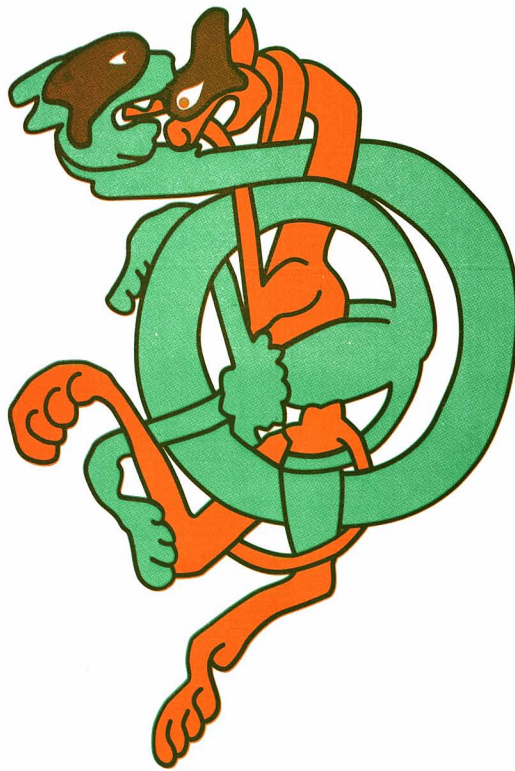




ionól na n-Éireannach Birmingham

Birmingham Irish Community Forum

ANNUAL REPORT 1995 - 1996



TUAIRSC BLIANTÚIL 1995 - 1996

Being Irish in Birmingham

We are a distinct yet integral part of the rich cultural tapestry which makes up the city of Birmingham.

Mission Statement

The Irish Forum exists to represent the views, needs and aspirations of all generations of Irish people living in Birmingham.

History

It was in the mid 1990's that the City of Birmingham officially gave a voice to the Irish community when it supported the establishment of the Irish Forum.

The role of the Forum is on the one hand to provide a link between the Irish community and City Departments, and on the other to help the Council identify the needs of all groups within the Irish community.

The work is vast and wide ranging and the following objectives have been agreed by the Executive Committee of the Forum:-

- *To be used as a Consultative body for Birmingham Council and other organisations*
- *To set up projects which address the specific needs of the Irish community in Birmingham*
- *To access funding to ensure existing Irish projects are maintained*
- *To have contact with Irish Community Organisations or those who work with Irish people*
- *To find out the main issues and needs of Irish men and women in Birmingham*
- *To commission research*
- *To lobby and campaign for the rights of Irish people*

Currently there is much progress being made in all of the areas.



FOREWORD

I am delighted to contribute to this, the Irish Forum's first Annual Report. The Irish Community are an important part of our multi-cultural city, making up 14% of the city's total population.

During the year, the Irish Community and the city of Birmingham lost a leading figure with the untimely death of Fr. Joe Taaffe. He will be sadly missed by all.

The Executive Committee of the Forum, which is made up of elected representatives from many of the key Irish community organisations in the city, clearly acts as a very strong voice for the Irish Community in Birmingham.

They are involved with a number of our departments, including Economic Development, Leisure and Community Services, Social Services and Housing. A number of projects have been and are in the process of being developed for Irish people and these include:

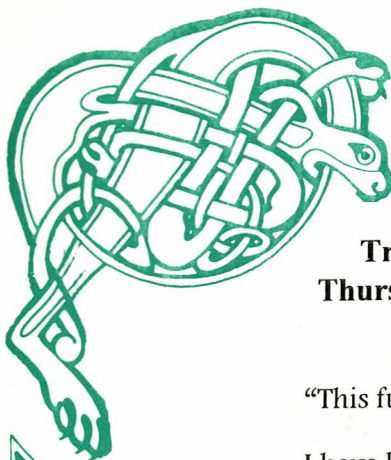
- research into the economic needs of the Irish Community in Birmingham;
- the establishment of an Irish Employment Resource Centre;
- additional funding for the Irish Welfare and Information Centre to address issues relating to the physical and mental health and welfare of Irish elders;
- the relaunching of the St. Patrick's Day Parade and
- housing for single Irish elders.

I hope the Irish Forum continues it's good work and I look forward to a growing and productive relationship with the City Council.




Theresa Stewart

Theresa Stewart
Leader of Birmingham City Council



Tribute to Fr. Joe Taaffe, O.M.I., (RIP) as orated at the Funeral Mass on Thursday evening 5th September 1996 at St Anne's Church in Birmingham by Fr. Paul Byrne O.M.I. - his close friend and fellow priest.


