

## AUTOHISTORY by Seoirse Ó Broin

I Left Belfast in August 1937. My parents, sister and girl friend saw me to the boat at the docks near Queens Bridge. There were lots of tears. I kissed all the ladies including the girlfriend whom I never met again. The steamship took 7 hours to Heysham, and the train 7 hours to London. My uncle met me at Euston station and brought me to their house at Enfield Lock in North London. Although it was lovely there the distance to the Savings Bank in Blythe Rd. was rather long. It meant getting up at 6 a.m. get in by 9 a.m. steam train to Liverpool St., the Underground to High St. Kensington, and a walk of a mile after that. No doubt the exercise did me good. Going by train there were 4 classes of compartments:- 1st. 2<sup>nd</sup>. 3<sup>rd</sup>. and Ladies. One day I nearly missed the train and the ladies pulled me into their compartment. I didn't half blush at their smiles.

People could not easily afford cars in those days and there were lots of horses and carts on the roads as well. One thing that amused me was the ice cream cycle vans--Eldorado and Walls. I had only seen them in comics before! In Belfast the ice cream was sold loose in "sliders" and "pokes" from a horse and van, but in London it was usually packaged. There were four rail companies-L.M.S., L.N.E.R., G.W.R. & S.R. Many of the double-decker buses were open on top. Trams were the means of travel from Victoria southwards, Hammersmith westwards and outwards. When the trams got up speed they made a loud whine, which was later found comforting during the air raids.

Quite a number of people were poor and unemployed. The Jarrow march took place in that era. Irish workers were resented because they were employed at a lower pay rate by Mc Alpine's and Wimpey. Strangely enough many landladies liked the Irish because they felt their money was reliable and they were not so choosy about their comfort and amenities.

My digs at Ashchurch terrace, Askew Rd. with a widow and her daughter in the upper half of the house at 22 s/6d B&B and Evening meal with full meals at the weekend were reasonable. The landlady was quite nice but they found it embarrassing when her daughter started courting in front of a 16 year old and my bedroom was too cold to sit in. The man downstairs was a freemason who was keen to get me to join his brotherhood. They were very curious about an Irish Catholic which was unusual for them. The meals were good.

At work I could buy a midday meal with sweet for less than a shilling including service. The service was by ladies dressed up like "Nippies" & cost 1d. per meal. The main dish was 4d. veg 2d each and 2d for sweet with a penny extra for tea. My salary for the first year was £85. The outgoings were 22/6 for digs 3/- for fares, razor blade 1d (which lasted about 3 months) laundry 2/6, céilí 1/- "pictures" 6d and small amounts for soap, pen, stamps and notepaper. I managed to save the return fare to Belfast for Christmas which was £2/14s. The journey was none too comfortable.

When I arrived back in Belfast the small houses amused me. Of course having a job in London was elitist even amongst the Protestant neighbours. Jobs were scarce then.

In January I was in new digs in a boys hostel, the Westminster Catholic Club at St. Georges Sq. run by an English priest Father Charles Carr. There was an ex-Indian army widow as housekeeper who kept very firm discipline with some kindness. Sometimes I helped out with the washing up, "Lux flakes" were generally used in those days so the dishes and pots had to be well rinsed. The upper-class English sat around the priest at meals, Irish and working class Northerners at other tables. Father Carr was very friendly with the manager of C&As and got a number of well-dressed boys jobs in that shop in Oxford St. I found out about the Céilí at the Cumann Gaelach at Brook Green, Hammersmith, which had a very Irish profile. We often went to the speakers corner in Hyde Park, rowed on the Serpentine, and played football in Battersea Park. After my boy scout experience I made contact with the Baden-Powell troop in Westminster Cathedral and went camping with them in Essex in my Irish uniform which was unique. They were too English for me so I left, and I passed on my uniform to a boy in Belfast.

I learned some ballroom dancing in the Westminster Catholic Club.

The IRA campaign in London started in 1938, and some people in the Cumann Gaelach were involved, a few were arrested and others deported. I even got to know the chap who was alleged to have put the bomb on Hammersmith Bridge and was sentenced to 20 years prison. A school friend of mine was also sentenced for placing explosives in letterboxes. My roommate an Irish Scot and myself were sympathetic with the cause but not necessarily with the means. Only by reading the papers did we learn what people we knew did. But a large number of people including civil servants were deported. One of the chaps I knew was lucky and got a job with a bank in Ireland after being deported.

