

# British Association for Irish Studies Newsletter

ISSUE NO. 14 APRIL 1998



**HANNA SHEEHY**

**SKEFFINGTON**

**SPEAKING OUTSIDE**

**MOUNTJOY PRISON**

**DUBLIN 1914**

SEE

**FOCUS INTERVIEW**

ON PAGE 2

**ALSO: FEATURES - VIEWS - NOTICEBOARD**

***SEE STOP PRESS ON PAGE 1***

***RE. BAIS ONE DAY CONFERENCE AT RUSKIN COLLEGE***

***OXFORD ON SATURDAY 12th SEPTEMBER***

## **BAIS NEWLETTER NO. 14 APRIL 1998**

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### **Editorial**

Your news, views and reports have not been getting through to us. Also the final report on the Bais "Awayday" is not quite ready, so that will now appear in our July number. As we are committed to including only genuine news in this newsletter, we have not filled our pages with waffle – hence this April slim issue!

A matter of abiding interest to us is the one of lectures, conferences, study days etc. We are always keen to include reports on all such events and are very glad to consider for publication in the newsletter extracts from the most interesting papers presented on such occasions.

We are most grateful to Margaret Ward for providing us with a splendid Focus Interview. The Interview, as well as the interesting piece entitled "A good Constitution" might hopefully start an argument on our letters pages.

**Copy and/or discs (Word 6/95) for No. 15 should be sent to Jerry Nolan 8 Antrobus Road Chiswick London W4 5HY by 15 June 1998 as the FINAL DEADLINE.**

*Madeleine Casey, Mary Doran, Jerry Nolan & Marie Ryan* (Co-Editors)

### **STOP PRESS**

To commemorate the Bicentenary of 1798, BAIS in association with Ruskin College Oxford will host a one day conference at Ruskin College **IRISH REVOLUTIONARIES AND BRITISH RADICALS** on Saturday 12 September 1998 10.00am - 5.00pm.

Speakers will include:

**Kevin Whelan** (Notre Dame): Three Revolutions and A Failure: the 1798 Rebellion in Context.

**Virginia Crossman** (Staffordshire Univ.) Theobald Wolfe Tone and the Commemoration of 1798.

**Gillian O'Brien** (Inst. Of Irish Studies, Liverpool): Samuel Neilson and The Northern Star.

**Bob Purdie** (Ruskin College): Maurice Margoret and the Radical Movement in Scotland.

**Stephen Howe** (Ruskin College): The 1798 Uprising in Malta.

**Tommy Graham** (Trinity College Dublin) To Be Decided.

Post-graduate students working on aspects of republican radicalism are invited to participate in a **Special Workshop Session**. Please submit proposals by 31<sup>st</sup> May 1998 to the Conference Convenor Eleanor Burgess Mulberries Boreham Chelmsford Essex CM3 3DS 01245-467287.

Full Programme with booking arrangements will be sent out to members in the very near future.

## FOCUS INTERVIEW: MARGARET WARD

On the headstone of a family grave in Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery HANNA SHEEHY SKEFFINGTON (1877-1946) is described as "feminist republican socialist". In the recent biography *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington: A Life* (Cork: Attic Press, 1997), Margaret Ward has brought Hanna to blazing life on the page. Margaret very kindly agreed to discuss some of the issues at the centre of her brilliant book with Jerry Nolan.

**JN:** *Why has it taken so long for Hanna to emerge from shadowy footnotes and to stand up there with the two best known Irish revolutionary women, Maud Gonne and the Countess Markievicz? Perhaps Hanna's failure to complete and publish her memoirs was an important factor in the neglect?*

**MG:** What makes Hanna interesting is her fight for women's rights and full citizenship, her role in the suffrage movements and her confident and articulate opposition to the development of the Irish Free State as a profoundly restrictive and negative society. She can now be seen clearly to stand for a lot of deeply uncomfortable truths about the way in which the twenty six counties was directed during the first few decades of independence. Essentially she was the most important spokesperson for her generation of independently minded Irish women who wanted to lead fulfilled lives. Unfortunately Irish historiography has not encouraged or facilitated much research into the women's struggle as an integral part of the Irish fight for freedom. Consequently historians have tended to treat Hanna as a postscript or an appendage to the authorised version of what happened. It has been left to feminist historians to examine and reveal the crucial role of women within the nationalist movements in the early part of the twentieth century, beginning with a detailed account of the campaigns for women's suffrage. The more open debate possible in Ireland about the emergence of an independent Ireland has ensured that an increasing number of people want to study Hanna's contribution.

