

BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR IRISH STUDIES
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
THE IRISH CLUB
SATURDAY, NOV. 10TH 1990
TREASURER'S REPORT

As this is my final report as BAIS Treasurer before handing over the responsibility into the capable hands of Dr Graham Davis I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the activities which have been underpinned by the association's financial support and make some observations as to the association's future with respect to these activities.

When I started as BAIS Treasurer Keith Joseph was Minister of State for Education. Our financial situation "now" is infinitely superior to "then" — indeed we probably didn't think that we had anything as grand as a "financial situation". Now we have the best part of £20,000 in our two accounts and a further £25,000 to be received in February '91.

The energy of Members of the Association, its Executive and Officers has been considerable, but energy has to be underwritten by income for ideas to become reality. Often — most of the time perhaps — the energy of Ruth and Jim, and more recently Seán, has been directed to obtaining that income and it *has* been dispensed, despite comments to the contrary, in supporting the widest possible range of Irish Studies activities: two highly successful conferences of considerable academic and social quality (at Oxford and Liverpool); the underwriting of a proportion of the costs of the Soar Valley College annual conferences; a series of lectures for Vith Formers in Northern Ireland; our own lecture series in Liverpool and then Manchester; support for the activities of the Manchester Irish Education group; student bursaries for the conferences of the Irish Historians in Britain at both York and Durham and the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature when it was held at Coleraine; support for the post of the Director of the Joint Education Programme; the production of an ever expanding survey of those engaged in Irish Studies across all disciplines and areas of education; funding of the Institute of Linguists examination in the Irish language. All these and, no doubt, others that you all could mention.

Some of our activities leave nothing behind but the a significant increase in the credibility of Irish Studies as meriting a place in the British education system — one of our primary objectives. Others have more tangible results: the campaign to halt the termination of the Chair of Irish at University College, Aberystwyth; the appointment to be of the Caroll Chair of Irish History at Oxford; the JMB A/S and A levels in Irish Studies — for example. There are now three Higher Education centres of Irish Studies at the Polytechnic of North London, at St. Mary's College Strawberry Hill and at Liverpool University, each of which offers undergraduates a half degree in Irish Studies. While the creation of these centres has been the result of the often isolated endeavours of individuals, it is also the case that they have been finally able to work within a positive context — one to which the Association has contributed and in which they can look for mutual support. In this context it's a pleasure to welcome Mary Hickman of PNL on to the Executive.

This is high achievement by any standards, but high achievement engenders high expectations. *If* BAIS had been solely an academic association catering to the expectations of its members it would have done little of the above. The majority of our members are in Higher Education and for them an association exists to organize a plus, distribute a newsletter, perhaps a journal. BAIS has done that plus — and the plus costs, and costs considerably more than could be realistically expected to be generated by membership subscriptions.

What has been done to date has been based on no more than three major sources; the most significant being the Allied Irish Bank grant of £150,000 over three years of which £75,000 was targetted at source for the support of the post of Director of the JEP; grants from the DES and the DES Northern Ireland; and the Ireland Fund. The association's allocation of the AIB money, of which the final £25,000 for the Association is scheduled for February '91, was, again, targetted at source for the support of the Association's activities in terms of a permanent co-ordinator of its activities (the Executive Director Seán Hutton) in a permanent base — until now, 9, Poland Street.

I opened by saying that our financial situation “now” is infinitely superior to “then”, but so are the commitments greater and the expectations higher. The necessity of vacating Poland Street and going into the market for an office means that “now” we pay rent. What we have been able to do over and above that normally expected of an educational association has been made possible by “money at the margins”, that existing after a salary and attendant costs had been paid, journals purchased, *Newsletter* and newsletters published — all posted.

The money at the margins has “now” been eroded.

It is not that the Association’s position is precarious, but what is precarious is the concept and practice of the Association as it has existed to date.

We have a solid but not sizeable membership which moves in the two hundred and fifty to three hundred region — an income of c. £3,000 to £4,000. No realistic extension of that membership could fund the range of activities I’ve listed above. We are dependent on large donations — they alone create the “money at the margins”. The task of Officers, Executive and members in the year ahead is to do two things:

- a) pursue the creation of “money at the margins”.
- b) determine the scope and nature of the Association should it not materialise.

Dr Shaun Richards
Retiring Treasurer, BAIS
10.11.90