre, deal with many aspects of welfare and other matters relating to the County Associations. The Association is responsible for organising the successful St Patrick's Day parade in London.

The CICA jointly with the Irish Centre organises the London Irish Festival. This annual event is held on the first Sunday in July. Monies raised from the festival are donated to support the Centre and to the CICA Trustees who operate the Welfare Section.

### **Centre Shop and Social Club**

The Centre's shop has proved a popular facility since it opened in December 1988. It stocks a range of Irish goods including videos, cassettes and religious articles.

The Social Club organised a variety of enjoyable entertainments in the Centre's halls throughout the year.

Finally, as you are aware the Irish Centre is administered by an Administrative Committee composed of seven lay members who are elected at the AGM and four who are appointed by the President. The Patrons appoint three clerical representatives. The Administrative Committee meet on the second Tuesday of each month to receive reports and to decide policy; the Executive consisting of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary meet with the Director and Administrator on a regular basis to discuss policies in greater depth and ensure the smooth and efficient running of the Centre.

I would like to thank all our social advice workers, those in the Hostels and Day Care Centre, and the staff and volunteers at Camden Square. Without their dedicated commitment we could not provide the services this report describes.

We are grateful to the Irish Government, the Dion Committee, the Borough of Camden, our generous benefactors noted in our financial statement and the many fund raisers for their contributions to the financial resources essential to the smooth running of our services.

Rev Tom Scully, OMI



# Community Services Report

1989 was another busy year for this department. The Centre interviewed 4,500 callers and answered 8,400 telephone enquiries. These 13,900 persons presented assorted problems totalling 23,055.

## Services Provided

Problems:	% Assisted
Accommodation	19.6% (4519)
Food	15.4% (3550)
Employment	12.6% (2905)
Identification	12.6% (2905)
Advice/Counselling	12.6% (2905)
Travel	10.9% (2513)
Other (shower/clothes)	6.1% (1406)
D.S.S.	4.5% (1037)
Repatriation	3.7% ( 853)
Finance	2.0% ( 462)
	<hr/>
	100% 23,055

The above figures are a resumé of statistics collected on the services provided for 1,748 new clients and the 2,952 return callers who called at the centre in 1989. As is clear from the chart above, callers to the centre may have a number of needs requiring assistance. Staff will sit down with clients, discuss their situation and work out the best way of dealing with the problems presented. Clients are encouraged to avail of their rights and take up the services available to them.

A large proportion of our work involves dealing with crisis situations, therefore staff regularly find themselves having to respond to the basic human needs of people, such as finding a roof for the night or staving off hunger. This is necessary before work can begin on less immediate needs, such as finding permanent accommodation, tackling benefit problems or finding appropriate employment.

Accommodation was the single largest problem presented to staff during 1989. Our response depended on the individual situation of clients. The options available to those who are homeless and penniless, invariably in Emergency Nightshelter or Hostel, sometimes we may be able to find a landlord who will take someone without a deposit or rent in advance.

Thirty-one per cent of our clients requested help with identification difficulties. In the majority of cases identification would have been required for the Department of Social Security.



Our main response to these queries would be to send for a Birth or Marriage Certificate. Since the recent benefit changes, Irish people making fresh claims for Income Support face extreme difficulties unless they have a number of forms of official identification (including a Birth Certificate) to support their claim. The staff frequently dealt with people who were refused payment of Income Support despite having a Birth Certificate.

Employment advice and assistance is a service availed of by twelve per cent of clients. The majority would have requested assistance in obtaining labouring work on building sites. This reflects the immediate needs of clients, as labouring work is seen as easily accessible to young unemployed Irish, and payment is usually in cash at the end of the week. Information is provided on site safety and alternatives to labouring work, such as courses run by Migrant Training Scheme or at skill centres, and callers are encouraged to use the phones in the centre to try and get work. Help with travel costs is given, when necessary to get to work the next morning.

