

British Association for Irish Studies Newsletter

ISSUE NO. 12 AUTUMN 1997



**“WHAT I THINK SHOULD HAPPEN
NOW IS TO RECAPTURE THE
SPIRIT OF THE EARLY YEARS”**

The President of the Gaelic League (1997)



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FOCUS INTERVIEW

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EDITORIAL

This Autumn edition of the Newsletter has much of interest for anybody involved in Irish Studies. Our first Focus Interview with Mary Kenny in the Summer Newsletter has provoked one very spirited response. Our current Focus Interview has the Gaelic League President spreading out a vigorous future for the Irish language in the twenty first century. We look forward to some spirited responses to his challenging vision.

The BAIS Biennial Conference at Salford was a remarkable event. The organisers rejected no paper proposed, with the result that there was a very wide range of disciplines involved – local social history, cultural history, literary theory, feminist theory, political history, sociological methodology, etc. – and a correspondingly very wide range of experiences and opinions demanding attention. The problems posed by this broad-church approach of the Conference organisers were the risk of a lack of focus and a certain degree of fragmentation. Certainly there was quite a melting pot of ideas at the Conference, most of which will be hopefully absorbed by those delegates who were present to hear papers and who may have heard about the many other missed papers in general conversation.

One of the most positive aspects of the Conference was the bubbling prospect of BAIS graduating to a new stage of life. Saturday 14th February, 1998 will be the BAIS "Awayday", at which Council members in their various committees will conduct "brainstorming sessions" to consider ideas for a projected BAIS development plan into the next century. It is very important that all our readers put their ideas on paper and forward them to us so that a wide range of positions can be explored and considered on the "Awayday".

Centres of Irish Studies remain a major interest for the Newsletter. We have heard the news that Dr. Lance Pettitt, the energetic editor of the Newsletter 1994-6, has succeeded Dr. Jim O'Hara as the Director of Irish Studies at St. Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill. We hope to feature aspects of research work being done in the various centres of Irish Studies in future issues of the Newsletter and invite both staff and students to help us build up a lively picture of what is going on in each centre.

Mary Doran has taken over from Lance Pettitt the compilation of the list of BAIS members' research interests. Please see the form on page 15. The list will be published in early 1998 - apologies to those who have previously sent in the completed form. A special welcome to Marie Ryan who is joining the Editorial team as from the Winter 1997 Newsletter. Please send copy and/or discs to Madeleine Casey, 5 Kendall Road, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 6RB. **The deadline for the Winter issue is 30th November, 1997.**

Madeleine Casey, Mary Doran & Jerry Nolan
Co-Editors

THE FOCUS INTERVIEW IN THE WINTER NEWSLETTER WILL BE WITH Drs. Mary Hickman and Bronwen Walter about reactions to findings in the CRE commissioned report: "Discrimination and the Irish Community".

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING OF BAIS COUNCIL: SATURDAY 15.11.97

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:

- 4 issues of Irish Studies Review and BAIS Newsletter posted to you
- Institutional Membership includes two copies of ISR & Newsletter
- Network of nearly 300 members with Irish Studies interests.

BAIS Chair's report to the AGM, 1997

The last AGM took place at the first of our London-based one day conferences; and on 31 March the second bi-lingual conference took place using the same format of papers and debate. Council has been planning our Sixth Biennial Conference over the past year; and is now making arrangements for our inaugural BAIS London Lecture on 11 November. It is also beginning to plan a 1998 BAIS conference on 'Irish Revolutionaries and British Radicals'. The members of Council who have been chiefly responsible for arrangements in connection with these events are Bob Bell, Eleanor Burgess, Mervyn Busteed, Domhnall Mac Suibhne, Frank Neal, Lance Pettitt and Cait Thompson.

During the year three issues of the BAIS Newsletter and four issues of Irish Studies Review have been distributed to members. The Newsletter now has three Co-Editors, Madeleine Casey, Mary Doran and Jerry Nolan, who bring with them fresh ideas for developing this publication. Mary Doran has also taken over responsibility for the members' Research Register. Lance Pettitt, who developed and upgraded the Newsletter, is now cutting back on his commitments due to his increasing responsibilities at St Mary's University College - and, on this occasion, we wish to thank Lance for a major contribution to the Association over a number of years. We are very pleased to be associated with a publication of the calibre of Irish Studies Review and benefit from the arrangement whereby the Newsletter is distributed from Bath College of Higher Education. Mervyn Busteed has not only provided us with minutes and agenda throughout the year, but has also had a heavy commitments on the conference front and has taken a strong interest in development issues. Domhnall Mac Suibhne, our Treasurer, has carefully managed the finances of the Association. He has continued to develop financial procedures and has liaised closely with Sandy Trott, BAIS Membership Administrator, who is providing us with a quality service. Cait Thompson has co-ordinated the Irish language activities of the Association for a number of years in a way that has earned the Association wide respect. This year, again, Cait has secured EU Lingua funding to send teachers of the

Irish language in Britain on refresher courses in Ireland. Cait is standing down from her co-ordinating role this year, and we thank her for her quietly efficient services to the Association.

