

# British Association for Irish Studies *Newsletter*



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*Spring 1992*

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***The British Association for Irish Studies Newsletter exists to provide a voice for, communication between, and information to the membership. Apart from reports by the Officers of the Association the views expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the British Association for Irish Studies.***



## A Message from Ruth Dudley Edwards, Chairwoman, BAIS

The launch of this ambitious journal is symbolic of the buoyancy of Irish Studies in Britain. *Irish Studies in Britain* and the *BAIS Newsletter*, which we have sent to our members for some years, have ceased publication to enable the concentration of resources on their up-market and highly professional successor. Their respective editors, Jonathan Moore and Eamonn Hughes, deserve our thanks for all their pioneering work.

On behalf of the British Association for Irish Studies I am delighted to welcome the first issue of *Irish Studies Review* and its accompanying *Newsletter*, and to promise that we will give its courageous editors all the help we can. We all want this to be a vibrant, stimulating, instructive and polemical publication: reader participation will be crucial to the journal's success.

**Ruth Dudley Edwards**

### Editorial

This is the first edition of the re-vamped *BAIS Newsletter*. It is offered as a companion pull out to the new BAIS journal, *Irish Studies Review*. Since the journal now includes features and book reviews which were found previously in *Irish Studies in Britain* and in the *Newsletter*, there is a clear brief for a more straightforward publication communicating information to BAIS members. The *Newsletter* begins with the address given by Mary Robinson to the Institute of Irish Studies at Liverpool which includes encouragement and support both for the Institute and for the British Association for Irish Studies. Her remarks extend beyond the normal courtesies to a real appreciation of the need for Irish Studies to re-visit Irish history, written as Yeats described it, 'in a fiery shorthand' so that it wouldn't be forgotten. In history, literature, folklore and culture, in economics and anthropology, the richness and diversity of the past pose a challenge to a narrow orthodoxy. It is a generous recognition of the activity of Irish Studies in Britain.

This is followed by reports from the three established centres of Irish Studies in higher education at Liverpool University, North London Polytechnic and St Mary's College, Twickenham. All three have their own distinctive focus and collectively they encourage the belief that Irish Studies will sustain the promising growth achieved in the last few years.

Two highly successful events receive a report and a review. The annual conference of the Irish Studies Workshop, at Soar Valley College, Leicester, was very well attended and organised with customary flair by Nessel Danaher. The review of the BAIS lecture series on Irish Writers, held at Bath College of Higher Education, is written by Mpalive-Handson Msiska, a specialist in Post-Colonial literature at Bath. The Irish lecture series will probably continue as an annual event at Bath having received initial support from BAIS.

Kate Thompson, Convenor of the Irish Language Sub-committee has sent us a report on the Irish language. This provides a useful review of the growth and recognition that has been achieved in language provision since 1986. Sean Hutton, at the centre of a network of information on Irish Studies, has compiled a brief list of BAIS activities over the period 1990-1991.

Future issues of the *Newsletter* will include reports from conferences, material on activity and course developments in institutions at all levels throughout the education system. Just as previous issues have included features on organisations like the Information on Ireland Partnership or resources such as the John Rylands Library, so future issues can serve as a noticeboard or as a platform for BAIS members to voice opinion on the current state of Irish Studies.

## **Mrs Mary Robinson, the President of Ireland**

**Address to The Institute of Irish Studies, The University of Liverpool, 16 December, 1991**

I am particularly glad to have the chance this afternoon to pay tribute to Irish Studies in the University. Many of us here today know that they have been a vital archive for aspects of our past which need to be stored and protected. This is one dimension of their contribution. And they have also played an exciting part in the re-statement of important issues of Irish identity in our time. The debates and controversies which they evoke and the questions they raise are now a vital part of the way we see ourselves culturally. And they have become a crucial part of the heritage of our children. The shelter they give to perishable aspects of our past such as our oral tradition and linguistic research are an essential part of this heritage.

I congratulate the University of Liverpool on its initiative in establishing the Institute of Irish Studies as the national centre for the development of the study of Ireland in Britain. Since October 1989 it has made this role, its own, commanding support from among a wide range of Governmental, commercial and charitable bodies in Britain, Ireland and at the European level. I am deeply impressed by the standards of excellence of the director, Dr Patrick Buckland, and his staff, and by their success in dramatically raising the profile and image of Irish Studies here in this country and developing an Irish Studies dimension within the British education system. In addition to work of an academic nature, the Institute has pioneered a Joint Education Programme for scholars and has introduced teaching materials and cross-curricular strategies in order to develop and extend Irish studies at first and second levels of education.

The Institute is linked into the larger family of the British Association for Irish Studies which has done so much to promote interest and understanding of things Irish throughout Britain. Both are meeting a widely perceived need to increase mutual understanding between Britain and both parts of Ireland and contribute to the understanding of an Irish dimension within a multicultural society in Britain and beyond in Europe.