Our second-hand clothes store and shower facilities were used by up to six per cent of clients. These were particularly welcomed by the homeless or those living in squats, who wanted to prepare for an interview or just restore some self pride.

Repatriation is often a very lengthy process. Staff have to contact friends/relatives in Ireland to guarantee payment of the fare before we can arrange a travel voucher. Refusal to guarantee payment means we are unable to repatriate a person, so we then have to look at other ways of obtaining help.

### **Changes to the Social Security System**

1989 was yet another year of changes to the Benefit System. For the bureaucrats this system is now more effective and easier to administer, but for the claimants, claiming benefit has become a time consuming bureaucratic task that is almost impossible to comprehend.

The first stage in claiming benefit is to sign on as available for work at the Unemployment Benefit Office. This used to be a relatively straightforward task, but in March 1989 the Unemployment Benefit Office and Job Centres were merged into one. Every new claimant must now be interviewed by a 'New Client Adviser' who works by appointment only and claimants often have to wait up to 5 days for an appointment. Claimants who have not worked and paid National Insurance contributions in the U.K. must claim a means-tested benefit called Income Support. The claim form is issued by the New Client Adviser if he/she is satisfied with the interview.





Then comes the second stage, bringing the claim form to the D.S.S. Here the claimant has to prove their identity by providing documentation that satisfies the officer at that particular office, very often two forms of identification are necessary. Income Support is paid two weeks in arrears, the D.S.S. can issue a crisis payment in the form of a loan but this is very rarely given to single people. Before April 1989 this would be the end of the procedure for people living in Board and Lodgings, or Hostels, but now as the D.S.S. no longer pay accommodation costs to these claimants they have a further hurdle to cross. They have to make a separate claim to the Local Authority for Housing Benefit. This involves a great deal more form filling and sometimes an even longer wait for payment.

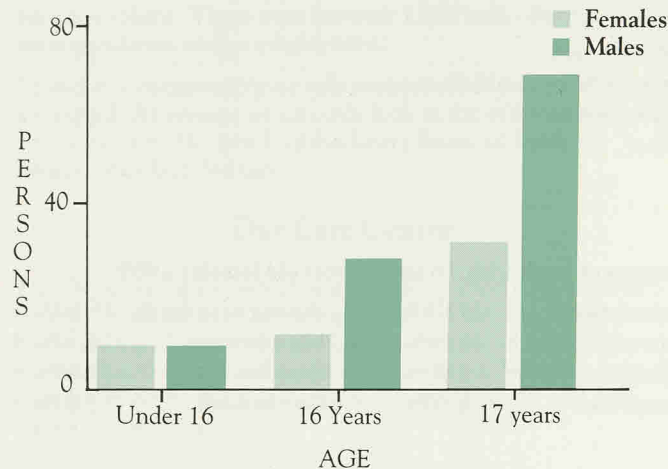
This is the change that has had the greatest affect on our work with clients. Before April 1989 (October 1989 for Hostels) people living in Board and Lodgings or Hostels could receive extra money for meals to cover the costs of eating out. Now these claimants receive the basic rate Income Support from the D.S.S, the rent element of their accommodation costs plus eighty per cent of the rates element are paid by Housing Benefit. They have to pay extra charges (e.g. meals, service charges etc.) from their Income Support. Thus the majority of these claimants are worse off. The worst affected are families who live in bed and breakfast, the majority of which have been placed there by Local Authorities under the Homeless Persons Act 1985.

For some of our clients, especially single men, the task of claiming benefit is so daunting that they either don't bother to start a claim or else they give up after the initial interview. This means having to survive until they find employment and get their wage packet, which very often involves having to rely on friends, relatives, welfare agencies or begging.



## Sixteen and Seventeen Year Olds

In 1989 a total of 151 seventeen year olds and under were seen at the Irish Centre, which accounts for a total of 459 interviews,



reflecting the amount of work involved with this age group. Below is the breakdown of the ages of the clients. Despite the changes in Social Security mentioned previously we still are seeing a large number of 16 and 17 year olds coming over.

