

THE COUNCIL OF THE IRISH CENTRE

51/52 Camden Square, London NW1 9XB

NINETEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

For the year
ending
31st Dec 1973

1973 was a year of definite progress for the Centre. Many of the problems that were hanging over the Centre for years, and to which answers were not too readily available in the past, were tackled and definite decisions were taken. We trust in God that our decisions were correct and that we have taken the right course.

Alongside this, the ordinary everyday running of the Centre seems to have gone exceptionally well. The improved financial trend that started two years' ago in a very small way, has continued and gathered momentum, so that this year's figures look very encouraging indeed. It is a tribute to the various groups and committees concerned in the running of the Centre that everything has dovetailed so well, and that the nett result of this co-ordinated effort has been so satisfactory.

In the past year our relationship with the local community has greatly improved. The local Tenants' Association continued to use the Centre as a meeting place, to which they are very welcome. Now the local Liberals hold regular meetings here. After Christmas, a very successful social function for the local neighbourhood association was held in the Douglas Hyde Lounge. To many of these people the Centre was a complete mystery - they had often passed the door but never ventured in - now they realise that we too are human and that we are interested in the local community in which we live and willing to play our part. This is a development we hope will continue to grow in the years ahead.

On one or two occasions we had complaints of noise, people talking in the street rather late after functions in the Centre. This is something our members must be careful about and show due consideration for other people who may have to rise early for work the following morning.

I. SUMMARY OF WELFARE REPORT

For a detailed analysis of the work done by the Welfare Office in 1973 please consult the Welfare Report. There are however one or two striking features in the Report. It is difficult to explain that at a time when emigration is very much on the decline, that our figures for 1973 are greater than for either 1971 or 1972. The numbers coming to the Centre in 1973 totalled 1,760 against 1,243 for 1971; or 1,383 for 1972. This refers to single people and does not include families.

It adds further to the problem, when we receive from the Department of Employment in Dublin every month, lists of job vacancies in Ireland, for which they are trying to recruit labour. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the Centre is becoming better known; also that a very high proportion of those coming over, come to the London area. It also has a bearing on the problem that the job vacancies are usually for skilled and experienced labour, while nearly all the labour potential coming over is young unskilled men. In the tables of the Welfare Report there are alarming figures. Dublin - 512; Cork - 383; Limerick - 99. The vast majority of these are young unskilled men without visible means of support.

This is not making the work of the Centre any easier, and we intend to draw the attention of the Authorities to it at the Easter Congress in Dublin.

In so far as was possible, the vast majority of these were found both employment and accommodation. A very creditable performance.

II. HOSTELS

As you see from the Financial Report, the income under Hostel Accommodation has increased from £9,504 for 1972 to £14,200 for 1973. This is largely due to the fact that the Girls' Hostel was completely renovated the previous year, and was in full use during 1973. It was not due to any increase in charges. The Girls' Hostel is continuing to operate very smoothly under the able guidance of Sr. Thecla. We thank her for her dedicated work during the year.

In our Report last year we mentioned the problem of the Boys' Hostel. Now we are glad to report that this problem has been unexpectedly solved. It was just providence that Hope House came on the market, and the goodness of the Holy Family Sisters in selling the property to us at a reasonable price, that finally solved the problem. Negotiations for the purchase of the property opened in August 1973 and the transfer of deeds was completed on 31st January 1974.

No mention of the Welfare Department in the Irish Centre would be complete without special reference to Dr. L. Morton. For years he has been the mainspring activating the operation. His constancy and fidelity deserves our lasting thanks and appreciation. This year he was joined by Fr. Hackett and Mr. Bradley who formed a welfare sub-committee, and the new style monthly report to the Administrative Committee which has been much appreciated, is only the first fruits of their deliberations. We look forward to their continuous help and guidance. This year saw the arrival of Miss Joan Galvin, who together with Sr. Anne Marie perform the day to day running of the Welfare Office. We congratulate them on the task they have performed.

III. IRISH CENTRE CLUB

The popularity of the Centre as a social club continues to increase. The attendance at the various functions and entertainment provided show no appreciable sign of falling off at a time of great economic stress coupled with the fuel crisis, which could have been expected to have an adverse effect. This is largely due to the loyalty of our ordinary club members; to the various county and other Irish organisations and associations who have made the Centre their natural headquarters and give loyal support to all our functions.

To the Irish Centre Club Committee we owe a deep debt of gratitude for their fidelity during the year. Three times every week they run the Bingo Sessions and organise other functions to assist the Centre. The Old Age Pensioners' Party held after Christmas was one of the outstanding successes of the year. Coupled with this the cultural activities in the Centre have flourished during the year. The Paddy Crean School of Irish Dancing every Monday night, attracts a very large number of children. Tommy Maguire continues with the traditional Irish music classes for children, and we must congratulate him on the absolutely outstanding number of trophies won by his pupils both in England and in Ireland during the year. This year's Junior Fleadh Cheoil organised by Comhaltas almost doubled on the previous year in competitors & attendance.

the problem was to get enough space to run all the competitions.