Tarlach Ó hUíde was a member of the Cumann Gaelach.

Although born in London of Protestant parents, he learned Irish at Conradh na Gaeilge. He became involved in activities and wrote a book in Irish "Cois mo shealbha" about his experiences. He spent some time in Crumlin Rd Jail and later became editor of the Gaelic newspaper "Inniu".

The Spanish Civil War caused a lot of arguments at work. Many union members were communists and used to promote the Unity Theatre. Of course Communism was anathema to me then. I can remember joining the Anti-Godless march from Southwark to Westminster Cathedral.

Then the Young Christian Workers came on the scene and I was recruited as a member. The training in the See, Judge and Act principles was healthy to help the workers in Christ's name. Pat Keegan stayed at 98 St. Georges Sq. and was a lively propagandist. He was the first layman to partake in the Vatican Council and helped to get evening Masses introduced and brought work into the Offertory liturgy of the Mass.

I attended the Concert and an allnight Céilí of the Gaelic league in the Queens Hall, 4 Regent St. on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1939. At 6 in the morning we had a meal in an Italian restaurant nearby of "ravioli home-made" for the first time.

The declaration of war on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September was very sinister with air-raid sirens blaring. We were immediately issued with gas masks. My roommate Andrew from Glasgow left his job in the Post Office telephones and went to Dublin trying to join the Irish Army but was not accepted. His father wrote to the Post Office to have him reinstated saying he did a rash act without thinking. They took him back and strangely enough his job was reserved and he was not called up. Blackout started, no lights to be visible at nighttime. Even the underground had tins over neon lamps. Rations started because of the danger to ships. We had to get used to margarine, bread puddings, scrambled dried eggs and less sugar and meat.

Of course I began to take an interest in young ladies, had many dates and learnt modern dancing, the proper "seoinín".

In 1940 when Germany occupied France, the airraids on London started and it was very frightening. At first we all went down to the basement of the house. But soon I got used to it and went upstairs to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and had a good night's sleep. It was dangerous outside because of the shrapnel caused by the guns. We still supported the céilí every week, although one night I had to take refuge in Victoria bus station, because it was so rough outside.

One had either to do air-raid duty or home guard. They put me in the home guard at work which I did not relish, two hours on and four hours off during the night, and straight to work the next morning. Nevertheless I had to enlist later for the services and was chosen for the RAF which was better than the other two services.

I kept diaries. We started Céilí in the Hostel, Irish and Scottish dancing. We had some of Frank Lee's Céilí records and some sheet music. Father Carr was a good pianist and used to play for us sometimes accompanied by a Father Moriarty on the drums. The authorities were

suspicious of the Irish records and music I bought in Smithfield Market in Belfast in case they were coded. It took a long time to convince them.

Medway St. girls hostel used to supply the girls and it was great fun. There was even a movie made of the céilí. The Sister in charge of the hostel was annoyed at their late homecoming, and the noise of the boys seeing them back safe, and rang up Father Carr who informed her that people are only young once. 11 o'clock was the locking up time at the hostel in Medway St. Father Carr was highly amused at the situation.

One tragedy happened at the door of Medway St. A Belfast girl, Ena Traynor, was hit by shrapnel and had to have her leg amputated and another girl called Connelly had to have a steel plate inserted in her hip after a bomb fell outside the hostel. Ena was transferred to Belfast in the civil service. Her brother, Joe, died some years ago in Chesterfield after being transferred from London.