But the field of Irish Studies is not a bland area and I don't want to pay it bland compliments. I am very glad of the chance to take this occasion to raise the question of the purpose and ultimate

future of these Studies, and the responsibility those researches incur, and we with them, in the issues we all face today.

When I think of Irish Studies - or perhaps what I'm really thinking of is the effect they have - I think of a wonderful phrase which Yeats used in an introduction he wrote to a book of Irish prose. He was a young man at the time and he was searching around for a way of commending this prose to other readers, some of whom were in other countries. He spoke of the eloquence of the prose and its strength. And then he spoke of the past. The old men he said had written down the past in 'a fiery shorthand' so that it wouldn't be forgotten.

In a certain sense we look to Irish Studies for that, for 'the fiery shorthand' which collects and sifts and records a very precious but quickly-passing reality. In a nation like ours I think we have learned to recognise that the past is not always the same as the meaning of the past. History may well be a visible sequence of events and incidents and records. But the meaning of those events and incidents may take time to emerge.

And in our country that meaning, when it emerges, often does so through a literature which is valuable and defiant and may well stand in a thoroughly awkward relation to the official version of the past. I am very glad to mention some of those writers' names here. Writers such as Elizabeth Bowen and Daniel Corkery and Francis Stuart and Kate O'Brien and Mary Lavin and Michael McLaverty may seem to have nothing in common whatsoever. In fact they are profoundly united in the kaleidoscopic vision of Irishness they have left us with: a vision which is generous and diverse, binding us to no narrowness and obligating us to no single interpretation of our past or our purpose as a culture.

In this concept lies the great importance as well as the great challenge which awaits Irish Studies in our generation. In part, it is the challenge of commending a diversity, a richness and variance of culture, when often a singleness or narrowness of interpretation is more welcome and more coherent. The writers who were obstinately true to their experience have left an example and a warning to the wider field of these studies. In economics and history, in folklore and



anthropology, the treasure of the meaning may often lie in its contradiction of the obvious and comforting orthodoxy. It takes courage to explore these contradictions but I think it is necessary and valuable that they be explored.

It may well be that these explorations plunge Irish Studies into more questions than answers. But after all, we live in a time of questions when the Irish experience is re-defining itself from decade to decade: from North to South, in the balance, in the balance of regions and genders and generations - so much is changing. The only danger I foresee for Irish Studies is that out of some adherence to a pre-ordained past, or a set way of thinking about the Irish experience, that

these Studies might edit out those changes in favour of a more attractive or finished version.

In saying all this I know I am not commending an easy or equable path for Irish Studies and the scholars involved in them. But I also know I am only confirming the trend of the most innovative of these studies today. I also know how many people in this room share with me an excitement at the richness and diversity and contradictions in our culture. And I believe that the fiery shorthand which writes them down will be a priceless text for all our futures.

*Mary Robinson*

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## **Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool**

### **Report for the Academic Year 1990-91**

The third academic year of the Institute of Irish Studies, 1990-91, has underlined the continued need for a national centre for the development of the study of Ireland in Great Britain, involving higher education with the wider community.

Britain's first ever MA students in Irish Studies took their degrees in December 1990, while in the following July the first intake to the Irish Studies undergraduate pathway were awarded the degree of BA Combined Honours (Art). These degrees give immense personal satisfaction to students. They also provide, especially at master's level, an effective means of raising the level of understanding of Ireland in Britain through the students' networks as well-established members of their professions and communities.

The Declan Kelly Programme for Research on the Health of Irish People in Britain continues to raise many questions about the relatively poor health of Irish people in Britain, but is now making a significant impact on policy makers. A report to Birmingham City Council prompted the dramatic headlines in local newspapers: 'Dying Breed ... Misery and Death face Brum Irish'.

Members of the Institute gave evidence to the committee of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body enquiring into the problems facing Irish people in Britain. It is now generally acknowledged that the Institute is in the best position to provide the strategic information necessary to define those problems and to devise effective remedies.

The extent to which the Institute interacts with the wider community is clear from the priorities adopted in the past year. Liverpool's links with Ireland were underlined in the attention given to modern Irish art and artists in the undergraduate and adult education programmes.

Over two hundred people attended the opening of the Institute's exhibition of 'The John Clare Series' in the School of Architecture gallery. It was the first public showing of an interpretation of the poet's flight from an asylum by Clement McAleer, a Northern Irish artist living in Liverpool. Also popular were the Institute's evening lectures, 'Irish Art and Culture', which placed in a social and political context the highly-acclaimed exhibitions of modern Irish Art arranged at the Bluecoat, Tate, Open Eye and Walker Galleries in Liverpool. The talks ranged from 'Viking Sculpture in the Irish Sea Area' to 'Street Art in Northern Ireland'.