"This funeral in its immensity and its complexity is a tribute to a great man.




I have been asked to speak here this night. Apart from the difficulty in dealing with the emotion of losing a friend, I felt such a sermon should have been easy. But the more I thought about it the more difficult it started to become to simply speak, to speak simply about a simple man. But then of course it dawned on me - this was no simple man. This was a man who was complex and full of paradoxes, a series of contradictions.

He was a humble man - and yet he was the most photographed man in Birmingham. He was a humble man - and yet look at this funeral, which he planned. He was a teetotaler - but spent most of his time in pubs! He was a laconic, sometimes taciturn man with a quiet personality who became one of the outstanding personalities in this city.

Because of what he stood for, what he did and what he was, you would have expected Fr Joe to be respected. And that he was. But I have known a lot of men and women who were respected but never loved. I know few people who were loved as he was by so many.



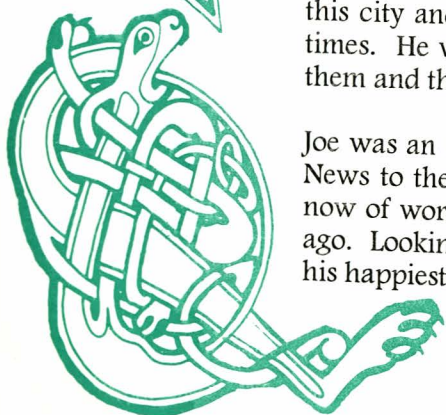
Why was that? Obviously for himself. He had qualities which took time to grow on you. Time - time was something which Joe gave to a lot of people, particularly those in trouble. It was this consistency, this stickability that was so much part of him. No matter how long it took, no matter how long he had to be with people, he was with them. He was a man who gave loyalty to his friends and of course this was given back. Loyalty and love are close together.



There was another apparent contradiction in him which is a great lesson for this city and indeed for Irish /English relations at this time.

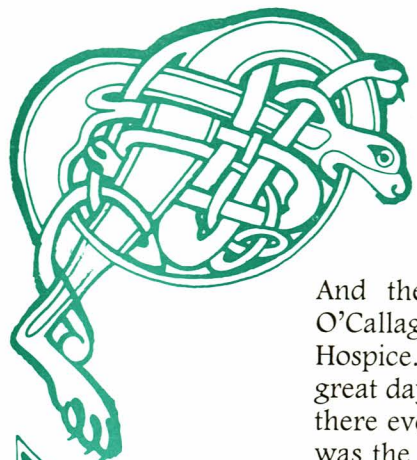
Nobody had any doubts about what Joe Taaffe stood for, and certainly none about what he was against. Yet he was the most tolerant of men. And there's the lesson. Sometimes apathy disguises itself as tolerance. Joe had convinced opinions and yet had tolerance because he could respect the opinions of others. That is so necessary today.

Somehow too Joe was loved not only for himself, but because he was a symbol. He was a great man for symbols. Do you remember that Patrick's Day vestment? He somehow became the symbol of this city of what it was to be Irish and Brummie. He was respected and he was loved for that.



Any priest will have things that he does publicly and things that he does in a helping way quietly and nobody ever knows. As I look down at this congregation I see in that mosaic of faces what made up this mans life, as a man, as an Irishman, as a citizen of this city and as a priest. I see families with whom he was in bad times, in long bad times. He was their comfort. There is one family I see here who knew of his love for them and their daughter who was ill for so long.

Joe was an Oblate and because he was he took to heart our motto "to bring the Good News to the poor". He had a great love for the poor and it was returned. We speak now of working with the poor rather than for them. Joe knew about that many years ago. Looking back on his long life it was with the poor and the troubled that he was at his happiest.



And then too there was the long campaign for the Birmingham Six. Hughie O'Callaghan who is here tonight, told me that he went to visit Joe for the last time in the Hospice. Joe talked of that marvellous day when they were released. While that was a great day in his life, it was the culmination of all those duty days. Day after day he was there even when the campaign was not fashionable. It is ironic too that this shy man was the most photographed that day also. And as long as they keep showing clips of that release, it is Fr Joe with his shoulder bag and beaming, welcoming smile that we will see.



I would like to express my deep sympathy to his family. All of this full church and those outside are with you in prayer this night.