Among the people staying in the St. George's Sq. hostel was a chap from Newry, Michael Mc Loughlin who went back to join the Irish Army. He was killed in an accidental explosion in Imaal. Bob Walsh of the "Catholic Worker" and Jim Whelan of the "Cork Examiner" lodged there. Some of the inmates became fighter pilots. Eddie Sullivan from Bangor rose to high rank in the Foreign Office as consul in The Hague. A German lad living in the hostel was interned, he seemed to have radio equipment when war commenced. A Liverpool Irish lad Joe Ryan reached a very high position in Post Office management. At work a friend of mine Paddy Manson got the Military Medal as Major in the Army and married an Irish girl he met at the Céilí. He became Postal Controller in N.Ireland, and held the job as a Catholic with liberal views. I remember one time he was questioned before the war about his diary which had phone numbers of suspected people in London and he warned me about keeping names in diaries. One famous person who worked in the PO Savings Bank was Michael Collins. He worked in the Daily Balancing branch. His sister who lived in 5 Netherwood Rd worked there until she retired about 1937. Her rank was Higher Clerical Officer and she actually was granted special paid leave to give a lecture about her brother in the USA. The authorities could never find a photo of Michael Collins during the Anglo-Irish war. I knew the only Englishman who was invited to the party after the treaty. His name was Phillimore, and was a buddy of Collins when he worked at Blythe Rd. According to the Gaelic League records, Collins was nominated for the Ardchoiste but turned down because he had not enough Irish. In Claverton St. in 1939 I met a woman who had a date with Michael in Hyde Park.

During the war I was diverted going to work by unexploded bombs. The Savings Bank was only hit once by a small bomb and nobody was killed but a pub nearby was hit and many were killed. Irish workers were encouraged to come to England because most of the English young men were called up. At the same time Irish neutrality was constantly criticised, and De Valera was the bogey man. Many of the doctors and nurses were Irish also firemen. As English lads joined up early we became more noticeable.

Another chap who worked under me called Dyson was married to a sister of Cathal Brugha. He told me that De Valera offered him a good job in Ireland which he didn't accept possibly because he was English. An Irishman in the civil service gets to know a lot about people working for him.

Even today a lot of commissionaires outside government buildings are Irish. I found my work boring at times and did not always get on with those above me because of my unorthodox ideas and scorn of formality. I was never a "toady" which was a common trait in the civil service.

One Irishman in later years got to the height of principal, a Mr. Coghlan from Cork. His son became a priest in the Westminster diocese.

An Englishman, Norman Cotton, who worked under me, told me that when he was in the army during the war in Belfast he went with a friend to the Broadway cinema on an Easter Sunday.



He was greatly surprised when Hugh Mc Ateer the IRA chief held up the cinema and read the Proclamation of 1916. The same chap had a small Jazz band and he was hired to play at a birthday party in Kruger's house in Ruislip, being unaware that the Krugers were to be arrested as Russian spies. One of the girls who attended the céilithe at Brook Green was a sister of the Callaghan who was shot by the RUC at Hannastown, Belfast in 1940.

I also knew a Glasgow chap who lived in St. George's Sq. who became a conscientious objector over Ireland and was gaoled. He was treated very roughly and died of TB in prison. I was called up on the 13<sup>th</sup>. September 1941 and kitted out in Padgate, Lancs., the civilian clothes were sent home. My square-bashing was in Morecambe. The church in Morecambe was St. Patricks. It is believed that St. Patrick landed at Heysham where there is an ancient church dedicated to him. I tasted nettle beer for the first time in Heysham. Even in Morecambe I met an Irish girl who went to the céilí in Hammersmith, she was transferred there in the civil service.

Nearly all the letters were censored. I wrote to people in Belfast and this caused enquiries because one of these, Nora Bradley, had been deported from London. I mentioned people I met at céilithe and on holiday. Another victim of these enquiries was a chap in the YCW (Young Christian Workers) in Ardoyne who did not know any of my friends. They thought the YCW was a subversive movement. Another was called down in the office, he worked in the civil service. He had been transferred to Belfast mainly because his father was a retired RIC man. He was questioned about the others and felt most embarrassed. My next-door Protestant neighbour in Belfast was also questioned about my connections. She said my parents were decent people. It just shows one how thorough the security was.

I was posted awaiting the wireless course to an active flying station, Topcliffe, Yorkshire where many of the bombers failed to return from raids. They were Armstrong-Whitleys also called "Flying Coffins" because they were too slow. This station had a sad atmosphere about it. I had a friend in Harrogate and went to visit her. I could not get a bus back and thumbed a lift in a lorry. Unfortunately the lorry crashed into a stationary bus in the blackout near Dishforth and I landed up in Harrogate hospital with chest concussion. I convalesced at Knaresborough at Christmas where Lord Mackintosh personally gave each of us a tin of his toffees, a luxury in wartime.