Liverpool's ties with Ireland are also being strengthened through the Institute's involvement with the plans to develop the northern gateway to Europe, linking Dublin with the ports of Liverpool and Hull and Bremen and Rostock. As part of the Institute's European Regional Development Programme, discussions are being held with the EC and various local authorities on a series of strategic studies to promote the economic development of the hinterland of these five key points in a freight and transport network linking Ireland with Central, Northern and Eastern

Europe.

The Institute's expertise on Northern Ireland has been utilised directly to increase understanding of the Ulster Question in Britain. It organised, in conjunction with the Chaplaincy of Lancaster University, a conference on Northern Ireland, addressed by leading politicians and the Protestant Primate of Ireland. It is preparing materials and training for teachers who wish to teach Northern Ireland as a controversial issue in primary and junior schools. It has arranged an exchange of sixth-form students between Northern Ireland and the north-west of England.

In October 1990 and in March 1991 students from three Sefton schools and from six Belfast schools followed a challenging programme of academic and social activities. The spirit and

atmosphere of the exchange underlined its value in promoting better understanding, especially in the academic sessions. There the standard of discussion was extremely high, challenging the views of the main speakers and developing fruitful lines of enquiry.

The Institute has successfully responded to the challenge to establish a national strategy to make the study of Ireland an integral part of the education system in Great Britain. In doing so, it is helping to increase mutual understanding between Great Britain and both parts of Ireland; and it is addressing the challenges and problems facing Irish people at home and abroad, especially in the light of European integration.

***Dr Patrick Buckland***  
***Director of Irish Studies***

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## **Irish Studies Centre: the Polytechnic of North London**

The Irish Studies Centre (ISC) was set up in October 1986 at the Polytechnic of North London to provide for the educational needs and interests of the local community. The Centre is in the Humanities Faculty which is located in Kentish Town, in one of the main areas of Irish settlement in London, stretching from Camden Town to Archway. Within the Humanities faculty the ISC is based in the School of Languages and European Studies. Consequently both the research and teaching activities of the Centre benefit from close collaboration with social scientists and linguists involved in developing and expanding European Studies.

### **Courses**

The ISC provides a variety of courses: the Irish Studies Foundation course which acts as a taster course for the degree for those who are returning to study or students who want a short course in Irish Studies; an undergraduate programme within the Humanities Combined Studies Degree, this enables students to minor, joint or major in Irish Studies; Irish language courses in liaison with European and Language Services; the ISC also contributes to an MA in Modern European Studies. Recruitment is very healthy as anyone involved in Irish Studies will appreciate. In fact our only constraint is PCFC target numbers which

PNL chooses not to exceed with excessive numbers of fees only students. Each year therefore we accept approximately 25 full-time students and up to 20 part-time students. The overwhelming majority are mature students, in the main Irish or of Irish descent but we now have a rapidly growing number of English, German, French, Italian and American students taking the courses.

All the Irish Studies courses at PNL are fundamentally concerned to provide a variety of perspectives from which students can become aware of and achieve a critical understanding of currently dominant assumptions about: the Irish in Britain; the historical and contemporary contexts of Irish society; and Ireland's relationship to Britain. Great importance is placed on the study of Irish emigration and on Irish communities abroad, these are compulsory elements of the degree course. Other innovative courses are Women and Irish Society and a variety of courses which explore Representations of Ireland and Irishness. The Irish Studies degree course is interdisciplinary and draws on history, sociology, political science, economics, geography, literature and we hope in the near future, language. The critical analysis of modern Ireland, North and South, societies which have undergone enormous changes in the past twenty years, can thus be fully explored.



In a relatively impecunious institution it is necessary to utilise all available means to enhance the learning experience of the students. The ISC is fortunate to have joined a large ERASMUS network, based on European Studies and Irish Studies, co-ordinated by the University of Limerick. We are now able to send a small number of students every semester to complete six months of their degree course at Limerick. This enables students to have an even wider choice of courses. Plans are in hand for a similar arrangement with University College Galway.

### Research

The Centre gives the highest priority to developing new knowledge on Irish issues, with particular reference to the Irish community in Britain. To this end a Research Forum has been meeting regularly since January 1986, a series of Occasional Papers is published, and a Resource Centre has been established. In addition, there is an important emphasis on acquiring research experience within the degree course and all students have to complete their own original project about the Irish in London.

The Research Forum holds regular meetings to hear and discuss papers. It aims to set out new work in the field, to discuss the problems of the research process itself, and to encourage further work. The Forum has considered a wide range of topics at its meetings, including: housing conditions and homelessness, Irish women and the English feminist movement, education and the identity of the second generation Irish, the Irish born in nursing, new data on recent patterns of migration and on the political activities of the Irish community in Britain. Probably the best attended meeting we have held, overflowing the largest room in the building, was when Chris Mullin came to present his findings about the Birmingham Six.