We Oblates are going to miss him. He will be difficult to replace but we miss him, not just because of that, but because we are missing a friend.

There are two churches going to miss him, the church here and the Irish Church. One of the best things the Church on the other side of the sea has done is to send their people after the emigrants to care for them. In Fr Joe Taaffe they sent their best.

This city is going to miss him. He was someone who stood up and preached against racism and who contributed in no small way to the notion that this multi-ethnic city and all the riches for it, who taught people, especially his own, the importance of understanding and owning your own identity while at the same time being part of and proud of Birmingham.



Not that it was always easy being Irish in Birmingham. And that brings me to the memory of last St Patrick's day Parade. Joe, maybe more than anybody else, pushed for the Parade to happen because he knew that again he was dealing with a symbol. The symbol of a people in what had been for them a strange city and who were now marching through the city - their city.

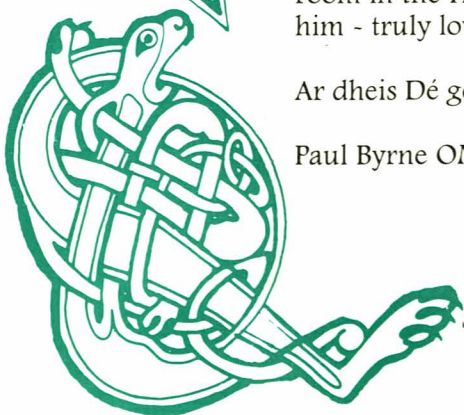
The Birmingham bomb had created hatred and division and had forced many of the Irish to keep their heads down. Joe felt the time was ripe to march with heads high through the middle of the city. And then came the Canary Wharf bomb and when heads were going down again, Joe wanted that Parade, even against more cautious advice. When it had gone off so successfully Joe said publicly "this day was the resurrection day for the Irish in Birmingham".

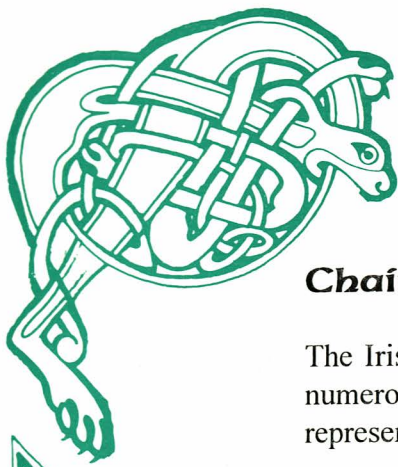
And speaking of resurrection - if you read that magnificent part at the end of St Matthew's gospel, you will see that it speaks of the good being rewarded - why? because "I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison and you visited me, I was hungry and you gave me food..." Fr Joe Taaffe did that day after day after day. If he is not in heaven, what chance is there for the rest of us?

My sympathy too to the many friends who now mourn him. The whole wall of his room in the Hospice was filled with cards from those who loved him, not just respected him - truly loved him.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam".

Paul Byrne OMI





Chair's Report

The Irish Forum is a consultative body. It consults with the City Council and the numerous city agencies on behalf of the Irish Community through the various Irish representative groups.

I will go into each of these in a little more detail.

The City Council clearly realises the wonderful celebration of peoples and cultures that go to make up Birmingham. A representative group from each was set up eg the Bangladesh Council and the Hindu Council. We are the Irish Community Forum.

Years ago, DeValera use to say he would look into his heart to know what the Irish people wanted. The city has no such inner eye and so a representative Community Forum is needed.

Because there are so many agencies - Housing, Social Services, Education, Economic Development, The TEC and the Health Authority - the Forum has to spend most of its time in dialogue with City Officers from those Departments and organisations. To ensure this dialogue is continuous - a full time officer, Gobnait is appointed by the Council.

Nevertheless her workload needs support. South Birmingham College support with administrative support.

Who do the Forum represent?