This year the Association made a grant of £300 towards the activities of the Women on Ireland Academic Network. The Council has also developed criteria for the provision of such financial assistance. Having focused for a number of years on placing the Association on a sound administrative and financial basis and on the delivery of a limited range of services, we are beginning to look at ways in which we can move the Association forward. Margaret Ward has produced a revised BAIS recruitment brochure and we shall be giving attention, in a forthcoming away-day review, to the recruitment and retention of members - a vital issue for the Association. Response to the questionnaire developed by Bob Bell and distributed to the membership was poor, although it did give us some indication of members' wishes. The plenary session "Supporting Irish Studies" at Salford will be carried further at an away-day in February 1998, when the aims, objects and activities of the Association will be reassessed.

Our inability over the history of the Association to develop a strategy for schools and further education, and the fact that we had, this year, to abandon our Famine Project - after all John Woodhurst's efforts to get it off the ground - indicate that the development of the resources of the Association, in terms of personnel and finances, will have to be central to our review. Indeed, every activity we undertake carries a price-tag in terms of both these scarce commodities. The active core of Council have been quite flexible in making their services available where that has been needed and we have all assisted in publicly representing the Association. I have worked most closely with the Secretary and the Treasurer, and have made a number of grant applications on behalf of the Association. I have sought to maintain an overview of Association activity and have assisted elsewhere as necessary. Working with Council has been a great pleasure over the year.

FOCUS INTERVIEW: GEAROID O'CAIREALLIN

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 to restore the Irish Language as the key reform to preserve and develop Irish national identity. The League came to be regarded, among other organisations with similar aims, as "the old oak of the Irish language movement". At present there are about 250 Gaelic League branches throughout Ireland, mostly in urban areas and with about 90 of the branches in Northern Ireland. Gearoid O'Caireallin, a 37 year old Belfast man, was elected as President of the Gaelic League in 1995, in succession to Prionsias Mac Aonghusa. In A BAI'S FOCUS INTERVIEW Gearoid discussed with Jerry Nolan the role of the Gaelic League in the Ireland of the twenty first century.

JN: *The main aim of the founder of the Gaelic League, Douglas Hyde, was that Irish should be spoken fluently by most of the Irish population. Over one hundred years on, there is little Irish being spoken fluently not only among the general population of Ireland but even in places like the Dail and the Seanad and the Irish law courts. Why has there been so little progress in the language revival for the vast majority, beyond the cupla focal?*

G.O'C: The Gaelic League began as a young person's idealistic organisation. Hyde's vision seemed mad at the time because he believed in and inspired other people to believe in the revival of the Irish language at the time when the colonial anglicisation of Ireland seemed utterly unstoppable. There were early successes for the League because it gave to Irish people the chance to find a voice of their own. I accept that the challenge now is as great as ever. What I think should happen now is to recapture the spirit of the early years in the very different historical situation.

JN: *But you have not yet explained why the early successes were snuffed out. Surely you accept that the Irish language seemed to relapse into a kind of irreversible decline during the de Valera period, in spite of the fact that de Valera obviously believed in the cause?*

G.O'C: Serious mistakes were made by de Valera who used the state to take over the main work of the Gaelic league. Too often the language began to be seen as a state-imposed defence against foreign influences which remained for de Valera, as for Hyde, the threat of anglicisation as the price of economic development. Also the state-imposed revival in those days became too closely associated with poor teaching methods in the schools and public disillusionment with the general lack of progress after years of learning the language.

JN: *I remember that de Valera had a great belief in the Gaeltachtaí as the ideal place to learn Irish. What is the League's view of the best place to learn Irish in 1997?*

G.O'C: Of course the *Gaeltachti* still have an important role to play but a very good place to learn Irish in 1997 is in one of the *Gaelscoileanna* or the community schools who deliver the whole curriculum through the medium of Irish. There are about 30,000 students now involved in the *Gaelscoileanna*. The Irish state must provide some financial support for these ventures, but these school can succeed only if families within the local community provide the strong motivation for all to learn and use Irish. The policy of a tender loving care within families is being so much more successful than the mechanical teaching methods so often employed during the de Valera years. Already there is evidence to suggest that there has spread an affectionate regard for the language as a celebration of things Irish, in place of the previous apathy in the face of an officialdom and bureaucracy trying to impose things. Current national figures like President Robinson and Michael D. Higgins have helped enormously to foster the new mood of optimism about the revival of Irish in the twenty first century.

JN: *But will this new mood continue when media interest shifts onto other things? Surely the harshest fact for the Gaelic League has not changed in a hundred years – that Irish as the second language for the vast majority in an English speaking Ireland must always be on the defensive and in danger of irrelevance in the global village where English functions as one of the main world language?*

G.O'C: No, times have changed. I believe that now modernisation in Ireland can become part of the argument in favour of the language revival for the first time. Regional development within the European Community has stimulated economic development in regions where an economy to be successful draws strength from reawakened awareness of roots in the local culture and can establish its distinctive identity best on the international scene by sometimes using its native language.