The papers published as part of the Irish Studies Centre Occasional Papers Series have so far usually been presented at the Research forum. In the future, however, the remit of the publications series will be wider than that of the Forum which will continue to focus on the Irish in Britain. The Occasional Papers series was relaunched last year with titles about the current Irish emigration, a comparative study of Irish and Eastern European Jewish married women's work at the turn of the century and the housing of the Irish in London. New titles this year will include: identity and the second generation Irish, and a study of Ireland, and the iconography of rape.

Recently a major research project has been initiated with colleagues in European Studies comparing the experience of the Irish in Britain with that of Algerians in France. The study aims to compare the differences and similarities in the experience of the most numerous migrant group resident in each country. The research is concerned with analyzing processes and changes in identity formation, by a series of examinations of immigrant associations and clubs. We are concerned to analyze the processes of the relationship between minority group and dominant culture in terms of hegemonic and negotiable identities, in the sense that both the dominant and subordinate communities may appropriate or be appropriated by their respective others.

A priority of the ISC since its inception was to develop a Resource Centre available to all interested in the Irish in Britain. We have been greatly aided in this task by the acquisition of the books and archives of the Irish in Britain History Centre. Included were bound volumes of the *Irish Post* from 1971-1986, which we have updated for subsequent years. Given the difficulties many researchers have experienced in obtaining the *Irish Post* through the British Library the volumes of the newspaper represent an important open-access resource for the recent history of the Irish in Britain. It is no exaggeration to say we are inundated by requests to consult the archives.

### Community Links

The ISC's ties with the local Irish community have always been strong because the Centre grew out of negotiations between the Polytechnic and local community groups. These links have been maintained by running joint courses and developing joint research projects. A few examples: an 'Irish Language Post A-level Gaeilge Workshop was the result of collaboration with Gluaiseacht na Gaeilge and The Working Mens College, Camden; with the Roger Casement Centre in Islington we developed and ran a Return to Learning course for Irish women which took place at the community centre; recently the ISC has jointly developed a research project about Irish women's mental health with the Islington Womens Counselling Centre.

An important goal of the Irish Studies Centre is to establish Irish Studies more generally as a subject in the curriculum of further and adult education, thus widening the chances and choices for Irish students wishing to enter higher education. In February 1991 a project was established to produce teaching materials and

provide training in order to encourage local colleges and Adult Education institutes linked to PNL to begin this process. The project is jointly funded by the Lawlor Foundation, PNL and the Irish in Britain History Group. The materials developed will provide a complete access course on Irish Society Today. The course will comprise three units: The Foundations of Contemporary Irish Society; Women in Irish Society; and Perceptions of Northern Ireland. We aim to design

and package the materials so that they can be used flexibly for assessment and accreditation purposes. It is hoped they will be published in autumn 1992. A dissemination programme will be implemented involving a series of one day workshops to disseminate information about the teaching materials and to train teachers in their use.

**Dr Mary J Hickman**  
*Director of the Irish Studies Centre*

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## **Irish Studies at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill**

The new degree course in Irish Studies at St Mary's was set up in September 1990 and is a reflection of the growing interest being shown in Irish Studies generally. With the second intake of students enrolling in September 1991, there are currently some 75 students studying for joint honours degrees. When the third intake arrives in the next academic year, the Irish Studies Department will have approximately 120 undergraduate students.

It is appropriate that such a course has been developed at St Mary's as it is a College which has a long tradition of academic and student links with Ireland since its foundation in 1850. These links are consolidated by many Irish ex-students who have settled in Britain or returned to Ireland, and by the thriving ex-student Simmarian Societies which exist both in Britain and in Ireland; for example, a considerable number of our present students come from schools where some of our ex-students are teaching.

Only a small proportion of our students are Irish born, and of these, the majority come from Northern Ireland; it is a little early to tell whether this has any significance or not, though I suspect it does! A considerable proportion, around 50%, are second or third generation Irish, and show a real commitment to exploring the cultural roots which many feel have been denied to them. A substantial proportion, however, have no family connections with Ireland and have very varied backgrounds ranging from English, Scottish, Welsh and Cornish to Greek Cypriot and West Indian. The variety of experiences which these students bring with them lead to lively and healthy exchanges of views during seminar discussion, and to genuine appreciation of different cultural backgrounds and traditions. Whatever

else Irish Studies should, or should not, be, it should never be boring.

The basic aim of the degree is to promote the academic study of Ireland, and to examine its relations with Britain and other European and non-European societies. The overall structure of the course is multi-disciplinary and students are involved in the study of geography, history, language, literature, politics, religion and sociology.

The First Year consists of a foundation course which is aimed at introducing students to some of the major social and cultural developments in Ireland past and present, and to the major forces which have shaped them. Study of the economy and the social aspects of Ireland is followed by an introduction to the language and literature. These courses are set against a broad historical context of the development of Irish society from the Celtic period.

In the Second Year the course progresses to examine more substantive aspects in which history and literature courses dovetail in a study of the same chronological period (1870-1922), and where the links between the two disciplines are highlighted and common themes are discussed. The other second year courses explore contemporary Ireland within a social studies framework, dealing with social institutions in Ireland, north and south, as well as community conflict in Northern Ireland.