**JN:** *May I mention straight away the only gap in the biography which slightly worried me? Why did Hanna lose all religious belief? Was her somewhat reluctant atheism an overreaction to her Irish middle class upbringing?*

**MW:** It is very difficult to document fully how Hanna lost all religious belief. Probably her husband Frank started off the whole process when he rejected Catholicism, and indeed all organ-

ised religion, for intellectual reasons. Certainly we know that Frank was very angry with Hanna when she described herself as Roman Catholic on a form during one of her early spells in prison as a political protestor. The early stages of her withdrawal from and rejection of the church may be described as somewhat reluctant because naturally it took her time to distance herself from the Catholic traditions of her family. But as Hanna grew in self confidence, she moved considerably beyond a social and political rejection of religion to develop a joyful embracing of a paganism which she associated with a delight in nature freely expressed in ancient pagan Ireland and of a type of spirituality unencumbered by patriarchal rules and regulations. As a direct result of her neo-paganism, Hanna became a much more rounded personality, and today can be seen as a role model for Irish women who also have outgrown patriarchal structures and are searching for new sources of inspiration.

**JN:** *You make the point strongly that Hanna was utterly opposed to Cumann na mBan but was very active in other women's organisations like the Irish Women's League and the Women's Social and Political League. Why did she favour these alternative forms of women's organisations in Ireland?*

**MW:** Hanna was totally opposed to the foundation of Cumann na mBan in 1914 because the Cumann was founded specifically as an auxiliary body to the Volunteers. Her objection was not to the military activities of the Volunteers but to the central fact that women were being excluded from the whole policy making structures of the organisation. How could Hanna join a women's organisation which accepted such a split role for men and women solely along gender lines? However her condemnation of the Cumann did not stop her supporting individual members of the Cumann with whom she shared political objectives. Later in the twenties, she argued for such women to be represented on the executive of Sin Fein. Hanna's strong belief in the equality of women in political organisations

inevitably meant that she vehemently rejected the subordinate role which far too often was offered instead of full equality.

**JN:** *Your book highlights Hanna's deeply felt opposition to the Treaty of 1921 and to the proposals for the Irish Constitution of 1937. Her rejection of de Valera grew to the point of loathing. Was this rejection of de Valera connected with her loathing of de Valera's cult of Mrs. Pearse the Mother as the ideal of Irish womanhood?*

**MW:** Hanna sided with de Valera's opposition to the 1921 Treaty. Her reason for opposing the Treaty was that she believed that the Treaty settlement betrayed the promise of full equality enshrined in the 1916 Proclamation and would most likely benefit the people of property and the clerical establishment and not the ordinary people with whom she strongly identified as a socialist. Her opposition to de Valera grew as she began to see him as the polar opposite to Connolly, especially on women's issues. For Connolly women were equal comrades but for de Valera women worked best near the domestic hearth. By the thirties, Hanna saw de Valera as a conservative, church-bound, anti-feminist, bourgeois politician whose main intention was to turn Ireland into a narrow minded Catholic statelet and whose successes profoundly depressed her. Her utter rejection of de Valera's cult of Mrs. Pearse as Mother Ireland can be seen as a metaphor for Hanna's embittered rejection of the Free State's betrayal of the Irish nationalism of 1916.