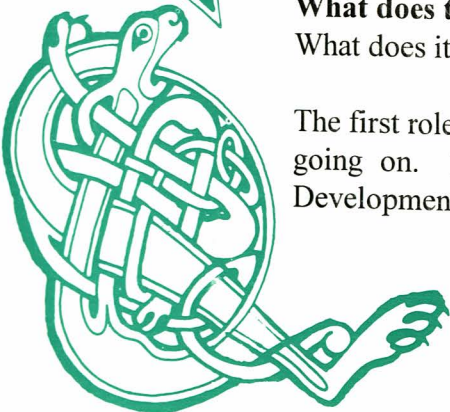
The Irish people of Birmingham have numerous well established and identified organisations. The GAA, Comhaltas, Conradh na Gaelige, Dancing Schools. For the uninitiated, GAA organises Irish sport - football and hurling; Comhaltas runs the Irish music teaching; Conradh na Gaelige teach Irish language and we all know the flourishing dancing schools teach Irish Dancing. Beyond these are the Irish Centre, the best known Irish meeting place in the Midlands, the Irish Welfare and Information Centre where the social welfare needs of thousands of Irish are processed, the Irish Women's Support Group and the Irish Mental Health Forum. Alongside there are the many County Associations.

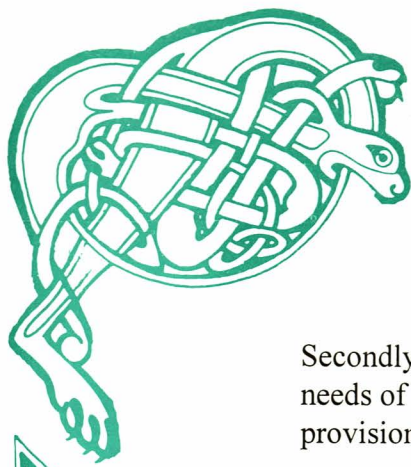
The Forum aims to represent the views of these member organisations to the City Council and decision makers.

What does the Forum do?

What does it consult about, or, what goes on at our meetings?

The first role of the Forum has been to support the excellent good work that is already going on. Details of the financial support we have secured will follow in the Development Officer's Report.





Secondly, there are real pressing issues for the Irish as a community, such as the needs of the elderly Irish. Here the Forum is negotiating improved housing and health provision; again, further details will follow.

Research that we have commissioned points to the need for better access to training and advice on courses. We are negotiating to secure an Irish Employment Resource Centre to meet these identified needs.

The most visible sign, so far, of our work has been the relaunch of the much loved St Patrick's Day Parade which returned with such joyous success last year.

Shortly before the Parade, President Mary Robinson accepted our invitation (through the City Council) to visit Birmingham.

The Forum is a great success, thanks largely to the inspirational role of the late Fr Taffee, the leader of the Forum. If the city had previously ever needed to look into the heart and mind of the Irish in Birmingham his was both the best loved heart and best informed mind of the Irish in the city.

The work of the Forum is guided therefore by the needs of the community, in communication with a city that wants to listen to the needs and work alongside the community in fulfilling these needs.

The community has contributed much to this city. When in need we have looked to our own resources, our own community to deal with problems. This will and should continue - Is ar scóth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine.

Alongside this great community support is the opportunity, now firmly established, to work with the City Council to ensure that the needs identified are met.





Development Officers Report

INTRODUCTION

In my third year with the Irish Forum I am very excited and pleased to report on the continual growth, progress and confidence the Irish Forum has achieved in the city of Birmingham. Our mission has always been to represent the needs, views and aspirations of the Irish community in Birmingham. By maintaining very close links with the Irish community and the City Council, and sticking to agreed and clear priorities we succeed in being seen to be consistent, clear and deeply committed to the aims and objectives of our organisation. Close partnerships are being developed with the City Council and other key institutions. As a result, we are embarking on seeing a whole new wave of Irish developments and projects across the city.

ACHIEVEMENTS

We have seen the "resurrection of the Birmingham Irish community" with the re-launch of the **St. Patrick's Day Parade**.

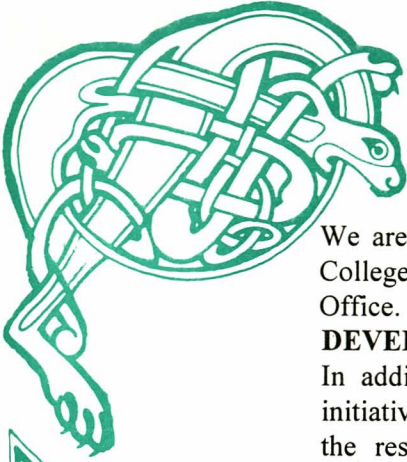
The Irish Welfare and Information Centre has grown from strength to strength to the point where there will now be a total of six new members of staff from early in 1997. The Forum, and in particular members of the Health & Social Services Committee have worked tirelessly with Social Services Personnel in order to secure the funding for these projects. Such developments will certainly go a long way to ensuring that services to elderly Irish people in Birmingham will become more accessible and more relevant to their needs.