Accommodation is presented as the chief problem for these young emigrants, most of them are ill prepared and have very little money which makes the situation all the more difficult.

Emergency hosts and landlords, since the Social Security changes, now view under 18 year-olds as a bad financial risk and many have changed their policy on accepting them. Initially most people stay at Centrepoint, in the case of males thirty-five per cent have stayed there. However, the move on from Centrepoint proves a lot of hard work and constant ringing of hostels to try and find vacancies.

In the case of females we see the pattern that if they have someone to stay with, they fare much better in London and they call to see us for different reasons, i.e. I.D., whereas if they don't have someone to stay with, thirty-one per cent end up here requesting repatriation.

Likewise for males, of the 103 clients seen, 46 requested help with accommodation, and of these 36 stayed at Centrepoint. The other requests were for help with food and travel, and 42 asked for help in finding employment.



	Males	Females
Accommodation	46	14
Employment	42	8
Travel	40	4
Food	34	4
Identification	24	15
General Advice and Information	26	1
Repatriation	16	15
Other	9	

#### Progress of work with 16 and 17 year old females 1989

Repatriation	31.25%	Staying with family	16.60%
Referral to H.P.U.	16.06%	Identification	14.50%
Squatting	2.00%	Students	12.50%
Hostel/Care	4.00%	Live in work	2.00%

The 1988 Social Security and Employment Acts have radically changed the benefit position of 16 and 17 year olds. Generally entitlement to Income Support is withdrawn for this age group. 16 and 17 year olds if unemployed are required to take up a place on a Youth Training Scheme (Y.T.S), however, there is also a limited right to a restricted range of benefits. In March of 1989, following pressure from concerned organisations, changes were introduced to allow 16 and 17 year olds who come under the category "estranged" to apply for benefit.

From 10th July 1989 Income Support entitlements have been extended to young people who "of necessity have to live away from their parents or person acting in place of the parents because: (1) S/he is estranged; (2) S/he is in physical or moral danger; (3) There is a serious risk to his/her physical or mental health".

Also these claimants are to receive the higher rate of benefit, i.e. that of the 18-24 year olds, which is £27.40.

Likewise from April 1989, 16 and 17 year olds who are in or seeking emergency accommodation in a nightshelter should be automatically considered for Income Support under the 'severe hardship' provision, however entitlement to Income Support for the under 18 year olds is extremely limited, and the bulk of cases relate great difficulties in obtaining it.



### Phone Callers

We began listing our *incoming calls* in May 1989. As aforementioned we had 8,400 phone calls presenting many and varied problems. There were however 1,000 calls offering accommodation and/or employment.

To monitor outgoing phone calls is yet another task to be attempted. At present we can only look at the bill which approaches £8,000. Much of this heavy financial burden is because of calls to Ireland.

### Day Care Centre

The Day Care Centre which was opened in 1988 continued to flourish. In addition to providing subsidised lunches Monday to Friday for the 75 members, the Centre organised two highly successful outings to Eastbourne and Southend. With the help of Camden Institute the members also enjoyed keep-fit and craft classes during the year.

### Consultancy

Between newspapers, T.V. stations and researchers phoning us for facts and figures, we calculate we get one enquiry a day on average. Whenever there is a report in Ireland on emigration we get the Irish media phoning for our reaction and for the story from this side. When there is a British report on homelessness we get the same reaction, as the Irish media want our comments on how the report relates to the Irish who are homeless in London.

We rarely have all the answers the media want. Researchers who call in person here are more easily accommodated as they usually are happy to read reports and copies of newspaper articles and do the work themselves. Unfortunately we cannot help them all every time.



# Research Project

In May of 1989 the Centre embarked on a research project which aims to try and establish what opportunities for further education and training might exist, for young Irish immigrants, in the London area. Although the project is orientated towards Irish immigrants, many of the findings will in fact be relevant to all European Community nationals who wish to continue their education or training in London.