**JN:** *By far the most moving chapter in your book is "Death of a Pacifist 1916" which includes such a vivid description of the shocking events surrounding the brutal murder of her husband Frank by a British officer. As a bereaved widow, Hanna grew ever more dedicated to the causes of feminism and socialism in a truly independent Ireland. Would you sum up your convincing analysis of this personal transformation?*

**MW:** Just as the executions of the 1916 leaders transformed the emotions of the vast majority of the Irish people, so did the utterly unexpected murder of her husband during the 1916 Rising have an enormous impact on Hanna as she struggled to cope with feelings of grief, loss and outrage. The appalling cover-up of Frank's murder by the British army convinced Hanna that there

would never be justice for the Irish as a colonial people. She began to see the British Imperial State as one of the supreme examples of an unbridled all-male machine. She became convinced that the influence of women who were disdained as citizens at the time could have made all the difference to the conduct of the First World War, as it could have prevented the gross injustice of the official inquiry into Frank's death. Frank had been jailed as a pacifist at the beginning of the First World War and had to escape to the USA to avoid the Cat and Mouse Act. Hanna took a very strong line of opposition to the Government's later threat of conscription. She was anti-militarist but not a pacifist. She must have seen her anti-conscription campaign as a continuation of her husband's humanitarian crusade. Her total support of the ideals of the 1916 Rising and of Sinn Fein can only have drawn strength and determination from the memory of her murdered husband.

**JN:** *Hanna was very hostile to the first performances of O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars". Why did she find O'Casey's view of the 1916 Rising so offensive? Do you share her dismissive view of O'Casey's play?*

**MW:** There were various strands in Hanna's attitude to "The Plough and the Stars". She was only too aware of the sleek first night audience at the Free State subsidised Abbey Theatre who were mainly the pro-Treaty crowd very happy to jeer at the 1916 Rising – a clear-cut case of a Dublin affluent audience tittering at the antics of the Dublin poor. In the play O'Casey presents the members of the Citizen's Army as mainly squalid and degenerate. Hanna had very good reason to react fiercely towards the dramatisation of looting in the play. The looting episode could have been part of a more dramatic social exposure of the Dublin slums but what mainly interested O'Casey was the comic possibilities of showing the looters discrediting the lofty ideals of the leaders. Hanna exposed O'Casey's disinterest in the causes of poverty which led the people to loot and in the sense of mission among the leaders to liberate Ireland from the injustices of the British Imperial State. Hanna must have recalled how Frank had been arrested on the Dublin streets, just prior to his murder, where he had been trying to stop the looting. Of course, O'Casey was ready to proclaim Frank as the first Irish martyr for socialism; but in fact, O'Casey

wanted to praise Frank at the expense of Connolly whom he hated. Hanna linked the deaths of Connolly and Frank: Connolly died for freedom and Frank died for peace. In practice, Hanna did not refer explicitly to her own personal 1916 tragedy in her protests against "The Plough and the Stars" but she did note the irony of the fact that such a play was being produced in a theatre funded a state which owed its very existence to the 1916 Rising. Even today, I find "The Plough and the Stars" a very uncomfortable play because, like Hanna, I tend to see the play as a travesty of the Rising by a man who should have known better. It is not one of O'Casey's plays which I could ever admire.

**JN:** *You describe Hanna as a much respected person among women's international organisations, especially in England and America. What was her contribution to these organisations on the world stage?*

**MW:** Hanna always wanted to become involved in women's groups concerned politically with Peace and Freedom. She met some women in these organisations who were hardline pacifists who opposed physical force in all circumstances. For Hanna there was no easy equation between peace and freedom. She argued that in the case of nations suffering from colonial oppression the unjust peace had to be broken before freedom could be achieved. Hanna found it easy to argue and make alliances in Europe because she spoken fluently both French and German. We also know that she found common ground with Egyptian and Indian feminists. During the twenties and thirties, Hanna was welcomed as a dear friend supporting their causes by British feminists. Her views were directed to women across all cultures. She was interested in seeing a commonwealth of European nations, not like the rich man's club of the EU today, but more of a common forum for mutual cooperation with men and women playing an equal role. One of her great regrets was that the Free State could not play a full role in international affairs while the great injustice of Partition remained.