JN: *Are there any examples which show this new type of economic development in Ireland where the Irish language plays a vital role?*

G.O'C: Examples are happening in one of Ireland's leading industries – tourism. There is the success story of Liam O'Cuimheagaim in South Donegal who has attracted many Americans and Japanese to come and experience the joys of the Irish language in music, song, poetry and conversation in his *Oideas Gael* enterprise. There are other examples of cottage industries in small country and urban communities where the Irish language is being used as a bond between the workers which results in very good industrial relations. The link between productive entrepreneurship and the Irish language will continue to grow well into the next century.

JN: *Is there any special significance in the fact that the President of the Gaelic League is an Ulster nationalist? I should be very interested to know more about how you first became involved in the cause of the Irish language.*

G.O'C: As a pupil at St. Mary's Christian Brothers School in Belfast, I was inspired by a teacher, Michael O'Murchu. Michael gave me a love of the language which put it above politics. I went on from school to study Celtic Studies and English at Queen's University but I did not finish the course. I decided to become a journalist. Soon I was enjoying persuading people outside academic circles to discover the pleasures of things Irish.

JN: *What exactly do you mean when you say that the Irish language is above politics?*

G.O'C: I mean that the initiative to revive Irish as a spoken language throughout Ireland has passed out of the grasp of the politicians and lies in the hands of families, friends, communities. The Gaelic League fosters all developments on that local level. As the global village develops, the nation-state as understood by people like Hyde and de Valera will be changed utterly. The League's strongest argument is that to establish credibility in the global village, the Irish need to be bilingual. As multilingualism will be seen increasingly as the most desirable goal for a twenty first century education, the Gaelic League will be arguing strongly the case that Irish should be one of the languages used by a fully educated Irish people.

JN: *What about the problem in Northern Ireland where Ulster Unionists can hardly be expected to see overnight the Irish language as above politics?*

G.O'C: I agree that Ulster Unionists have long associated, too long associated the Irish language solely with political nationalism. They forget that the language has potential as a source of reconciliation rather than of conflict.

Remember Hyde did his utmost to keep the League in very early days as a meeting ground and as a mass movement of nationalists and unionists. The political violence in Ulster obscures the possibilities for the meeting of the two traditions. The political context of Ulster is changing. The nationalist vote is now about 42%. Balance of numbers will encourage mutual understanding and respect. The *Ard-Fheis* was held in Belfast last year. The main reception was in in the Belfast City Hall, for so long the bastion of Unionist supremacy. I detected a mutual respect for the symbols of the different traditions. Traditional conflicts will greatly lessen when there grows a parity of esteem in an increasingly democratic society.

JN: *How can Irish nationalists ever learn to respect symbols like statues of Queen Victoria and the regimental scrolls of honour?*

G.O'C: Why not? Provided that the unionists respect nationalist symbols such as the Irish tricolour and the Irish National Anthem. It was more difficult for the unionists to do this when they considered themselves to be living in a monolithic Ulster state protected by England. If we can move out of the cycle of violence, there's no reason why the traditions, especially among the young, cannot meet on the ground originally envisaged by the founder of the Gaelic League.

JN: *How visible a presence in Northern Ireland is the Gaelic League in the current situation?*

G.O'C: The Gaelic League promotes many projects in Northern Ireland. We want more Irish used on the BBC and the Irish National Anthem played alongside "God Save the Queen". We are trying to persuade local councils to adopt bilingual policies in some areas of communication. We are campaigning for more State aid for Irish-medium schools. We are proposing the foundation of an Irish medium University with a broad curriculum for those who are moving on from the *Gaelscoileanna*. Keeping busy like this enables us to invite the whole of Ireland – people and governments – to think along the lines of our forward-looking policies and practices for a truly civilised global village.

REPORT:

FILM FESTIVAL FEVER

The past six months have seen three major festivals of Irish film in Britain and the growth looks set to be consolidated. *Newsletter 10* reported on 'Festival of New Irish Cinema' held in Hammersmith at the end of January. This event is now four years old and well-established with screenings at the Hammersmith Irish centre and the Riverside Studios. It is presented by Arts Ireland and Moving Arts Productions and receives funding from the Ireland Fund of Great Britain and the Department of Foreign Affairs. This year's festival achieved 69% average capacity houses and provides a platform for younger, lesser known and student production as well as recognised directors. The Irish Centre in Blacks Road is equipped with beta facilities, the format in which many student films are made for budget reasons. Ros Scanlon, one of the organisers, told me that the continued success of the festival was a combination of factors. The Irish film industry finally 'getting its act together' had increased output but also, she adds, there is a noticeable 'quality jump' in the material over the last two years. Next year's festival is scheduled for Spring 1998 but the actual programming of the festival is a tricky exercise juggling print availability, popular tastes, innovation and experiment. Films in Irish and on more traditional themes are also screened to appeal to the Centre's year-round users in the Irish classes, music and dancing groups and senior citizens. Ros explained that there are plans in the pipeline to launch an Irish film-makers workshop to tie in with the annual festival activities and develop the talent of local people within the area.