While it is obvious that there are an abundance of opportunities for further education in the London Area, several constraints are placed on the young immigrant who wishes to pursue further study on a full time basis. One factor that governs school leavers access to higher education, is the qualifications they have obtained at secondary school. The secondary educational systems in the Republic of Ireland and the UK differ significantly. Therefore, one of the initial concerns of the project was to ascertain how Irish school leavers qualifications were viewed in the UK, in terms of access to higher education.

In the UK no official equivalences are accorded to non-British secondary school qualifications, and third level institutions are free to specify their own course entry requirements for students with "overseas" qualifications. Consequently, the project canvassed 60 London institutions, between Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of further education; in an effort to establish what qualifications an Irish school leaver would be required to have, in order to be admitted to their degree, diploma and certificate courses.

The most pertinent factor determining a young immigrants access to further education is finance. The project enlisted the help of the Department of Education and Science, National Union of Students, Inner London Education Authority and the Education offices of the remaining London Borough Councils, to try and clarify the position of Irish immigrants studying in the UK, in relation to the payment of fees and eligibility for grants. Enquiries to the project indicate that there is considerable confusion about these issues.

Currently the project is identifying the major training initiatives in the London area in which young immigrants might participate. By June of 1990 it is hoped that the project will be in a position to present a comprehensive overview of the possibilities for continuing education and training that exist in London.



# Missing Persons Section

The Irish Centre is the only Irish voluntary organisation working in the field of missing persons. In our work we deal directly with various statutory bodies both at government and local level. We have also built up a very good relationship with other voluntary welfare and advice agencies both here and in Ireland.

The section started the year with a balance of ten cases carried forward from 1988. During 1989 we received a further 102 cases, making a total of 112 cases to be dealt with in 1989.

## Results

- 48 Located by us.
- 9 Returned of own accord.
- 13 Received letters from us through DHSS/NHS. We received no replies.
- 21 Unsuccessful after full enquiries were made.
- 21 Carried forward to 1990.

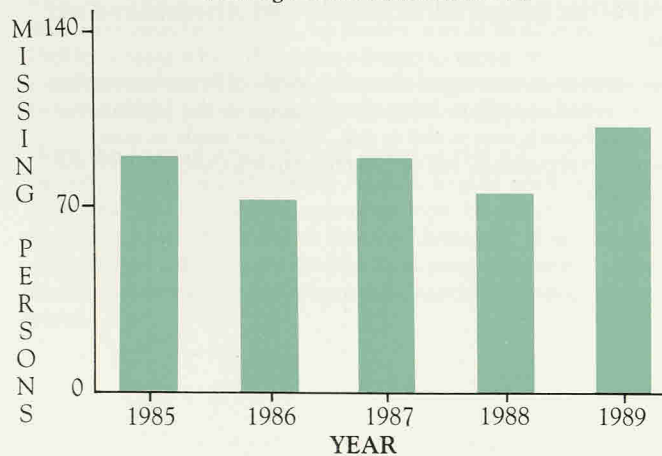
112 TOTAL

## Methods

- 20 Found through DHSS/NHS.
- 18 Found through Irish Centre/Conway House Records.
- 3 Found through Quarterly Bulletin.
- 2 Found through contact with Clergy in Ireland.
- 5 Found through other Agencies

48 TOTAL

Missing Person Cases Received



The work of the section continues to receive a welcome from many sources, especially from those we are able to assist.



# Conway House Hostel

(100 Beds)

In 1989 the Hostel has seen a large number of people fail to get satisfactory accommodation on arrival in London, and many have experienced sleeping out before coming to us. There has been a ten-fold increase in the figures of last year. Hardships were reduced by the fine summer. Many may not be street wise enough to survive in cardboard city. They have to learn fast, or cut their losses and run.