The establishment of an **Irish Youth Group**, while slow to get off the ground, is now moving into a very exciting period. The Group are holding an 'Open Day' at the Irish Centre on 1 February 1997. Thanks to the Prince's Trust, who are funding this event, a whole series of workshops, displays and drama work will make the beginning of many new and exciting developments for Irish young people in Birmingham, and in particular, 2nd generation Irish Young People.

No doubt, many of you will be aware of the new courses being set up by South Birmingham College at the Irish Centre. This is an extremely exciting time for **Irish Studies** and other courses because they are taking place at venues around the city which are familiar to, and regularly used by Irish people.

The Economic Development Committee of the Council has recently agreed to support and develop initiatives to address the economic needs of Birmingham's Irish community following the production of **research** which we lobbied for. The Report clearly identifies the degree to which many Irish people are not gaining access to existing educational and training institutions, have higher rates of unemployment and have disproportionate numbers of self employed Irish people in need of support and training.

Cara Irish Housing Association's decision to open an office in Birmingham has been a tremendous success and achievement for the Forum because we believe that they hold the technical knowledge, skill and expertise to ensure that Irish people in this city will have a better opportunity of accommodation which is culturally sensitive to their needs. We wish to thank Birmingham City Council's Housing Department for their support in ensuring this development.



We are delighted to announce that after successful negotiations with South Birmingham College, they agreed to fund the post of a **full time Administrative Assistant** to the Forum Office.

DEVELOPMENT

In addition to projects which are currently getting off the ground, a number of other initiatives are in the pipeline. High levels of unemployment have clearly been identified in the research, particularly in certain Wards, including Sparkbrook, Sparkhill, Tyseley, Moseley, Aston and Nechells. We continue to work with City Officers and Councillors to ensure that an **Irish Employment Resource Centre** is established to address these issues.

Housing for Irish Elders must have been our greatest stumbling block (literally) to date. At our AGM last year we displayed detailed plans of the proposed 21 flats in Digbeth. Sadly, we are still in the throws of securing a site that can be built upon in an area fraught with problems due to the industrial history of Digbeth and the very high demand for scarce sites within the inner city of Birmingham. If all goes to plan, building 27 single flats should begin in mid 1997.

Money secured from the Irish Government and Focus Housing Association is being used to undertake **research** into the health and social care needs of older Irish men and we look forward to the publication of this report in mid 1997.

With such developments, increasing our funding base and changing our legal structure has become necessary. Additional funds are needed for:

- ◆ A **building** which will house new and existing staff and volunteers, hold meetings, seminars and training courses in addition to facilitating further growth and development;
- ◆ Additional **staff** in line with the growth of the Forum itself;
- ◆ Becoming a **Company Ltd by Guarantee** which has become necessary because we are moving into the area of managing larger finances, property and staff.

CONCLUSION

The profile and recognition of the Irish community, our needs and aspirations, continue to grow within the city. 1996 has been a year of development of projects including:

- securing funding for the Irish Welfare and Information Centre to help ensure that the specific needs of Irish Elders are more adequately met;
- the relaunch of the St Patrick's Day Parade;
- Mary Robinson's visit to the city;
- the production of research into the economic needs of the Irish community and
- the obtaining the Council's support for Cara Irish Housing Association to open an office in Birmingham.

1997 will be a year of consolidation of these many developments as well as ensuring the establishment of an Irish Employment Resource Centre and the building of 27 self contained flats in Digbeth. This process of continuing with these development and consolidating what has already been established is crucial in order to ensure the long term viability and sustainability of all these projects.



GOOD NEWS FROM BRUM

I was delighted, as always to be in Birmingham for St. Patrick's Day. Fr. Joe Taaffe, the indefatigable and much loved director of the Irish Welfare Centre reminds me every January to put Birmingham and Patrick's day together in my new diary - and so I have done for many years. For me this isn't a chore - it's a reunion with a city I served in, happily working with and for emigrants in the energizing years of the 60s. Then the great influx of young people through the hemorrhage years of the 50s were settling into the city, marrying and buying their first houses, and fitting into this bustling place. The 'institutions' of the time seemed right for that time and its people - showbands and ballads, pioneers and Legion of Mary.

It was a time too when in my own work of social housing there was explosive growth. The new charity 'Shelter' had made Birmingham one of its priority cities for help and in their second year gifted us £40,000. The significance of that was that it enabled us to generate £400,000 from the local authorities. Nearly half a million pounds bought an awful lot of houses for conversion into flats for young families in the late 60s.