March saw the launch of the first 'Kino Festival of New Irish Cinema' in Manchester which achieved notable success recording 2,000 admissions. Organised as part of the

broader Manchester Irish Festival, Kino is a members film club that already runs an international short film festival in October. It is an organisation 'open to anyone in the film-making community'. It acts as a focus and facilitator for those interested in making, watching and discussing film and video. Kino's venture into an Irish-themed event is significant. Festival Director John S. Wojowski explained that the current festival has evolved over two years from having a few films shown as part of the Manchester Irish festival in 1995 to a modest two-day event in 1996 to 'test the waters'. This year's full-blown event remains associated with the wider Manchester Irish Festival. In association with the Irish World Heritage Centre (Cheetham Hill), Kino provided for a series of awards for 'best films' at the festival including among others: Damien O'Donnell's *35 Aside* 'Short cuts', N.G. Bristow's *Dah Dit Dah* (Northern Lights) and Gabriel Levy's *The Resurrection Men* (New 16mm Short). We should remember that Kino Klub has its own programme of festivals all the year round and provides other services to raise revenue. It has mobile projection facilities which is hires out to schools, community events and colleges. Indeed, it organised the film showing for September's BAIS conference at Salford University.

Wojowski confessed that this year's ten day event although impressive was maybe a victim of its own ambition and lack of resources. Screenings took place in the mainstream 'Odeon', the alternative/art 'Cornerhouse' and the temporary set-up in the converted canal-side warehouse of Duke's bar and restaurant. Without their own permanent venue, Kino is forced to take the screening slots made available to it which can lead to dispersed programming times and much foot-slogging for audiences. Staff and

money have been stretched to the full this year and next year's festival may well be trimmed back to seven days. This will have several benefits. It will provide for a more intense 'festival' experience, secondly it would be easier to manage and thirdly it would be even more attractive to film-makers, producers and audiences further afield who would come to see more films in a concentrated period of time. Wojowski is looking for more sustained financial support and points out surprisingly that 'Irish film festivals are not the easiest thing to sell' to potential backers, even in a city with a considerable Irish presence. Kino's 1998 Irish festival is planned for March with the possibility of new categories of film, the same excellent array of awards and the promise of more Irish cinematic talent.

In April, the Barbican Centre, London, hosted the massive 'From the Heart' festival featuring 'innovations in Irish music and arts'. Its programme included music, visual arts, literary events, workshops and an extensive review of film called 'Green on the Screen'. The offerings differed from Hammersmith and Manchester in that the films celebrated the historical achievement of Irish cinema rather than providing a showcase for very recent productions. The highlight screening had to be *Irish Destiny*, a silent film from 1925 that is set against the background of the War of Independence. The 73 minute film was directed by George Dewhurst and was accompanied in the auditorium by a live orchestra playing a score specially written for the event by Micheal O Suilleabhain, who also played piano. The other forty or so films covered a wide range of genres, included special

tributes to John Ford, Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan. Tucked in among the popular, features were some lesser-seen documentary gems by Louis Marcus (*Dubliners*, 1972) and Sean Ó Mordha (*The Blue Note*). The low-budget, schlock-horror spoof *The Eliminator* (Michael and Enda Hughes, 1995) contrasted with the brightly polished if slightly unanchored production of *Last of the High Kings* (David Keating, 1996), based on Ferdia Mac Anna's novel. Indeed, literary sources have always featured in Irish cinematic production and some of the best were on show at this festival. Cathal Black's beautiful *Korea* (1995) is inspired by John McGahern's short story and Mary McGuckian makes a fantastically absorbing and genuinely unnerving film out of a W.B. Yeats play in *Words Upon the Window Pane* (1994).

While the Barbican festival was clearly a heavily sponsored, major event and pulled in huge crowds, I hope that the smaller, more intimate festivals will continue to thrive and mushroom around the country. Hammersmith, Kino and last year's 'Reel Ireland' festival, held at Nottingham's Media Centre, are distinctive in that they specifically tie into local or regional events, pull in people to see newer, more experimental or small scale films, exhibit student work, first time directors and community video projects which tend to get eclipsed by the demands of national distribution and profit-led programming of the mainstream cinemas.

Lance Pettitt is Director at the Centre for Irish Studies, St Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill.