In the New Year I was posted surprisingly to Belfast to learn wireless theory in the "Tech". We were billeted in the Presbyterian War Memorial Hostel just opposite the Tech in Donegall Sq. Occasionally I slept at home, and broke "bounds" by going up the Falls Rd. in civvies to a céilí. Of course I brought my friends to a meal or party. I often met my old friend Nora Bradley who was very fond of me. She even came to the RAF dances (cheek of it). Some people managed to leave London when the war started and got jobs in Belfast. On May the 12<sup>th</sup>. 1942 I was posted to Filey, Yorkshire, on a backers-up course, how to throw bombs and fire machine guns. The seaside resort was nice.

After that I was moved to South Kensington for the second part of the wireless course, which took place in the museums. I was billeted in Albert Court, luxury mansions behind the Albert Hall. Discipline was a bit cruel there and the boys rebelled throwing their delph mugs down the staircase alley in the evenings and clapping when they broke at the bottom. They even sang Deutschland Uber Alles marching down Exhibition Rd. The Group Captain heard of it and duly had the drillsergeant removed. He was politely told that he was dealing with intelligent men. Part of our recreation was swimming in the Serpentine in Hyde Park. I went to the céilithe in Brook Green again. A Scots lad asked if he could come to the céilí with us. He came and married an Irish girl he met there and learnt a bit of Irish. Irish classes continued during the war. We could be out until 23.59 p.m. and I was mostly at Irish events. I managed to have a holiday in Belfast.

In October myself and some céilí friends were posted to Padgate for embarkation abroad. We spent evenings at Craobh Oisín in Manchester and introduced the Eight-Hand Jig. We were kitted out for India in Blackpool and left for India from Greenock on the 13<sup>th</sup>. December 1942. The Troopship was called the "Britannic". It went far out in the Atlantic in a large convoy with destroyers circling around it. The ocean was very rough and nearly everyone was sick. There were 3000 on board, I slept in a hammock and someone was sleeping under me on a table. We had to wear a life-jacket during the day, and I wrote "Eire go brath" on mine. A Scots soldier began speaking Gaelic to me and I was made welcome to their Gaelic sing-songs with the Seaforth Highlanders. We spent Christmas on the cold Atlantic and the dinner was severely rationed.

[For a fuller version of the Journey and Experiences in India, please refer to my Irish article "Cos I ndá Champa".]

The convoy to India travelled around Africa. There was a stop at Freetown harbour, Sierra Leone where provisions were taken aboard. The next stop was Durban where we stayed in a camp in tents for 10 days. We were transferred to a Polish ship called the "Pulaski", which had to leave the convoy due to a broken boiler. We had to do our washing with salt-water soap. We stopped in Diego Suarez bay Madagascar to obtain fresh water. A single gunboat escorted us to Mombasa across a dangerous straits for U-boats. We changed to a boat called the "Dominion Monarch" and reached India in February 1943.

I spent 3¼ year in India which I found most interesting. I wrote some letters and airgraphs in Irish which had to be censored in Bombay. I met many Irish priests and nuns, and was especially friendly with the Redemptorists in their seminary in Bangalore. A Father Magner from Limerick used to speak in Irish to me. At the end of the war I met three Irish priests who were released from internment in Mandalay under the Japanese. One of them escaped from a Japanese prison, a Father Dooley, but on seeing he had no chance of reaching the Allied lines he climbed a tree and waited until a Japanese soldier rested under it, and then dropped on him and knocked him out. When the soldier came to, he surrendered and was taken into custody again. They were eventually treated as neutrals, which meant a limited internment. A Father Walsh wanted to show his Irishness by reciting the Hail Marys at the end of Mass in Irish. He intended to return to Burma so he asked me for the Salve Regina in Irish. Fortunately I had a simple prayer book in Irish which I gave him.

I left India in April 1946 and returned by the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. I was posted to an aerodrome in Ouston near Newcastle-upon-Tyne before demob. I met an old friend, Pat Byrne (alias "Tiny" because he was 6ft.4inches in height). There were céilithe all round Newcastle. The main céilí was at the Tara club in Griffin Arcade and they were very fussy about admitting people who were strangers. They did various dances I have not seen elsewhere such as the Glencar Reel

After Demob I spent leave in Belfast and got to know Glún na Buaidhe, and obtained the Fáinne from Domhnall Mac Grianna, a brother of the famous writer "Máire". Back in London I lived in Belgrave Rd. for a while and then Grosvenor Rd. in the Pimlico area. When the "Garryowen" took over the building in Brook Green Rd. the Cumann Gaelach moved to the Servite Hall, Fulham. One interesting person I met there was May Hennessey who worked for a while in the British Embassy under David Kelly in Stalin's time. She was very Irish in sentiment and loved céilí dancing. In those early days Mick Sullivan was MC at the céilithe. He was very good at reciting Carmody's car, and the Trimmings of the Rosary, and took part in plays. He went to Gatwick to work, where he also organised céilithe which we attended occasionally. Later he went out to Rhodesia to follow Jack Birmingham. Joe Kelly took over as chairman after him.