In the Third year there are history and literature courses dealing with Ireland from partition to the present, and the literature which has emerged from the current 'troubles' in the north. Students are offered the opportunity to specialise through a number of options involving the English language in Ireland, religious



traditions and the social theory of divisions. An additional option, in the form of a supervised project, involving original research and the writing of a short dissertation is available, thus allowing students to work on a topic of their own choice.

As well as a course involving a study of Gaelic literature in translation, there is an optional Gaelic language course which we intend to develop more fully. As the course develops with its third student intake, it is intended to increase the number of second and third year option courses to include areas such as folklore and media representations of Ireland.

In addition to the academic work, there are a number of cultural activities relating to Ireland which are regularly organised in the College, and an active Irish Studies Society is run by the students. St Mary's is a venue for the annual Siol Phadraig Irish Arts Festival held in London, and the musical scene is well represented through ceilis and traditional music sessions (once featuring the legendary Miko Russell). A number of events are run in conjunction with local Irish community groups. Visiting speakers have included Professor Brendan Kennelly who provided a memorable reading from his poetry, and Professor Sean O Tuama giving an inspiring

commentary on 'Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire' (The Lament for Art O'Leary). The easy accessibility to London's theatres has meant that regular visits have been made to productions such as Brendan Kennelly's 'Cromwell' and Brian Friel's 'Dancing at Lughnasa'. In addition each year staff and students organise a week's study visit to Ireland, spending time both in Dublin and Belfast where there is a full programme of educational, cultural and social events.

The research interests of the staff reflect the diversity of the Irish Studies courses, and once our first graduates emerge, the post-graduate programme will be enlarged and strengthened. The Department is also strengthening links with other institutions in Ireland and Europe, and investigating a number of collaborative research projects. It has been an exciting, though fairly exhausting, two years, and, given all the uncertainty and financial restrictions with which higher education seems ceaselessly assailed, it has not been without its difficulties. However, Irish Studies is now firmly established at St Mary's, and has a solid foundation which can be used for gradual expansion and development.

*Jim O'Hara*

*Director of Irish Studies*

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## **Irish Dimensions in British Education**

**9<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference, Soar Valley College, Leicester, 8 February 1992**

After being 'snowed out' in February 1991, it was a great pleasure to be able to welcome over 270 guests to our 9th Annual National Conference held on 8 February this year. The conference was designed to be mildly provocative, using the umbrella title of 'Nice People and Rednecks': Interpretations of Irish History and the Irish in Britain. The two main guest speakers were Dr Brendan Bradshaw of Queen's College, Cambridge, who delivered a constructively critical survey of Irish historiography over the last 50 years, and Dr Graham Davis, of Bath College of Higher Education, who updated our view on the Irish in Britain in the 19th century. Dr Bradshaw pointed to the factors that had conditioned the 'new wave' of Irish historians over the last 50 years or so, clearly indicating the pitfalls involved in attempting to present a 'detached' interpretation of historical affairs. Whilst emphasising that 'revisionism is laudable and necessary', Dr

Bradshaw went on to indicate that in terms of Irish history 'It was also in purely historical terms a failure as it failed to convey the substance of Irish historical experience.' He concluded by tackling the vexed issues of neutrality and objectivity; he pointed out that 'in order to be objective you do not have to be neutral ... it is much better practice to be engaged, to convey a sense of that engagement, to enable the reader to perceive what the nature of that engagement is, than to assume a stance of apparent neutrality and detachment.'

This revision of 'Revisionism' was complemented by Dr Davis's wide-ranging and well informed survey of work carried out over the last 30 years on the subject of 'The Irish in Britain in the 19th Century.' This was a much needed and long overdue appraisal, with appeal to students at all levels, from senior secondary upwards. As well as indicating the new lines of research, Dr Davis

also pulled together the varying strands of development and indicated the direction of the ongoing formulation of revised viewpoints. Conference publicity featured Dr Davis's new volume on that interesting aspect of Irish settlement (published by Gill and Macmillan).

A wide range of workshops were on offer, and all were packed (too packed in some cases!). Summarised briefly, the topics were:

- the changing nature of organisations amongst the Irish in Britain, 1870-1940 (John Dunleavy, Oxford HE College);
- an historical and contemporary perspective on mental health amongst the Irish at home and abroad (Dr Terry Brogha, Leicester University);
- cultural production and post-colonialism (Sabina Sharkey, PNL);
- assessing 'Over the Water' by the Author, Maude Casey;
- anti-racist teaching strategies and the Irish dimension - Tony Breslin, secondary teacher, North London;

- Irish women in Britain - Identity and Experience: Pauline Polkey (Loughborough University), Deirdre O'Burne (York University);
- an introduction to Irish Literature via the works of Flann O'Brien: Caoimhghin O'Brolchain, Sunderland;
- Teaching and promoting Irish language in Ipswich: Mici Mac Cu Uladh of Conradh na Gaeilge;
- Irish Studies Courses at Edge Hill HE College - Alan Morton.