LETTERS

Mary Kenny – A Reaction

I read the interview with Mary Kenny in Issue 11 with a growing sense of bewilderment. It seems to me that she did not need – or heed – Jerry Nolan's questions. On almost every occasion the answer was, to put it politely, tangential. Again and again substantive points were put to her, but they seemed only to act as prompts for what reads as a nostalgic meander through a series of loosely connected anecdotes and personal reminiscences, usually prefaced with: "A friend of mine... I meet women who... A bishop told me the story... I remember..." At times I almost felt I was intruding on a stream of barely coherent musings over a fondly imagined landscape studded with cosy homesteads, caring clerics, devout mothers and children agog to read the missionary magazines. Just occasionally the flow was interrupted to take a sideswipe at the buzzing flies of the press, academics, "modern dissenting missionaries" and beastly men.

Surely the saddest point in the interview is plumbed when the obdurate refusal to admit that the Catholic Church ever made any mistakes leads her to dismiss any apology for abuse of children by some religious as "pathetic" and goes on to suggest that some victims seek public redress merely to pick up payments from the press. But perhaps most revealing of all is the assumption throughout that Irishness and Catholicism are synonymous. Nowhere is there any hint of awareness of the vibrant spiritual traditions of the Protestants of Ireland, north or south – are they being defined out of Irishness?

We are all indebted to the Editors of the Newsletter for letting us have this insight into the mindset of an apologist for a certain tradition of pre-Vatican II Catholicism as it evolved in Ireland. Now we can see why so many have abandoned it.

Mervyn Busted

(Ed. Note: The writer, who is Honorary Secretary of BAIS, is writing in his personal capacity.)

NEWS REPORT: LAUNCH OF 1798

BICENTENARY PROGRAMME

The Bicentenary Programme for the 1798 commemorations was launched at a reception hosted by the Ambassador, Mr. Ted Barrington, at the Irish Embassy on the 16th July. Mr. Barrington, a native of Co. Wexford, spoke of the importance of 1798 in Irish history (with the formation of Republicanism, Orangeism and the implications for the Act of Union) and in British history (for its influence on British radicalism). Minister Seamus Brennan fully committed the incoming government in the Republic to support the commemorative programme and spoke about the international aspects of 1798 and after. Then the Minister thanked the outgoing Minister, Avril Doyle, for her work. Mr. Bernard, of Comóradh '98, emphasised the importance of analysing and understanding the '98 events and in understanding the contacts and connections between radical groups in Ireland, France and the United States. The non-sectarian and revolutionary philosophy of the Rebellion will be featured and the charge of sectarianism will be contested. The Wexford Senate will be reconvened as a focus for the Diaspora. Mr. Matt O'Connor, of the National 1798 Visitor Centre, gave an outline of the Centre which will open in 1998 at Enniscorthy. The Centre will chart the history of democracy, the background to the Rebellion, the events of 1798, the aftermath and significance of 1798. There will also be a section on how the Rebellion has been, and continues to be, interpreted and commemorated. For further information, please contact: **Bernard Browne, Comóradh '98, Market Square, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, Republic of Ireland. Tel: 00 353 54 33540/37198. Fax: 00 353 54 35115. E-mail: 98com@iol.ie**

A PERSONAL VIEW: BAIS CONFERENCE—"The Irish and Britain"

Hosted by the European Studies Research Institute at the University of Salford, the sixth biennial BAIS conference took place from 5th to 7th September. With about thirty five papers on offer over the weekend, parallel sessions were employed. The papers were almost as diverse as they were numerous. What I hope to give here is a flavour of my perceptions of the weekend.

Within the first session, the importance of local historical and social studies became apparent and was a recurring theme over the weekend. Ann Garry Bray and Frank Neal's papers both took the effects of the Irish famines on the north west of this country as their subjects. Ann's paper detailed the 'charitable response' of Manchester worthies to Ireland's distress while Frank energetically revealed the depth of his research into the social and economic 'impact of the Irish famine refugees in the North West of England.'

The evening entertainment laid on for Friday in the campus cinema was a showing of two short films. *After '68* by writer and director Stephen Burke is a moving portrayal of an adolescent girl's life in Derry at the outbreak of the Troubles, juxtaposing her rebirth into womanhood with her mother's into a political activist and the city's into a war zone. *Thirty Five Aside* by Damien O'Donnell, is an ironic look at school bullying surely modelled on the Baz Lurhman style of film making as characters exaggerated their way across the screen with amusing and sometimes hilarious effect.

Kevin Bean began one of the sessions on Saturday, leading us through the shifting ground of republican political thought on British presence in Northern Ireland over the

last three decades as the need for terra firma upon which to negotiate has become ever more essential. Paul Dixon followed with his paper, 'Bringing the Boys Back Home: the impact of the movement for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, 1973-75'. This paper threw up a theme which was also to recur, that of anti-Irish racism. In this case the focus was on the populist and vociferous campaigns organised by the families of British soldiers serving in Northern Ireland.