I took part in Gaelic League events. The Gaelic League was kept alive during the war by a number of elderly academics, who did not organise many activities for young people. Muiris Ó

Conaill, a Corkman, was president and was also secretary of the Irish Texts Society. He had a very "proper" sort of attitude about Irish and did not welcome newcomers with openness. Con Brosnachan was Secretary of the league and lived at Forest Gate. Brian Brooks or Brian Bán was treasurer, a very likeable person. Irish classes were held in 10 John St., Theobalds Rd. and the Argyll St. school at Kings Cross. There was a Fáinne group run by Áine Nic Niocláis. Newcomers from Ireland found the set-up a bit strict and inflexible. There was also a political strain, the older people were not as republican as the new arrivals. Áine Nic Niocláis was Féis secretary in 1947. I taught an Irish class and also played a large part in organising the 1948 Féis as secretary. I also ran outings to the country, where hikes were about 10 miles and most enjoyable. The Irish Press and the Cork Examiner used to publicise them in advance. John St., the headquarters of the Gaelic league was a very busy place and had an excellent library. Because of the lack of activities like céilithe the league used to find it difficult to pay its way.

I think the new Ardchoiste took over on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 1947. Anne Brady became the new secretary and Danny Martin from Fanad, Co. Donegal was made President, and Maurice Crilly treasurer. Strange enough there were not enough Irish speakers to enable the Ardchoiste to operate in Irish. Chris Forde only had a little Irish although he was a good organiser. Mick and Matt Broderick were fluent speakers. We had to broadcast our activities by leaflets given out at churches after Mass. These were printed by the Woodgrange Press which transferred from Forest Gate to St. Marks Rd. Notting Hill. The old Gaelic League blocks were very colourful. The Féis and concerts used to make certain people famous while the Gaelic League itself was short of money. We planned a programme and managed to get a little sum from the Irish Government. The céilidhe on St. Patrick's day was in Holborn Hall in 1947. James Johnson, the opera singer, sang a couple of songs.

I was often MC at the céilithe and Féiseanna. Regarding the Féiseanna, although dancing competitions took up most of the time, much more attention was given to drama, singing and musicians in the early days. We had a hard job getting adjudicators, the early dancing adjudicators were Peadar O' Rafferty and Alice Mc Aleer from Belfast. A Miss Moore who was a ballet dancer, adjudicated one Féis and it is to her greatest achievement that she gave a prize to Terry Bowler whose big feet kept him back before. There were many disputes after that Féis. During the war Máire Sheehan was the London champion dancer. After the war Cathal Smith and Paddy Crean were successive champions Ted Cavanagh was another winner. Margaret Kehoe (now Mrs. Hayes) was the chief violinist and Bill Rollinson, an Englishman played the piano. An O'Sullivan from the Victoria direction, who always had a whiskey bottle in his pocket, was also a good violinist. Paddy Taylor played the piccolo.

To digress a little, Larry O'Dowd from Sligo used to play the bagpipes also the Piano Accordion, although he could not read music. He used to play for the dances at the Galway Club at Camden Town. Another friend of mine an English girl with a Scottish mother, Angela, who was about 22 at the time, used to play the piano in the Galway Club, I can be blamed for introducing her to Irish dance music and giving her books of the music.

In 1947 I lived with the Gouldings for a while in Grosvenor Rd. Pat Goulding, the man of the house learned the Uilleann Pipes and had a number of lessons from Leo Rowsome who came to the house. His eldest daughter, Pat, was a wonderful piano player. The other daughter Sheila is now Mc Aleer after marrying Alice Mc Aleer's brother and is now a noted Irish dance adjudicator in Luton. Her mother died in October 1987, ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam.