**JN:** *You quote Hanna as saying that she had sympathy with the educational and social ideas and practices of Soviet Russia in the 1930s. How practical was all this sympathy? Exactly what policies should Ireland have taken from the Soviets?*

**MW:** Hanna went to Russia in 1930 as an Irish-woman with the interests of women right round the world closest to her heart. What most impressed her in Russia was the way in which ordinary people lived their daily lives: the housing, the sharing in cooperatives, the free welfare schemes, full employment. To her joy she met women in Russia who were relatively free from the pots and pans of domestic labour and from the demands of consumerism in the areas of fashion and clothes. She would have loved to be able to see in Ireland communal forms of living, the breaking up of the great estates, state intervention to provide employment by way of public works, equal pay for men and women, the lightening of the heavy burden of religion on everyday living. Whenever she saw Russian women being the true comrades of Russian men, she longed to find a way to bring about such a happy state of affairs in Ireland. Of course, she had some reservations about aspects of the Soviet system in the thirties, such as the dominance of the machine and the inflexibility of five year plans. What probably most impressed Hanna in Russia was the ending of the isolated family life, no longer required by religion, and the subsequent emancipation not only of the women but also of the men and the children.

**JN:** *The greatest fascination of your book for me is the intriguing way in which you depict the complex relationship between the four variously different and differing Sheehy sisters. To what extent do the differences between the Sheehy sisters reveal almost irreconcilable strands in the total Irish experience?*

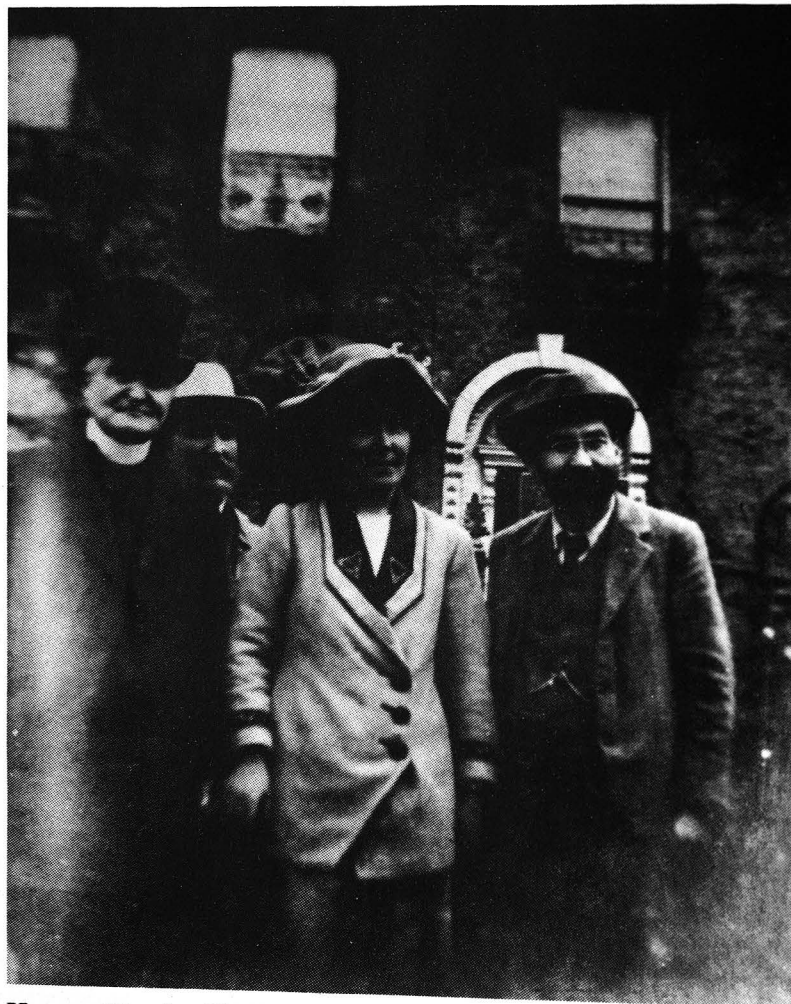
**MW:** Yes, the Sheehy sisters were very different and almost irreconcilable, I suppose. Yet remember that they had one thing in common – a fervent belief in women's rights. Margaret (Culhane) was the non-political sister but her interest in the bohemian life, especially in the theatre, was unconventional. Kathleen (Cruise O'Brien) and Mary (Kettle) were most loyal to the best in the Irish Catholic tradition. Kathleen was involved in the Irish Language movement for which she compiled a grammar. While Mary was closely associated with the first nationalist establishment of the Free State, she became active in women's organisations when she became a councillor in Rathmines. In my view, the very differences between the Sheehy sisters reveal how much they had in common as highly intelli-

gent and educated women who were determined to broaden the life choices open to women in Irish society. The fact that their brother Eugene became a prominent judge only goes to show that such an option would not have been open to his sisters in a society which had been virtually structured to exclude women from such eminent posts of public service.