I moved on to London and then in 1974 came the Birmingham bomb. In my experience no other IRA bomb affected the relationship between English and Irish quite as much as that. Its hard to know why - maybe it was the fact that it went off in the centre of what is, for such a large city, a rather small city centre. Maybe it was the carnage itself - the youth of the victims, the graphic TV coverage and the callous random nature of such an innocent soft target - as is evidenced by there being Irish victims of it. I know that my colleague Fr. Paddy Sheridan OMI dealt all night with non-stop phone calls - trying desperately to say 'don't blame *all* the Irish for this'. But many did, or the Irish thought they did. I know of people who tried to hide their Irishness - and certainly few flaunted it. The Birmingham Six injustice when it finally emerged, didn't help relations either. Long after 1974 we were still filling in personal details on landing cards flying into Birmingham, but not to Heathrow and there always seemed to be a strong police watch as the Irish planes disembarked.

All of that puts the effect of the cease-fire into a special perspective in Birmingham. This was the end of the nightmare. The Birmingham Irish decided to celebrate by reviving the St. Patrick's Day Parade - so definitively stopped after '74. That parade then was going to have a significance and a symbolism way beyond the logistics of a march through town.

And then with the same terrible suddenness of that bomb in the Bull Ring - came Canary Wharf.

Immediately there were many voices who argued for the cancellation of the parade. It would be insensitive, it would be provocative, it could be dangerous. But the parade committee resisted these voices.

That is why Dick Spring at a reception in the London Irish Embassy on Friday, March 15th was right in saying '*the Birmingham parade will be the most significant Patrick's day event in Britain*'.

And so it was. It was preceded by a moving Mass in a packed St. Catherine's Church where the bilingual liturgy and the offertory gifts depicting Irish culture, the presence of the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress and the leader of the Council, made for a sense of occasion. I was delighted - in spite of the cold East wind - why does it blow everywhere on March 17th - to be on top of the open-topped double decker where the Lord Mayor and a suitably obvious, white bearded Patrick waved to the crowds. It was those crowds who made their impression on me. The parade itself was big and colourful - floats and bands and county banners - no New York or Dublin, but big enough to bring people to windows and to need police control, but the way was lined by people and there was a great amount of green and shamrock and tricolours and hats - and children 'decked out' too. It seemed to me that those crowds grew both in size and good humour as we moved on. Was I imagining it - or was there a sort of growing relief - '*This is actually working - there's going to be no trouble - and isn't it great to be Irish - to be part of this euphoria*'.

By the time we moved, to the familiar tunes, into Highgate Park, the sun was warming our backs. It seemed right that it should. The bands played their party pieces and people sang along and somehow even the singing seemed thoughtful and prideful - reflecting the quiet happiness - '*we did it - we were right*'.

The two short speeches from the Lord Mayor and Fr. Joe caught the mood. The Lord Mayor spoke of being Irish and Brummie - Brummie and Irish. All around me were 2nd or even 3rd generation Irish - and Brummie - children with their unique accent and their green Patrick's day badges.

I think the last and very significant words belong to Fr. Joe Taaffe OMI - '*Today we saw the resurrection of the Birmingham Irish*'.

Indeed we did.

Paul Byrne OMI
The Globe, March 1996

DAY PARADE

In the aftermath of St Patrick's Day 1995, a public meeting was called at the Birmingham Irish Centre with a view to re-launching the Birmingham St Patrick's Day Parade. As a result, a Committee was formed with the much loved Fr Taaffe as the Chair.

The months passed by with much discussion but with slow progress due primarily to the fact that none of those involved on the Committee had any previous experience of organising an event of this type. Contacts with groups such as Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, businesses and interested community groups were gradually established and from this point onwards the whole project started to advance on all fronts.

Each time that support was offered to the Committee, it gave everyone involved the kind of boost that was needed if the project was ever going to peel itself off the drawing board and onto the streets of Birmingham.

And so it was, that on Sunday 17 March 1996 the Irish community in Birmingham stepped out into the sunshine from St Catherine's Church to hold the first St Patrick's Day Parade for 22 years.

The Lord Mayor was in attendance, every single one of Ireland's 32 counties were represented by local people with county banners, 14 floats were organised and 3 marching bands travelled over from Ireland. The atmosphere was one of joy and celebration. Council representatives and the police at times joined in... the streets were alive with the sights and sounds of Ireland.