The Drama section of the Féis was well supported. We managed to get Frank O'Donovan as adjudicator one year when we had three-act plays in Irish. The Féis venues were Argyll St., St. Monica's hall, Seaton Place, and somewhere in Holborn.

I suffered a breakdown in 1947 and thought my world was finished, but not so. I still kept up my Irish contacts and they brought me back to high jinks again.



Captain Alan Saul late of Bomb Demolition in the Army during the war came to my Irish classes in John St. He was a deep republican in view point and was on the prisoners welfare organisation. His father was a church minister in Tipperary, and he sent Alan to Oxford, which showed in his rather "posh" accent. This accent stopped him from getting a good "blas" on his Irish but he could always impress in company, especially among the upper-class English. When Billy Butlin came to the St. Patrick's day céilí he was a useful entertainer to his party. Irish dancers were invited to perform at the Butlins concert in the Albert Hall, much to the disgust of purists in the Gaelic League.

When the Lane pictures disappeared from the National Gallery, Saul's flat was a safe sanctuary, so you could say he was responsible for their partial return to Ireland. He always turned out proudly at the St. Patrick's Day parade in his saffron kilt. He played the bagpipes but was not a musician. His vocal rendering of "Amhrán na bhFiann" was usually a discordant bass from everyone else. I must say he liked his beer and women, and had no difficulty even at a senior age. He was a director consultant in the reinforced concrete business. When he retired he spent his summer in the Gaeltacht at Ballygall in the Dingle peninsula and his winter in Acapulco in Mexico. In his will he left £9,000 to the Gaelic League in Belfast.

Mick Tighe, born in Dagenham was another character in my Irish class. I brought him to Rannafast in 1948 with two others. Mick was a lively supporter of every worthwhile Irish event until his separated English wife caught up with him. Then he was too ashamed to come back. We all loved him. Louis Byrne from Dalston was another London born stallward, who was very loyal. He was an expert flute player but rather tiring in his conversation where he seemed to find all the difficulties and snags in the world. He worked on the Salad Bowl in the Lyons Corner House at Piccadilly. We all loved him too.

The Gaelic League in 1947 or 1948 chartered a plane from Luton to go to Newport in the Isle of Wight to perform a Fáinne examination of the Prisoners in Parkhurst. Three representatives of the Gaelic league went including Danny Martin and Mick Broderick. We had big ideas then and even made inquiries about chartering a pleasure boat to go to France to visit Fontenoy. Fortunately or not the number required was quite large to fill a steamer.

Maire Doyle of Hereford Rd. Bayswater and Mary King were very active in the Prisoners welfare organisation. Mary's sister Peggy (now Sheehan) was for many years Secretary of the Gaelic League.

Danny Martin of Fanad was President after Muirís Ó Conaill. He was a native speaker but could not write Irish very well. He worked as a cabinet maker for London Transport and assembled his own television set in 1950. I lived in his house in Isleworth for a while at Isleworth and I can assure you that the set worked well. He was paralysed with polio after the war and managed to fight his way out of it leaving only a weak knee. He managed to get a good job at Valencia Observatory and transferred to Cahirciveen in 1951. Later I heard he had his own business in Cork.

In 1950 the céilíthe were held in St. Annes hall, Seaton Place. The priest was a great fan of ours. The parish was very small and we helped out with the finance. From then on until the area was redeveloped the continued every week and féiseanna were held there also. Denis Lyons of Cork became president on May the 27<sup>th</sup>. 1951 (as a distraction here may I mention that I attended a dance in the Blarney Club, Tottenham Court on the 21<sup>st</sup>. May 1951). I lived at Battersea for a while until the landlady sold half of the house.

Near the time of the Ireland Bill, Lord Brookeborough was the principal speaker at a meeting of the Empire Loyalists in the Central Westminster Hall. Tickets had to be applied for and many of us obtained tickets and really broke up the effect of the meeting. Our action merited 2 columns in the Daily Telegraph next day Anthony Eden was also booed at the meeting and leaflets were thrown about. Michael Sheehan was forced to leave. Larry O'Dowd was in his post office uniform and some old lady reported him to his head, who happened to be a Corkman, and he

advised him not to wear the uniform on an occasion like that. We also gave out leaflets as they left the meeting. Anthony Eden and Basil Brooke were taken out secretly by a special exit. Many people were angry at being called Fascists and reactionaries.