Feedback has generally been very positive; next year we hope to make our 10th Anniversary Conference rather special, with the theme being 'The Irish Diaspora'. We hope to have speakers from the UK, Ireland, North America and Australia. Conference Reports 1983-91 are available for a modest charge from: Nesson Danaher, Irish Studies Workshop, Soar Valley College, Gleneagles Avenue, Leicester LE4 7GY.

**Nesson Danaher**  
**Soar Valley College**

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## **The Irish Language**

Although small groups of Irish speakers had been meeting informally for several years in different parts of Britain, it was not until 1986 that the first formal classes were established (by Siobhán Uí Néil). The late eighties saw a significant growth in the spread and formation of classes for adults in Britain. Some people who had hitherto been learners suddenly found themselves with the responsibility of organising and teaching.

By 1988 BAIS felt that a sub-committee should be set up to co-ordinate the teaching/learning of Irish throughout Britain. Kate Thompson - who had taken early retirement from teaching Modern Languages in Coventry - was elected convenor. A list of almost all classes was compiled with the names of tutors. These were in such diverse corners as Jersey, Cardiff, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Yorkshire, Midlands, Ipswich, and London. Some classes were taught by qualified teachers while the majority were run by enthusiastic Irish speakers with no formal training. The first obvious need was for a programme of in-service training in the use of modern teaching techniques and resources. To this

end courses were sought which would be suitable for adults and which would raise the general standard of the language teaching.

Letters were sent to The Taoiseach and TDs in Ireland as well as to Udarás na Gaeltachta, Bord na Gaeilge, Gaellinn, universities, lecturers and several educational institutions and individuals informing them of the interest in Irish Language in Britain and requesting support and funding. The replies from all were most encouraging with offers of every support.

In 1989 and 1990 three scholarships were received from Gaellinn enabling learners to attend Irish Language courses in Glencolmcille run by 'Oideas Gael'. Brian MacAonghusa from Gaellinn together with members of BAIS were invited to a reception at the Irish Embassy to celebrate this event.

Also in 1989 Údarás na Gaeltachta provided two scholarships for teachers to attend the course at Áras Mháirtín Uí Chadhain in Carraroe. All of this gave great encouragement to the sub-committee and helped to publicise the improving state of Irish Language teaching in Britain.



In September 1989 the first weekend in-service training course was held in Coventry where a large group from all parts of Britain gathered to listen to Liam Ó Cuinneagáin of 'Oideas Gael'. As Liam is an expert in language teaching and full of enthusiasm and energy one could not fail to benefit from his expertise and zeal. It was a most rewarding and enjoyable weekend.

The first Newsletter - containing information about the sub-committee and about Irish Language in Britain as well as reviews of available courses - was published in late 1989 and distributed to teachers here and to interested centres in Ireland. Favourable publicity from this led to increased interest in our work - this was encouraging and rewarding.

The first of the Institute of Linguists exam was held in May 1988 thanks to Siobhán Uí Néill's ceaseless efforts for which she received the 'Irish Poet' award. Entrants came from London and the Midlands and all passed with distinctions.

By now Irish Language learning in Britain was attracting much attention in Ireland and offers came from specialists willing to present seminars

here. One excellent course was held in Manchester in June 1990 and again in October. *The Irish Post* has been generous with praise and free publicity, as a result of which the spread of classes is increasing daily as is the respect of Irish educational bodies.

In January 1991 a grant of 500 punt was received from Bord na Gaeilge, interviews were held with Raidió na Gaeltachta and other media. Another successful training course was held in London by the well-known language experts Peadar Mac An Iomaire and his colleague Máire Uí Iarnáin recently.

The regular publication of Newsletters, the continuous enthusiasm of tutors and the provision of suitable training courses, has helped to realise the profile of Irish language teaching throughout Britain. With the prospect of funding from LINGUA in 1992 the future seems assured but there is still a lot to be achieved in the years to come.

**Kate Thompson**

**Convenor, Irish Language Subcommittee**

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## **Returning the Canon to the Irish**

**BAIS 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Lecture Series on Irish Writers**

**Bath College of Higher Education, 15 October — 19 November 1992**

The series of lectures held at Bath College of Higher Education for the British Association for Irish Studies was a resounding success judging by the high attendance and, above all, by the quality of audience involvement. It was not just another series of lectures; it was a forum for interrogating notions of history, literature and interdisciplinarity and, to a great extent, an attempt to read texts and authors against the grain.

Paul Hyland's lecture, 'Swift: Human Liberty' argued that Swift had textually inscribed himself in history as the champion of liberty and that there had been little attempt to question the validity of his authorial self-representation. Hyland called for a reading of Swift that took into account the multiple positions taken by the author in his time and evident in those works where his commitment to liberty is either contradicted or less straightforward. He comes to the conclusion that Swift may have been a champion of liberty, but perhaps not consistently so.