**JN:** *Finally what would Hanna have thought about the role and achievements of women in Irish political parties today? Are her fervent arguments for a Woman's party in Ireland now quite dated or do they still retain some relevance in Irish current politics?*

**MW:** Hanna stood for election as an independent Women Party candidate in 1943 but failed to make very much impact on the political machine controlled by men. Things have not radically changed. What Hanna would most approve of

now are the women's groups on both sides of the Border who are breaking down sectarianism and are working hard at creating cross-class, cross-cultural and cross-Border cooperation. The Women's Coalition as an essential part of the peace process could have been started by Hanna. She would have been pleased by the election of Mary Robinson as President of Ireland because Mary Robinson's success might become an encouragement to women to come forward and take an active part in political life. Hanna's last message before she died in 1946 was that women must organise, must educate themselves in citizenship, must become vocal in politics to the point of being clamorous. Women have to go on fighting for more than a token participation role in Irish politics. I feel that if Irish women listen to the message of Hanna, then they will feel the need to respond to the challenge of being satisfied not with gestures but with real and widespread participation.



**Hanna Sheehy Skefington with her husband Frank and her Uncle Father Eugene Sheehy, on her release from Mountjoy Prison, Dublin after her hunger strike in 1912.**

## **Irish Studies at University of North London – A personal View**

I first became aware of a new course beginning at the Polytechnic of North London (as it was known then) when I was working as a Library Assistant at the Polytechnic's Kentish Town site. I was reading PNL's Humanities Bulletin which gave information on the new Irish Studies Course commencing in February 1988 at the Polytechnic's Marlborough Building site. I liked what I read and signed up there and then. This was an access course designed to give people a flavour of what they could expect were they to take up the degree programme later that same year. The course ran each Wednesday evening from 6pm to 9pm and the course tutor was Dr. Mary Hickman. Topics covered were: Irish Migration to Britain; Ireland the Irish Landscape; History of Modern Ireland; Irish Literature; media coverage of Northern Ireland.

I chose to do this course as I am London-Irish (my parents came from Co. Limerick in the 1950s). I found the whole course thoroughly exhilarating. There was such enthusiasm from the staff and students and I felt a real sense of belonging, like I'd found my niche. There I found other people like myself who were interested in learning more about the land of their mothers, fathers and grandparents. I found in the staff nothing but support and encouragement and this continued throughout my studies.

In February 1989, I registered as a part-time pupil on the evening degree scheme. However, it wasn't until September 1991 when I finally took the plunge and converted my part-time degree into a full-time degree on the Humanities programme. I took a combined degree: Irish Studies and Film Studies, majoring in Irish studies as I had completed more units in Irish Studies than in Film Studies.

The scheme offers a comprehensive range of options, along with units which are compulsory. The beauty of it all is that you can choose exactly what you want from the non-compulsory range. I undertook the following units: Irish Migration to Britain; the Irish in London; Post-modern and Post-colonial Representations; Ireland and the Irish Landscape; Irish Fiction in English; Comparative Emigration Experiences;

Representations of Irishness; Ireland: 1800 to 1872.

After I graduated in 1994, I was offered a part-time administrative position at the Irish Studies Centre. This really opened up my eyes to the work of the Centre, which is wide-ranging. The Centre has an extensive archive which is regularly maintained and updated. The archive contains projects and dissertations by Irish Studies students at the Centre, as well as publications and materials relating to Irish matters. The Centre also deals with community enquiries on a daily basis. Various Irish community organisations in the UK, Ireland and beyond send their publications—newsletters etc. to the Centre. The Centre also has a community liaison role and interacts with these organisations.

In 1994, the Centre was commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality to undertake major research on discrimination among the Irish in Britain. This research looked into the lives of Irish-born people living in Britain and asked them if they ever encountered discrimination in various spheres of society: housing, education, employment, the Law, and generally. The results are now published and recognise that the Irish are frequently discriminated against and recommends that the Irish be seen as a separate ethnic group.