At one point the Parade stretched from St Anne's Church in Alcester Street back to St Martin's Church in the Bull Ring. People lining the pavements of Bradford Street waved and cheered as the human sea of green flowed by.

Some older members of the community met people that they had not seen for years. To describe the day as 'emotional' would be a gross understatement.

Together, as a community, we had ended the long wait to celebrate St Patrick's Day in the traditional way.

As Fr Taaffe said in his address at Highgate Park *"Today we saw the resurrection of the Birmingham Irish. The parade should now go on year after year, from strength to strength, bigger and better"*. This is now our goal.

Anthony Duffy
Parade Committee



COMMITTEE REPORTS

Education Committee

Review of 1996

The aims of the Education Sub-Committee are to support the educational provision for the Irish in Birmingham. The Committee is very conscious of the good work of the cultural groups such as Comhaltas, the Dancing Schools, Conradh and the GAA already do in supporting and celebrating Irish culture.

The Committee have two clear objectives:

- (i) to widen the provision of courses and improve access to courses for the Irish Community, and
- (ii) to evaluate the Irish achievement in Education in Birmingham.

The Committee have supported the development of a wide range of new courses launched at the Irish Centre in collaboration with South Birmingham College. We see this as the beginning of a programme of courses at the Irish Centre responding to the expressed needs of the Irish Community. The courses are both practical such as Computer Skills & Legal Aid and cultural such as History classes.

Secondly, we have tried, so far unsuccessfully, to establish a Higher Education Certificate in Irish Studies through a local University. Nevertheless we have run a one term course in conjunction with the University of Birmingham.

Plans for 1997

We plan to organise a half day conference on identity of second generation Irish as part of a wider conference for April 1997.

The Committee are also looking into the possibility of occasional literary evenings with an Irish flavour.

The second objective is to identify the Irish achievement in Education. The Committee are anxious to work with the City Education Department in order to evaluate the achievement of Irish pupils. The model of assessing the achievement of Black and Asian children is the one we wish to explore. To this end we are hoping for a meeting with the Chief Education Officer.

In conclusion, we want to celebrate Irish cultural activities, increase provision & improve access to education & training and finally, work with the Education authorities to evaluate achievement.

As a Committee we welcome anyone who wants to contribute; we all have educational experiences.

Tony Downey - Chair



Employment and Training Committee

Objective : To Establish an Employment Resource Centre for the Irish

The Irish community has traditionally relied on informal networks to access employment opportunities which have now largely disintegrated due to the decline of the construction and related industries. The Irish, as with other communities, still look to each other rather than the establishment for support. The Irish ERC will be an appropriate and effective means of replacing these informal networks and increasing access to wider occupational opportunities for the community. The Irish community is underrepresented in existing ERC provision. Of the 3 ERC's in the Sparkbrook, Sparkhill & Tyseley SRB area, just 57 out of 1,384 (4%) clients in 1995/96 were Irish.

Funding an Irish ERC will be in accordance with the Economic Development Committee Strategic Objective to overcome the barriers to employment opportunities for those who are disadvantaged, including minority ethnic groups. It is an established working principle that ERCs wherever possible should be owned and managed by representatives of their target community. The Irish ERC will therefore perform the same function as other community-focused ERCs in addressing the specific issues of discrimination and disadvantage experienced by its target group.

It is proposed to site the Irish ERC in Digbeth for a number of valid reasons. The Digbeth area is a traditional focus for the Irish Community and is home for numerous Irish businesses, shops, pubs, clubs and services including the Irish Centre and the Irish Welfare and Information Centre. The ERC would therefore be accessible to Irish people from the SRB area (ie Sparkbrook, Sparkhill and Tyseley). These are three of the largest established Wards inhabited by the Irish community in Birmingham, Deprivation indicators for the Irish in these Wards are high with unemployment being significantly higher than the already high average.

In addition, the ERC would take a lead in re-activating the Irish Business Forum and will work with the City Council to develop the Irish district as a distinct cultural and commercial focus as part of the proposed regeneration of the Digbeth and Deritend areas.

The Management Committee has strong links with South Birmingham College and it is intended that the ERC will further develop these as well as links with other colleges. The Management Committee intend to register as a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Irish ERC has grown out of the Birmingham Irish Community Forum and will continue to be a member organisation. Many members of the Management who will form the Board of Directors are currently members of the Irish Forum. Between them they have extensive experience of voluntary sector management and the arena of employment support and training. The Management Committee members include Pat McGillicuddy, Tony Downey, Tony Kennedy, Jane Gallagher, Eddie Falahee and Gobnait Ní Chrualaoi.