Graham Davis's 'John Mitchel: The Great Famine,' presented the view that historical interpretations of the famine have to a high degree relied on the uncritical acceptance of John Mitchel's analysis of the event. He went on to illustrate how the account is mediated by political and personal interest. In Davis' opinion, a closer examination of other historical evidence suggests that Mitchel's narrative may not be the authoritative version, for which it is taken.

In 'Oscar Wilde: Paradox and Perversity', Neil Sammells sought to reveal the complex matrix of oppositions deployed by Wilde, while at the same time examining ways in which the author's work has been read by both radical and conservative critics. As far as Sammells is concerned, all attempts to resolve the contradictions in the man's life and his work often end up with an excess which cannot be explained within the terms of the privileged model. He sees Wilde and his work as inhabiting and being determined by the terrain of paradox whose radical content lies not so much in

the resolution of opposition, as in the refusal to fix meaning to unipolarity.

Nicholas Grene's paper on Yeats shed light on the relationship between the poet's biography and the middle poems, tracing a kind of progressive complexity which culminates in the stylistically and thematically dense poetry of his later years. Through a close reading of the poems, Green reflected on the relationship between time and literary production.

Terence Rodgers reviewed the life and work of the poet, playwright and novelist, Patrick MacGill (1890-1963), arguing that the writer's literary reputation, though now in the process of recovery after many years of neglect, defied easy categorization. He spent most of his time outside Ireland and eschewed political nationalism and yet, as a popular and populist writer, MacGill had a legitimate place within the history of Irish writing as one of the distinctive voices of that 'other Ireland', emigré Ireland and its collective homeland, the Ireland of the imagination.

The last seminar, presented by Richard Kerridge, attempted to locate Seamus Heaney within the politics of contemporary Northern Ireland, concluding that the poet's work does not display a clear political commitment.

Beneath the variety of subject matter and approach, the series was an attempt to relate the various ways in which Irish writers and historians are linked to the diverse historical and contemporary political problematics constituting Ireland, insisting on the way Irishness, as both history and writing, is produced and rewritten simultaneously as autobiography and as the story of the nation. It is in this context that returning writers such as Oscar Wilde, usually seen as defining centres of Englishness, back to their point of origin is less of the expected prestige-seeking repatriation of valuable cultural icons than a radical robbery of the centre's means of self-signification.

*Mpalive-Hangson Msiska*  
*Bath College of Higher Education*

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## **BAIS Activities 1991-1992**

The BAIS brochure/report, published at the end of 1991, outlined the activities of the Association for 1990-1. It showed that the Association had maintained its range of activities and services. We can report that during 1991-2, despite the financial difficulties of the Association, new initiatives have taken place.

There has been a very pleasing reaction to the brochure, which is now being used to support the Association's fundraising campaign. In this context, special mention must be made of one of the Association's patrons, Dr Niall Crowley, who is devoting much time and energy to the campaign. In the area of services to members, an exciting new development is the appearance of the *Irish Studies Review*, and the Association is grateful to those members who form the editorial team. The fourth series of BAIS lectures took place earlier this year at Bath College of Higher Education, in association with the Bristol Irish Society Festival. This was a highly successful series on the subject 'Irish Writers'. A new initiative in this area of public lectures will take place this autumn when the Association will organise a series of lectures in London, in conjunction with a number of TCD graduate associations, to celebrate Trinity's

Quarter-centenary. The fourth series of sixth form history conferences organised by the Association in Northern Ireland, in conjunction with The Young Historian Scheme, took place on 23-25 March. These conferences are very much appreciated by teachers and pupils, and the current series was attended by over 300 lower sixth-form students. A new initiative in the schools' field took place on 3-5 April in the form of a tripartite conference involving schools from the West Midlands, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Sixty-six students and their teachers took part. In 1991, the Association was able to suggest possible Irish contacts to a member, as a result of which a Bradford-Dundalk school link has been set up. This is an area where the Association could extend its services to members, in facilitating links both with schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

For a number of years, BAIS has been associated with the Soar Valley Conference on 'Irish Dimensions in British Education' through its financial support of this valuable resource for the schools and adult education sectors. It is pleasing to report that this year's conference was a huge success, drawing a record attendance. Among the



subcommittees of BAIS, the Irish language subcommittee has been particularly active, organising a number of day-conferences for Irish-language teachers in Britain. Its convenor, Kate Thompson, has also been successful in obtaining LINGUA funding to send Irish-language teachers from Britain on language courses in Ireland. Bob Bell, of the Executive, is currently considering activities to support Irish Studies elements in schools. Executive member Stephen Regan has undertaken to explore a series of initiatives on the cultural front; and Conference Secretary, Jonathan Moore, is currently making initial preparations for the BAIS Biennial Irish Studies Conference in 1993.