During my time as Administrator at the Centre, I assisted the Director of the Centre, Dr. Mary Hickman, in setting up a conference on northern Ireland. This was an academic forum to bring together various politicians, journalists and academics to discuss the future of northern Ireland. The conference took place in London on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 1995 and was a resounding success. Participants included: Mo Mowlan (then Shadow Secretary of State for northern Ireland); Chris McGimpsey (Ulster Unionist Party); David Ervine (Progressive Unionist Party); John Hume (DPSLP); Mitchel McLaughlin (Sinn Fein), along with other prominent figures from the worlds of politics, academia and journalism. The broadcaster Jon Snow chaired the proceedings.

Later that year, I was also involved in assisting

the setting up of the Centre's first Public Lecture Series. The Lecture Series has become a permanent feature and still continues as a regular event today. Participants included Michael O'Suilleabhain (Professor of Music at the University of Limerick); Judge Catherine McGuinness (the then Chair of the Forum of Peace and Reconciliation); Gearoid O Tuathaigh (Professor of History at University College Galway); Declan Kiberd (Professor of English at University College Dublin).

I left the Irish Studies Centre in September 1995

## LETTER

### **Irish Londoners**

I read with interest the article by Finbarr Whooley in Issue 13 about the book **Irish Londoners**. This book contains a series of photographs taken by Paddy Fahey, mainly in the 1950s, depicting how the Irish community in London organised itself. This book of photographs is in every respect a fine publication.

Finbarr Whooley states that grimy realism, which was undoubtedly part of the reality of the time, could not be seen in these photographs. By grimy realism, he means workers on building sites, and drunks on skid row. This, of course, was, and still is, part of the hostile stereotype of Irish people to be found in the British gutter press. Paddy Fahey is to be congratulated for giving a positive, and perhaps overall, a more realistic picture of Irish people in London at the time.

### **RYAN'S BOOKS OF IRISH INTEREST**

Ryan's Books of Irish Interest used to trade in Southampton and Bournemouth, both university towns on the south coast. Most customers tended to be mainly College lecturers and students. The dramatic growth of interest in Irish literature and history in recent years has meant that the customers of Ryan's Books now include the general public (often Irish born or of Irish descent) who are eager to extend their knowledge of Irish literature and history beyond the information about such topics as Yeats, Joyce and the Great Famine which they may have picked up at school. Now Ryan's Books has its headquarters in Lon-

to pursue a full-time M.A. at Queen's University Belfast. Looking back at my time as a pupils and as an administrator, I can see the benefits of the Centre's activities – not only for its own students, but for the community at large. The Irish Studies Centre at the University of North London carries out its educational, cultural and community roles expertly, professionally and lovingly. Long may it continue!

*Jackie Harnett*

However my main criticism of Finbarr Whooley's article is his statement that the Irish emigrants of the 1980s and 1990s have yet to be documented. What emigrants? The reality is that the vast majority of those "emigrants" have returned to Ireland because the Irish economy has grown by 50 percent over the last four years, a level of growth that is likely to continue well into the next millennium. In recent years some 50,000 new jobs have been created annually, there has been a 2 percent annual reduction in the unemployment rate, and far from there being emigration there has been a net immigration to Ireland of some 15,000.

Positive information about the Irish Economy, which in reality, despite some problems, has been growing since 1959, is extremely hard to obtain. I would say that this is Ireland's best kept secret.

Michael Leahy (London N20)

don, a very convenient jumping off ground for transport to other parts of the country in search of Irish books on sale in salesrooms and private houses. The postal service is now streamlined, with books being sent out and invoiced separately. Those interested can ring Chris Ryan 0171-837-1869 about any out of print Irish books – there is no charge for a book search. Most books are offered in catalogues at very good prices. But the best news is that Ryan's Books have offered to post the next catalogue (due out in early May 1998) to each member of BAIS.