A change to the scheduled programme occurred between 11am and 2pm in deference to the funeral of Princess Diana. Those who wished could view the funeral in the cinema. Leaving London on Friday, I had felt a sense of relief that I was travelling in the opposite direction to the hundreds of thousands of people heading for the capitol. There was an ambivalent feeling about having this long hiatus in a busy schedule thrust upon us; most people expecting to observe the minute's silence as an adequate mark of respect. However, for those who did watch the funeral, whether for reasons of academic interest, nothing better to do, sympathy, sorrow or a sense of occasion, could anyone not have been moved by the beauty of the reading given by Tony Blair, the startling aural and visual presence of Elton John, the foundation rocking tribute by Earl Spencer, the simplicity of the wreath labelled 'Mummy', and the sight of the mourning multitudes bereft of a fantasy?

The conference reconvened at 2pm. I chose the session on Ethnic Identity - the Irish in Britain. Here, Liam Greenslade expressed how the Irish in Britain have been excluded from discourses on race and identity within British society despite clear evidence to show their distinctiveness, and how endemic anti-Irish racism is in this country. Phil Carver

focused in on the Birmingham Irish explaining how they and others who have lived for generations in British cities, often come to identify themselves with the locality in which they live rather than with being British. He explained how subsequent generations of Irish born in Britain have moved away from the fixity of a clear cut Irish identity towards a prism-like multi-identity more reflective of their backgrounds. Mary Hickman's paper centred on the 'myth of homogeneity' propagated by governments of the 1950s and bought into by most British and many Irish people between then and now. (This subject will be discussed further with Mary in Issue 13 of the Newsletter.)

In need of exercise and space after the confinement of the day, I dipped-out of the last session and headed across Salford's green and pleasant campus. It was four o'clock, grey, cold and starting to rain - the perfect time to view the Lowry exhibition housed in Salford's red-brick museum and art gallery. And there they were, the smoke-belching factories dispersing their hordes of workers, stooping determinedly 'homeward' or 'pubward, away from the mill and without a backward glance.' As well as his industrial scenes, the exhibition displayed many of his portraits, seascapes and landscapes. *Coming from the Mill*, 1930, *A Beggar*, 1965, *The Funeral Party*, 1953, respectively depicting a crowd, an individual and a group, conveyed Lowry's spectral images of lives hard lived and spirits lonely, forever moving or motionless within his bleak canvases. Reading the histories of these paintings, often in Lowry's own words, I recalled Frank Neal's paper, and realised that many of the characters he painted would have been Irish or of Irish descent; migrant workers who fled 'Black 47' in their hundreds of thousands for Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow.

Nine-thirty Sunday morning came round too soon for most, following a reception hosted

by Irish Ambassador, Ted Barrington, the Conference Dinner with Professor Robert Welch giving us his after-dinner speech, and retirement to the late bar for convivial chats as traditional Irish music was played by local musicians. As chair of the Irish Writers session that morning, I looked out at a pool of die-hard conference attendees awaiting their academic 'fix', and they were not disappointed. Michael Thomas began with a paper which charted the progress of Irish characters within the writings of William Trevor. From their early appearances as little better than 'stage-Irish' cyphers to the sensitive characterisations of his later work, the Irish in Trevor's Britain progressively have been given a life. Alison Younger argued that Brian Friel in his play *The Freedom of the City* manages to avoid the charge of creating nationalist myths and martyrs by not allowing the central character's to be seen to die, thereby challenging 'the audience to avoid being caught in an endless cycle of repetition.

The most spirited paper which I heard during the weekend was given by Mary Pearson of Birmingham Social Services Department. Mary's paper, 'Irish Identity and Children's Rights', was based on her recently published thesis. Mary began by reminding us of anti-Irish words and phrases which are part of our daily speech: 'throwing a paddy', 'taking the mickey', 'beyond the pale', 'hooligan', 'that sounds Irish'. The use of such racist language in common parlance makes her job with children in care all the harder. How can her offer of positive images of a child's ethnic identity withstand the battering it takes from negative stereotyping and racist remarks? And it is our failure to challenge every instance of racism, no matter how small we consider it which brought Mary to the conclusion that 'despite lots of policy there has been little change in practice'.

Madeleine Casey

REPORT: 'Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain'

After many years of lobbying the CRE for support of the Irish community in Britain, Irish community organisations and welfare agencies have finally seen a result with the publication of Dr Mary Hickman and Dr Bronwen Walter's 'Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain' in June of this year. This report represents a mile stone in the journey these organisations have taken to have the Irish recognised as an ethnic minority, a much needed but not necessarily wanted, label.