More developments are, therefore, in the pipeline. A member of the Association, Michael Bromley who has a background in journalism, has volunteered to assist the Association with press and public relations. His offer will enable us to improve the profiling of the Association.

It is pleasing, therefore, to be able to report that, at the level of services and activities, the Association continues in a healthy state.

Since 1989 AIB Bank has been the Founding Corporate Patron of the Association, and its major sponsor. The last tranche of that three-year sponsorship of £150,000 came to the Association in February 1991. It is proper that the Association should express its thanks to AIB Bank for its confidence in BAIS and for its valuable financial assistance during the period of sponsorship. The location of funding to replace AIB Bank sponsorship is the main task of the group currently responsible for fundraising on behalf of the Association.

**Seán Hutton**  
**Executive Director, BAIS**

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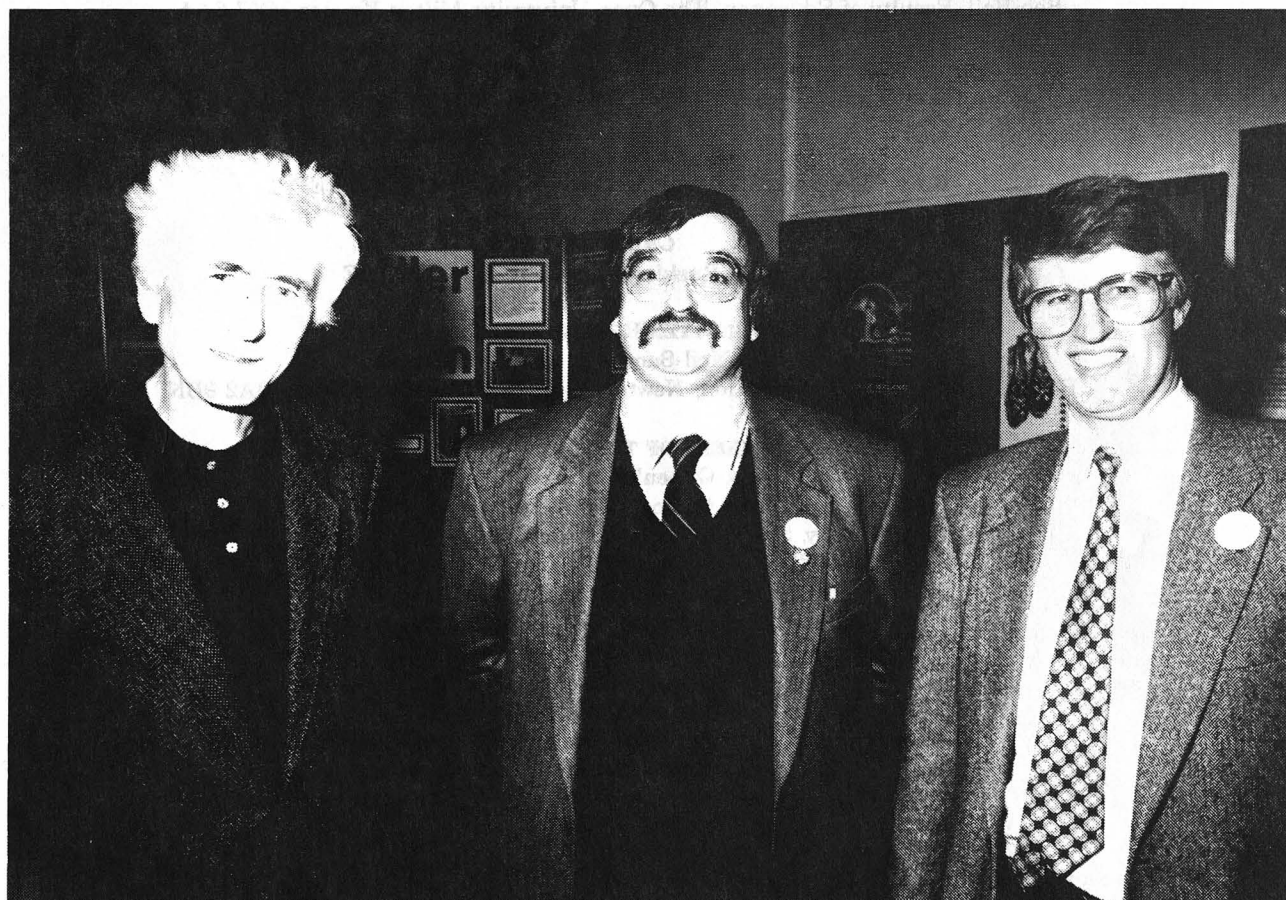
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Brendan Bradshaw, Nesson Danaher, Graham Davis (l to r)  
Soar Valley College, Leicester, 8 February 1992  
(Courtesy of Brendan Farrell, *The Irish Post*)