## A GOOD CONSTITUTION

The Irish Constitution which Eamonn de Valera introduced in 1937 has received much criticism in recent times, especially its articles no.2 and no.3, which laid claim to Northern Ireland as part of the national territory. Yet, at the time of its introduction, and for decades afterwards, the Irish Constitution was generally considered to be an enlightened and progressive document. It was widely debated at the time, and approved democratically in a national referendum. It must be noted that up to 1921, Britain herself had always regarded Ulster as part of Ireland's historic national territory, even after the Act of Union of 1801.

In the years immediately before 1937 Ireland had a colonial-type constitution which had come with the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921. Both Dublin governments (that of Cosgrave, 1922-1932 and de Valera 1932 onwards) had used and exploited the colonial-type constitution to the fullest extent. Ireland was vigorous and constructive at all the British Commonwealth conferences. She helped shape the very important Statute of Westminster. She was a staunch member of the League of Nations from as early as 1923. Here de Valera, who later became its President, worked closely with Anthony Eden, the British delegate, on such matters as the Sino-Japanese war in 1933, Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and Hitler's mistreatment of the Jews. All those conflicts threatened World Peace and stability and de Valera directed Ireland's contribution to debates on these vexed questions.

By 1937 an evolutionary Ireland needed a new constitution. De Valera decided to give it just that. If Cosgrave had been in power then, he would have had to make similar constitutional change, or lose all electoral credibility. Much effort was expended to find a suitable person for the new office of President. Dr. Douglas Hyde was chosen by all-party acclaim. A Protestant, he was a noted Gaelic scholar. He brought distinction to the office. There was no Presidential election.

De Valera's main problem was to adjust Ireland's relationships with many other states then, but especially with the territory of Northern Ireland.

At that time, Catholics were experiencing grave disabilities within the six counties. Indeed Basil Brooke, the Unionist Prime Minister, boldly declared that Stormont was "a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people". Brooke advised Protestants not to give employment to members of the Catholic minority: "I wouldn't have one of them about my place." Had milder and more conciliatory attitudes prevailed in the six counties under British jurisdiction, then it is very doubtful if de Valera would ever have put in place the controversial Article 44 of the Constitution which gave a special status to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) had gone to great lengths, especially in clause no. 16, to guarantee rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland. That clause is a model of justice, fair play and decency. It was probably written by Lord Birkenhead, a great drafter of British state documents in those days according to the account of Frank Pakenham (Lord Longford) in **Peace by Ordeal**. By 1937, this statesman-like guarantee to Catholics had been shamefully broken. Gerrymandering and discrimination were rife and accepted. Northern Ireland's voters had been guaranteed Proportional Representation from 1921 in all elections. By 1922 Stormont had cancelled PR in local elections and by 1929 had cancelled PR in parliamentary elections. Neither London nor Dublin pointed a finger; and neither the churches nor the media raised an eyebrow. In the 1937 Constitution, de Valera was throwing a lifeline to Catholics in their plight. He, at least, could not be said to have abandoned them – hence, in part, articles no.2 and no. 3 of the Constitution.

The origins of violence in Northern Ireland since 1968 can be traced back to the injustices of the 1920s. Had PR survived, Protestant politicians, at all levels, would have had to bid for Catholic votes by modifying and moderating their social policies. Also Roman Catholic politicians would have had to seek Protestant votes by trimming and rethinking their approaches. Cross-party voting would have created the context for reasonable moderation and not bigotry. Polarisation and bloodshed have become too closely linked in the history of Northern Ireland. If only the spirit of the 1921 Treaty had been preserved on the Un-

ionist and British sides.

Perhaps the most striking result of the 1937 Constitution was that it enabled Ireland to remain neutral during the Second World War. Robert Fisk's book gives all the details clearly. Most of the European states and the USA had remained neutral until they were attacked. When Winston Churchill angrily asserted that according to the Treaty of 1921, Ireland had no legal right to remain neutral, he was forgetting that the Constitution of 1937 had totally changed that position.

As an independent and sovereign state, postwar Ireland was immediately eligible for membership of the United Nations and of the Council of Europe. Ireland helped significantly in assisting refugees. She was in the OEEC in 1948 and

in the OECD by 1961. Soldiers from her national army were deployed on peacekeeping missions in Africa, where once she sent so many Christian missionaries.