Squatting as an alternative form of accommodation is less attractive now. There are fewer squats available and councils are repossessing them faster. In the past year we have continued to give assistance to people in squats, mainly advice or, where necessary, food.

The rise in homelessness has affected the hostel in an unforeseen way. The hostel was being used as a "drop in" centre for young people needing advice, support and help. Some took advantage and began using friends rooms to sleep.

Helping the marginalised is a demanding and costly ideal. They are a more difficult group to manage and help. We have lost £18,218 in bad debts this year. They have been incurred for the main part from changes to the benefit system.

The National Federation of Housing Associations, Shelter, and other national bodies have warned that the future of hostels is at risk under new legislation. Many are currently in turmoil wondering just how long they can last. For most it is possible to survive by changing the client group and going up-market or entering the field of becoming a care organisation. However, it is inevitable that changes will increase the level of homelessness and crime.

Public opinion is concerned about the levels of homelessness but not concerned enough to bring about change in the legislation. Like other hostels ours is also at risk. We have made as many adjustments as possible, but will just have to wait and see what the future holds.



# Saint Louise's Hostel

(133 Beds)

All the notices around the Hostel at 33 Medway Street, read "Now you are in the heart of London". A privileged position to be in, but costly, people quickly get lost in the crowds. The rush hours, job market, all play a part in the great process of attracting the young and the not so young.

The great shortage of affordable housing, the added anxiety of the Community Charge, the social security reforms, are all a big worry to first arrivals in London. For many sleeping rough is unavoidable. So here at Saint Louise's, the need to meet some of these challenges today, is as great now as when it first began in 1933.

Our catchment area is wide and varied. We do not advertise, however, agencies in Ireland refer girls, banks, Embassy staff, employment agencies, parents who recommend us to their daughters. Some former residents visit to renew contact, and tell their friends. Prison service, single parents, or expectant mothers, the variety and needs are great.

The summer influx of students, when girls book from January onwards, "I was with you in room 141 last year" or "Two of my friends would like to come with me this year, can you take us?" Parents often phone worried about their daughters, coming for the first time, they would feel happy if they were in a secure place. This applies especially to Irish students from June-September. We cannot meet all the demands, but we try and accommodate, or help with alternative plans for all.

For some years students from abroad, outstayed their time, some hanging on for seven, eight, or even nine years. On good grounds, they were away from home, no money, lots of valid reasons. Problems arose when they were advised to move on and leave room for new arrivals. After many meetings, and some aggressive behaviour, the problem has now been resolved peacefully.

With the dawn of a new decade, our priorities will remain as intended from the Irish Centre Hostels: to give priority to Irish girls, first time in London, ages range from 18-24 years with flexibility in length of stay as the need demands. However, other nationalities will be considered for short stays, this we feel is good for many reasons, especially from the Church and caring points of view.





# Facilities and Future Development

Among the enduring, positive characteristics of all aspects of the Irish Centre are movement, change and development. This report provides ample evidence of the impact all three have on the day-to-day activities of the Centre.

Although the Irish Centre Hostels face difficult, uncertain times, the Centre in Camden Square continues to evolve. Over the past year, through a combination of the Centre's on-going development programme and refurbishments, there has been a considerable improvement in the Camden Square facilities.

These improvements include new training/seminar rooms for the migrant training scheme, and attractive banqueting facilities in both the Kennedy and McNamara Halls.

The Day Care Centre continues to flourish and now provides facilities second to none in the area.

The office accommodation and chapel have been relocated within the Centre and now occupy much improved premises.

Office accommodation has been provided for the Federation of Irish Societies.

While it is appropriate that this Annual Report should primarily be concerned with reporting on the recent achievements of the Centre, it is fitting that the report should conclude with a look to the future, and we are pleased to report that further improvements are in hand, including the introduction of outreach work, to ensure the Centre continues to develop in response to the needs of the community it serves.

The Irish Centre is grateful to Patrick Lennon Associates, who have given their services free of charge, for co-ordinating the production of this report.  
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