This report is not just a gathering together of statistical evidence for analysis, an essential enough function, but it also is a catalogue of the wave upon wave of Irish people who have entered this country when the need for their labour was paramount only to find themselves beached in times of recession. As the report points out, long before and since the 1948 British Nationality Act and the 1949 Republic of Ireland Act cemented a few gold pieces along the highways between Irish ports and British cities, the Irish have been a major source of migrant labour, fulfilling needs in such areas as the health service, teaching, engineering, construction, domestic services, office work both clerical and sanitorial. How ignominious, then, when in pursuit of labour in this country, a place in which every Irish citizen has a right to inhabit, work and vote, an Irish person finds themselves up against 'gatekeepers', as Hickman and Walter describe them, barring the way to their rights; the petty officials who behind the front desks of UBO's, housing

departments, banks and insurance brokers ask these 'foreign nationals' for passports and 'unforged' birth certificates as proof of their legitimacy:

It was like trying to get blood out of a turnip... They brought everything Irish up - why are you here etc. I was offended because I felt we were grilled. If they did it to any other nationality, they'd be up for racism right away. The majority of Irish people I know had the same problem. (p.179)

An important recommendation the report makes is for the training of those in official positions of responsibility whose yea or nay at the health, welfare and benefit portals can seriously affect not only the nouveau arrive's chances of receiving fair play within the existing system, but also his or her physical and mental well being within this country. Perhaps one of the more shameful practices related in the report is of Camden Council's offer of return travel permits to Ireland to those it decided had made themselves intentionally homeless by the fact of their migration from Ireland to find work. A ticket home: a bitter sweet from a faux amis.

The broad recommendations this pilot report makes to the CRE are succinct and powerful. They include 'the need to make Irish issues more visible'; the 'collection of accurate data' through pervasive ethnic monitoring 'so that the nature and scale of problems faced can be measured and change can be

monitored; the need for an increase in the 'awareness of the racialised character of anti-Irish hostility' to enable victims to come forward with the confidence their voices will be heard and they will be supported by those who can effect change.

Conversely, the report reveals a reluctance within the Irish community to acceptance that anti-Irish racism exists and a rejection of or ambivalence to ethnic minority labelling by nearly half the sample interviewed. The issues involved in understanding these feelings are both complex and sensitive. Hickman and Walter reveal an understandable desire by many Irish residents to keep a low profile and for a quiet life. But the compromises one has to make for these goals to be attained can be demeaning at best and soul destroying at worst: "Everyone, as soon as I open my mouth, gets laughing... People mimic my accent or sing snatches of Irish songs." (Female lecturer), "I've heard the 'silly Paddy-Irishman jokes', portraying the Irish as thick. Bobby Sands jokes after he died were really sick. It was a very painful time." (Female civil servant). Perhaps the most important work of the authors has been in giving definition to anti-Irish racism and establishing that a language does exist for defining experiences which range from enduring Irish jokes to verbal and physical abuse by neighbours and police.

This report unearths much that is dysfunctional within British society and the lives of the Irish in Britain, not least, the acceptable level of racism casually

meted out by British people and with which many an Irish person in Britain cohabits. The *if I keep my head down, especially after a bombing campaign, and laugh at Irish jokes* attitude has seen many a person through tricky times in this country but must surely leave a bad taste in the mouth: "...I suppose you would be intimidated by remarks. 'Paddy' was only capable of digging the roads, that kind of thing. That would upset me more than anything because there's good Irish as well.", "For myself, personally, it's not that I turn a blind eye to it, but I'm weatherbeaten to it."

That language which is used by all ethnic minorities to enable their specific needs and rights to be met within their adopted country and with which to combat racism and discriminatory practices can now be utilised by the Irish as a result of this report. Of course racism and discrimination will never be eradicated from British society but the ability to fight it through official and judicial channels has now been made available to Britain's longest established and largest ethnic minority community: the Irish.

Madeleine Casey.

Pádraig Ó Conchúir (1928-1997) by Sean Hutton

Fuair Pádraig Ó Conchúir, ball fadsheasamach de BAIS, bás ar an 4 Iúil 1997.

Rugadh Pádraig i Chelsea i 1928. Bháin sé leis an dara glun Eireannach agus fuair sé, a chuid oideachais sa choláiste Slánaitheorach i Harrow agus ag Coláiste na hOllscoile, Gaillimh, áit a bhain sé, ce im tráchtála amach. Ba státseirbhíseach de chuid na Breataine é ar feadh cuid mhaith dá shaol - ach dála Pádraig Uí Chonaire roimhe, ba bheag i ndáiríre a spéis i gcúrsa riaracháin.

D'fhoghlam sé, a chuid Ghaeilge i gConradh na Gaeilge i Londain agus bhí sé, ina bhall gníomhach den Chonradh ar feadh a shaol. Seachas sin bhí spéis aige i ngach a bhain le hÉirinn nó le hÉireannachas agus bhí spéis aige freisin in imeachtaí na gcúrsa Ceilteach eile.

Ba scoláire é ar an seandéanamh. Bhí an t-úafas léite aige. Ba léir an t-eolas sin sa ráidhse litreach óna pheann agus sna colúin a d'fhoilsigh sé faoina ainm féin agus faoi ainmneacha cleite sna páipeirí agus sna hirísí Gaeilge.

Ba phoblachtánach é agus bhí sé gníomhach abhus i gcúiseanna a bhain le hÉirinn. Thairis sin bhí luí aige le traidisúin faoi leith i bpolaitíocht phréamhach na tíre seo: ghlac sé páirt go rialta i gcomóradh na Levellers, bhí se ina bhall de Chumann Thomas Paine, agus bhí baint aige le comóradh bliantúil Bronterre O'Brien.