In October 1997 the Republic's highly successful chairmanship of the EC ended with all of Europe's heads of state assembled for photographs at Dublin Castle. Ireland has indeed taken her place among the nations. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and the Constitution of 1937 provided a solid foundation upon which later political achievements have been built. Both historic documents have been widely misunderstood and sometimes roundly condemned by people, most of whom ought to know more about the making history of modern Ireland.

Charles O'Beirne (Cambridge)

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#### **NOTICEBOARD**

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1798 Bicentenary Conference in **Ulster Museum, Belfast** (19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> May) and in **Dublin Castle** (21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> May). For more information about this exciting conference, CONTACT Dr. Daire Keogh, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Tel: 353- 8376191

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#### **The Byrne/Perry Summer School**

26-28 July 1998 at the Masonic Hall, Gorey, Co. Wexford

The Gordon Wilson Memorial Lecture at 8.30 pm. on 26 July by Peter Temple-Morris MP  
Speakers include Tommy Graham, David Dickson and David Dickson  
For more information, CONTACT the Director Dr. Daire Keogh Tel: 01-8376191

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#### **Women on Ireland Network**

Study Day: Gender and Space

9 May 1998 at Staffordshire University

For more information, CONTACT Siobhan Holland 01782- 294666

Inaugural Conference: Woman and Ireland-Social, Cultural and Historical Perspectives

27 June 1998 at St. Mary's University, Strawberry Hill

Invited speakers include Christine Kinealy (University of Central Lancashire) Ailbhe Smyth (University College Dublin) and invited writers include Martina Evans Mary Dorcey

Reception at the Irish Embassy on evening of Friday 26 June

For more information, CONTACT Dr. Sarah Morgan, Centre for Irish studies, University of North London, Holloway Road, London N7 8DB

**BAIS NATIONAL COUNCIL**

Principal Officers

**CHAIR**

**Sean Hutton**, 69 Balfour Street, London SE 17 1PL. Tel: 0171 9162733 Fax: 0171 9162753

**VICE CHAIR**

**Dr. Margaret Ward**, Bath Spa University College, Newton Park, Bath BA2 6BN Tel: 01225-873701  
Fax: 01225-872912

**HONORARY SECRETARY**

**Mervyn Busted**, Dept. of Geography, University of Manchester M13 9PL TEL:0161-2753623 Fax:  
0161-2734407

**HONORARY TREASURER**

**Domhnall Mac Suibhne**, 53a Hartham Road, London N7 9JJ Tel: 0171-6077771

**OTHER MEMBERS OF COUNCIL**

**Dr. Bob Bell**, 3 Hill Road, London NW8 9QE Tel: 0171-2866072

**Eleanor Burgess**, Mulberries, Boreham, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 3DS TEL: 01245-467287

**Madeleine Casey**, 5 Kendall Road, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 6RB Tel: 0181-5685100

**Nessan Danagher**, Irish Studies Workshop, Soar Valley College, Gleneagles Avenue, Leicester  
LEA 7GY Tel: 01162-875368

**Mary Doran**, Modern Irish Collections, The British Library, 69 Euston Road London NW1 2DB  
Tel: 0171-41277538

**Prof. Frank Neal**, Dept. of Business & Management Studies, University of Salford, Salford M5 4WT  
Tel: 0161-7455920 Fax: 0161-7455556

**Jerry Nolan**, 8 Antrobus Road, Chiswick, London W4 5HY Tel/Fax 0181-995-1532

**Dr. Lance Pettitt**, St.Mary's University College, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham TW1  
4SX Tel:0181-2404090 Fax 0181-2404255 e-mail: pettittl @ smuc.ac.uk

**Marie Ryan**, 89 Everton Drive, Stanmore, Middx. HA7 1EA Tel: 0181-2060748

**Dr. Neil Sammells**, Bath College of Higher Education, Newton Park, Bath BA2 9BN Tel: 01225-873701

**Dr. Paul Stewart**, Business School, University of Wales Cardiff, Aberconway Building, Colum Drive,  
Cardiff CE1 3EU Tel: 01222-874000

**Cait Thompson**, 17 Mill Close, Braunston. Northants. NN11 7HY Tel:01788-891494

**DATE FOR BAIS COUNCIL MEETING SATURDAY 6.06.98**

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