Anyone who attended the Albert Hall Concert this year will have seen the wonderful improvement in the Irish Centre Brass Band. It is only on occasions like this that one is compensated for the amount of noise that takes place in the Centre every Sunday morning during practise sessions.

Special mention must be made of the staff in the Centre. Mr. & Mbs. Michael Lahiffe were appointed as Manager and Manageress during the year, and since their appointment there has been a complete transformation. The whole atmosphere of the place has changed. One has only to look at the increased popularity of the supper dances to realise that the standard has gone up, as well as cleanliness and better organisation all round. It should also be put on record that since Michael and Norah took over, our Stock Sheets month by month have been without failure "absolutely correct". We appreciate their work and would like to express our sincere thanks to them and their staff.

IV. FINANCE

The accounts show our liabilities have decreased by £26,373 to £36,177, while our fixed assets have increased by £2,685 to £145,870.

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 our properties.

In reviewing the reliability of our sources of revenue, it will be noted that the total received during the year from covenants, collections and donations, together with surplus on revenue account, amounted to an overall surplus of £28,570. This was a major factor in the reduction of our liabilities.

Covenants:

Arthur Guinness & Co.	£946	
M.J.Gleeson & Co.	105	
Burke, James	100	
Brunton, M.J.,	100	
Kennedy, L.,	50	
Sundry	8	
	<hr/>	£1,309

The following Boroughs gave donations:-

Camden	2,500	
Islington	100	
Kensington & Chelsea	100	
	<hr/>	£2,700

Donations:-

Irish Bishops' Fund	9,670	
His Eminence Cardinal Heenan	1,000	
Anonymous	1,000	
Anonymous	750	
Roscommon Assoc.	115	
Clare "	100	
Monaghan "	100	
Leitrim "	100	
Cavan "	100	
Mayo "	50	
Armagh "	25	
	<hr/>	£13,010

c/f

Donations total-	b/fwd	£13,010	
St. Patrick's Day Bankers Order		327	
Sundry Amounts		<u>1,693</u>	£15,030
Charity Walk		1,122	
Appeals & Royal Albert Hall		<u>911</u>	£ 2,033

We express our gratitude to all these contributors who have given us such valuable financial assistance during the year.

We also express our gratitude to our Auditors, Messrs. C.F. Burton & Co., represented by Mr. T. Brennan. To Mr. P.J. Keegan, our Honorary Accountant, an especial expression of thanks for his devoted and steadfast service to the Centre over the years. His guidance is one of the Centre's greatest assets due to his expertise and fidelity, and we must record our gratitude to him.

CHANGES DURING THE YEAR

Mr. Charles Gallagher and Cllr. Brian Duggan both resigned from the Administrative Committee during the year, due to pressure of work. Mr. William Darmon returned to Ireland to take up an appointment. We thank them for their arduous work on behalf of the Centre.

Fr. Tom McCabe OMI has been recalled to Ireland to help train a new generation of Oblates. He was a good methodical worker and we wish him luck in his new appointment. His place has been taken by Fr. Patrick Carolan OMI. We welcome him to the Centre and feel that he has a great contribution to make in running our new mens' hostel. Already he has buckled down to the work and we have no doubt that he will make a success of this very difficult task. He will be assisted by Bro. P. Regan OMI, to whom we also say 'welcome'.

We are very pleased to welcome Fr. O'Herlihy, Director of the Emigrant Chaplains, and the Representatives of Comhaltas Coeltori who are present as a result of the resolution passed at the last year's AGM.

APPRECIATION

Our sincere thanks are due to all our patrons who have supported us during the year. To the many voluntary workers who helped in the cleaning and redecorating of the Centre. To the young man from the Hostel who papered the Lounge and made such an ideal selection in the colour scheme - always a bit of a problem. To the Clare Association for re-painting the boys' dining room and the kitchen. To all who made such a wonderful job of redecorating the green room. To all the volunteers who man the Reception Desk after hours and make possible a 16 hours per day service at the Centre. To the Council of Irish Counties and all other organisations and individuals who have contributed to the success of the various functions held in the Centre - the Xmas Bazaar; the Summer Fair; the Albert Hall Concert; and the Charity Walk which netted £1,122 last year; to all we say a sincere thank you.

Lastly to Fr. Sheridan OMI and Fr. Carolan OMI - thanks for the co-operation and loyal support.

"LOOKING FORWARD"

At the commencement of this Report, we stated that 1973 was a year of decisions:

1. Hope House Convent and Nursing Home was purchased from the Holy Family Sisters at a cost of £150,000. The official take-over of the property was on 31st January 1974. The official opening was on 27th March.

The property was purchased through the Irish Centre Housing Association. This facilitated obtaining a Mortgage from the Borough of Camden and may also be of benefit if further grants become available in future.

The funding of the project was as follows:-

Total Cost:	£150,000.
Recd. from Episcopal Commission for Emigrants.(i.e. from Nat. Collection)			£75,000
Mortgage from London Borough of Camden	£87,249

2. The Lease of the Adjoining Property from British Rail was acquired. This was also obtained through the Centre Housing Association at a cost of £50,000. The purchase price was loaned to the Centre by Allied Irish Banks.

Due to Hope House, the whole position must now be re-considered - this we are in the process of doing.