I got to know the editor of the Irish News Agency, Colm Ó Lochlainn, who was later head of the Three Candles publishing firm in Dublin. He brought me to his office a few times and was fond of an odd drink. We drank in the Fleet St. pubs amongst the journalists. He had me invited to a cocktail party for journalists on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1952 to inaugurate the Tostal in the following year in Dublin. I spoke to Eamon Andrews there, and asked some pertinent questions at the meeting.

When Denis Lyons left London, Joe Mc Guire became president of the Gaelic league. He was an ex-clerical student and exercised a very strict attitude in the Gaelic League. I found myself at loggerheads with him because he was not so interested in pushing social events, and was rather dogmatic and narrow in his viewpoint. There was little "give" with him. Peggy King was secretary at the time. I resigned as treasurer.

For a while I did MC at the céilí and old time dances at St. Augustines Hall, Hammersmith while Donall Foley, the Irish Press reporter was away from London. Father Bell was the priest who took an interest in the Irish dancing. He is reputed to have been confessor to Pope Pius XI when in Rome. Father O' Donoughue was superior in St. Augustine's Priory at the time. Sometimes I went to three céilíthe in one week.

I must mention about the St. Patrick Day parade. Originally the Gaelic League used to have a "Gaelic" Mass in the Corpus Christi church in Maiden Lane at St. Patrickside. When the Anti-partition League came into being, we decided that a joint St. Patrick's Day parade with the Cumann Gaelach and the C.L.G should be organised inviting all the Irish dance teams and bands to take part. It was agreed that the old IRA should lead the parade, which went to Southwark Cathedral from Whitehall at first, and then from Horse Guards parade to Westminster Cathedral in the following years. The committee had Jim Conway and Mullarkey from the C.L.G on it. Jim Conway by the way had a dance hall called the New Emerald behind Hammersmith Station, where many a Prisoners' Aid céilí was held. I was a member of the Gaelic League representation and Bill Meegan and Joe Kelly represented the Cumann Gaelach. Each organisation had its own proud banner. Father Cremin organised the Gaelic choir in the Cathedral of which I was a member, and sang in the choir section behind the altar of the Cathedral. The parade was about a mile long and had three bands playing Irish march tunes. This parade continued until about 1971 and was later revived as a county association affair without the Gaelic emphasis.

Captain Saul arranged for a Gaelic night each Thursday in the Irish Club, Eaton Square. An attempt was made to teach Irish and do Irish dancing after. The Irish Club at that time was decided snobby. I joined for a while and took part in the debating society where my friend and I ensured that the ascendancy dominance was made to squirm. I became friendly with a Tom Beckett an Army officer who was responsible for escorting an Irish soldier in the British Army to trial by court martial because he murdered someone in Germany. He had different views from me but admired my stance. I was also asked to do MC at a concert there to help funds for the new Irish Centre. They expected me to be in an evening suit and did not altogether appreciate my introductions in Irish. Dermot Troy, Cathleen Coady and Frank Paterson(?) took part in it. Father Mc Namara was pleased with the proceeds for the Irish Centre.

I must make a brief mention of the speakers corner in Hyde Park. In the pre-war days and just after the war an Irishman called Ashe used to speak under the tricolour. One could not say he was well-dressed to represent the Irish people. Occasionally he took up a collection after the speech and landed up in prison because he had broken the bye-laws and could not pay the fine. Nevertheless he was a strong orator and dealt firmly with his opponents. He was fond of De Valera. Father Vincent Mc Nab, a Dominican from Portaferry Co. Down used to preach at



the Catholic Evidence Guild stand in his habit. On Good Friday, pictures were held up for the various stations of the cross. Father Vincent was rather ascetic and used to walk all the way back to Highgate. Another ginger-headed chap called O'Callaghan represented the United Ireland group. He had many critics even among the Irish. He lived in the Bayswater district.

One of the most famous Anti-Partition marches to Trafalgar Square had Eddie Mc Ateer, Cathal Brugha, and English MPs as speakers.