Is trua nár mhair sé chun páirt a glacadh sa phlé a bhéas ar siúl againn an bhliain seo chugainn ar 'Irish revolutionaries and British radicals'. Is cinnte go mbeadh focal nó trí le rá aige ar an ábhar sin.

Padraig OConchuir, a longstanding member of BAIS, died on 4 July 1997.

Padraig was second generation Irish, having been born in Chelsea in 1928. He was educated by the Salvatorians in Harrow, and at University College, Galway. He was a British civil servant for much of his life, but, like Padraig OConaire before him, he did not have a great enthusiasm for administration.

Padraig learned to speak the Irish language in the Gaelic League in London, and he continued an active member of the League throughout his life. He was passionately interested in all things Irish or pertaining to Ireland; and he also maintained an active interest in the affairs of other Celtic areas.

A scholarly person, Padraig read an immense amount. His knowledge was evidenced in his vast output of letters and in the Irish-language articles which he published under both his own name and various *noms de plume*.

Padraig was an Irish republican and was active in many causes concerned with Ireland. His affinity with specific strands of English-based radicalism was demonstrated by his regular participation in the commemoration of the Levellers and of Bronterre O'Brien, and in his membership of the Thomas Paine Society.

What a shame that Padraig will not be with us to participate in next year's conference on 'Irish revolutionaries and British radicals', a subject near to his heart.

NOTICEBOARD

The BAIS London Lecture

At the British Academy 20 Cornwall Terrace
London NW1 4QP
(Nearest Underground Station: Baker Street)
Tuesday, 11 November, 1997 at 6.30 p.m.

Dr. Mary Hickman and Dr. Bronwen Walter

DISCRIMINATION AND THE IRISH IN
BRITAIN: THE FINDINGS OF THE
RECENT CRE REPORT

The lecture will be followed by questions and
by a wine reception.

Tickets will be available from **Dr. Bob Bell**,
3 Hill Road, London NW8 9QE (Tel: 0171-
286-6072)

From mid-October onwards at £5 (£4 BAIS
members). Please make cheques payable to
British Association for Irish Studies.

BATH SPA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**Irish Lecture Series: Irish Women – Images
and Achievements**

15 October

REVEALING LIVES – PHOTOGRAPHIC
IMAGES OF IRISHWOMEN 1880-1920

Myrtle Hill-Queen's University Belfast

22 October

MARY LAVIN – A PORTRAIT OF THE
WRITER

Sarah Briggs-Bath Spa

29 October

HANNA SHEEHY-SKEFFINGTON: A
HETERODOX WOMAN

Margaret Ward-Bath Spa

5 November

THE WOMEN'S COALITION AND THE
PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN
IRELAND

Monica McWilliams-University of Ulster

12 November

TO BE ANNOUNCED

19 November

“ABANDONED WOMEN AND BAD
CHARACTERS”:PROSTITUTION IN
IRELAND 1800-1914

Maria Luddy – University of Warwick

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
STRAWBERRY HILL

Public Lecture Series Autumn 1997

At 19.30 each evening. Free admission.

11th November

THE YEATS GENERATION AND THE
IRISH REVOLUTION

Professor Roy Foster, University of Oxford)

18 November

Thaddeus O'Sullivan, director of
DECEMBER BRIDE and NOTHING
PERSONAL, in conversation with Lance
Pettitt about his past work and current film
project.

25 November

THE LABOUR PARTY AND ITS POLICY
ON NORTHERN IRELAND

Kevin McNamara MP

2 December

“ABANDONED WOMEN AND BAD
CHARACTERS”:PROSTITUTION IN
IRELAND:1800-1914

Dr. Maria Luddy-University of Warwick

For further details ring Lance Pettitt,

Tel: 0181-240-4090

WOMEN ON IRELAND NETWORK
STUDY DAY

On Saturday, 22 November, 1997-09-12

The Study Day is designed to provide an
opportunity for women working on the issues
of Ireland, Irishness and the Irish Diaspora to
share knowledge and resources. The keynote
speaker will be *Margaret Ward*-Bath Spa
University College. For further information
about this event write to **Louise Ryan**,
Department of Social Studies, University of
Central Lancashire, Preston PR1 2HE or
Kathy Cremin, Centre for Women's
Studies, University of York, Heslington,
York YO1 5DD. (Kathy may also be
contacted at 01274-549053.

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF IRISH STUDIES

A List of Research / Interests of Current Members

If you are a current paid-up member of BAIS and you are interested in your name appearing in a listing to be issued on an annual basis please complete the form below and return it to the address shown. The purpose of this list is to facilitate contact between those members sharing similar interests. The extent of the information you provide is at your own discretion. You need only to provide the information you want published. The list will be published in early 1998.

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Surname..... First Name(s).....

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

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Periodical: title of article, title of periodical, volume number, date, page numbers

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