Among the famous Irish dance halls of the time was the Garryowen at Hammersmith. Originally this hall was in Queen Caroline St. The chap who ran it lived in Stormont Rd., Battersea and was financed at the start by a Jewish partner. The hall was transferred to Brook Green Rd. in place of the "Eire Óg" hall where the Cumann Gaelach used the top floor. The Garryowen had a rowdy reputation, and had strong bouncers at the doors. Drunkenness was unfortunately commonplace.

The Casey brothers owned two halls, one at Bayswater and one at Elephant and Castle. Manor House dance hall had Chris Forde, a member of the Gaelic Ardchoiste as one of its organisers. Chris Forde, a Galwayman made money and landed on his feet, think he is still in London. He was very supportive to Clann na Poblachta.

Returning to the Gaelic League, in the early fifties due to the inflationary prices of offices the office in John St. was vacated. Another premises was found in 98 Belgrave Rd, a basement which was quite large. The ground floor flat was occupied by Áine and Sorcha Naughton from Spiddal and other Gaelic enthusiasts including Seán O'Rafferty, a Monaghan man who was President. He returned to Ireland in 1973 and the premises were returned to the owner. The remaining assets and books were sent to the Gaelic League headquarters in Dublin including valuable old minute books which referred to Michael Collins etc. Muiris Ó Conaill knew Padraig Ó Conaire and had some effects which were sent to the National Archives in Dublin via Cathleen Coady who used to live in Victoria and was a member of the Irish Club.

Seán Mac Stiofáin was born in England and became head of the IRA at the start of the 1969 troubles in the North of Ireland. He attended Irish classes at John St. and was known to Padraig. Another great character was Rory Mac Farlane, a native speaker from the Ballymacarret district of Belfast, who was a coarse spoken intellectual. He refused to speak English to any Irish speaker. He earned the disgust of Joe Mc Guire when he took an Irish class, direct method, in John St. He took exception to the bad pronunciation of the English born learners and referred to the Bloody English who could not pronounce properly. Of course he lost his job in the County Down railway in Belfast for calling his foreman an Orange bastard. He defended himself by saying he was Orange and a bastard but he should not have joined the two words together.

One of the most interesting debates in the Gaelic League at Belgrave Rd. was whether Ireland should join the Common Market. Some of the Connolly Club members turned up and all the speeches were in Irish. I was asked to be chairman and I thought the Anti-Common Market speakers were wonderful. The result was a draw, deliberately, I suppose.

A Liam Mullally, who wrote an article in the St. Patrick's Day magazine of the Gaelic League and who may have been a special representative of the Irish Government went to Germany during the war. He told me about being interviewed in London before he left and how the British authorities tried to stop him. He travelled via Lisbon and Hungary, and spent a couple of years in Berlin. He spent St. Patrick's Day 1942 in the Irish Embassy in Berlin. He knew a number of European languages and was engaged in teaching skiing to Russian soldiers in Switzerland after the war. He changed what money he earned into Swiss Francs because he thought that currency was more stable. Although he loved the Irish language his knowledge of it was elementary. I did not know what his special mission was, although I visited him in his hotel in Bayswater, then he was a courier for Polyours.

Seán Mc Dermott, a Northerner was secretary of the Anti-Partition League. He married Pat Ede who was a great Irish speaker on the Ardchoiste of the Gaelic League. They had a large family, he died youngish and she disappeared from Gaelic activities. Her children were very clever. In connection with my work I had to be a witness in court, and took the oath on a Gaelic Missal instead of the Bible.

I was married in Irish to Maureen Mc Donnell of Galway by a Father Mansfield in St. Augustines, Hammersmith on the 5<sup>th</sup>. January 1957. Father Delaney suggested the Marriage in Irish but fell and broke his arm in the snow. I have never heard of the service before or after or attended an Irish spoken marriage ceremony since. Maureen's father was OC of the West Connamara Brigade in the Anglo-Irish war and was himself married on the run, with armed protection in Co. Mayo. Early married life with a large family curtailed a lot of my activities when the children were growing up.

I forgot to mention the Bethnal Green Irish festival in 1952 and 1953 which was held in York Hall. The main instigator was Leslie Farnsworth who asked me to do MC which I enjoyed. I introduced the Irish Ambassador Boland in Irish at one day's event. He was the ambassador who broke his gavel at the United Nations Assembly calling the Russian delegation to order. The Festival consisted mainly of dancing events. Nevertheless it gave some status to Irish events in this country. I was living in Nemoure Rd. Acton at the time.