Pat McGillicuddy - Chair



Health & Social Services Committee

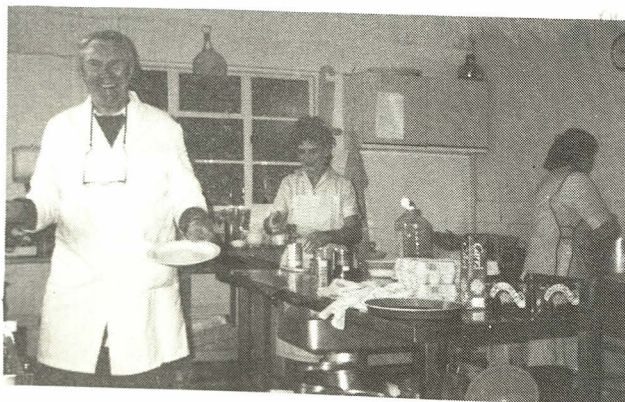
The Health & Social Services Committee have been very active since the last AGM and have succeeded in forming a strong team that have made things happen! The members of this team are: Ursula Keane (Chair), Teresa Gardner (Secretary), Liz Chaloner, Éamon Duffy, Barney Griffin, Winnifred Flanagan, Frank Ryan, Fr Frank Ryan (since September 1996) and Gobnait Ní Chrualaoí (Community Development Officer). Sadly we lost a valuable and respected member of our team during the year with the death of Fr Joe Taaffe.

During the course of the year we have spent a lot of time networking with resultant strong working links with providee agencies including the Department of Social Services. This has caused a successful raising of awareness of Irish issues with these agencies. In addition we have secured research money from the Irish Government and Focus Housing Association and funding for various projects from Social Services. We have not been universally successful, however, as we have not made any progress on ethnic monitoring with the Health Authority to date.

Our projects include:

- ◆ A research project looking at the health and welfare needs of older Irish men and developing a computerised database at the Irish Welfare and Information Centre.
- ◆ Funding for the Drop-In Centre on Moseley Road has been secured from Social Services. The Drop-In Centre will continue to be managed under the auspices of the Irish Welfare and Information Centre.
- ◆ Funding for the Tuesday Club to continue has also been secured as above.
- ◆ An exciting new development is the culturally sensitive service for people with alcohol and drug related problems which will be commencing early in 1997. This has resulted from extensive negotiations with Birmingham Social Services who will be funding it. Again it will be managed by the Irish Welfare and Information Centre.
- ◆ In the pipeline also is the proposed employment of a Development worker to develop culturally sensitive services for Irish elders across the city and to improve awareness among current service providers of issues concerning Irish elders.


As you can see from the above, it has been a very successful year.



Ursula Keane - Chair




Housing Committee




The year started on a high note when Birmingham City Council's Housing Department offered a city owned site, environmentally clean and suitably located. Our partners, Family Housing Association, shared our optimism that this site could be quickly developed.

In early September we were devastated to learn that the site was no longer available to us because, we were told, the site could only be developed to provide large family housing for the local residents.

As a result of this decision, a strong political campaign was launched, including urgent meetings between the Forum Executive, the leader of Birmingham City Council, the Housing Director, and other relevant Officers and Councillors, we were re-allocated another site. We are presently discussing the development of this site with Family Housing Association, Birmingham City Council's Housing Department and the Housing Corporation.



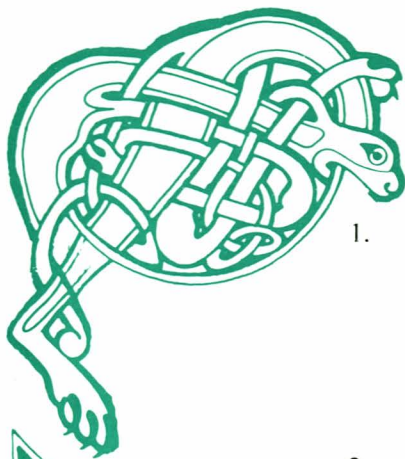
Another reason for future optimism is the recent decision of Cara Housing Association to open a branch in Birmingham. Cara are a London based Irish Housing Association (one of only 2 in the UK). They are already assisting the Irish Forum in an advisory capacity and they are actively involved in negotiating the purchase and development of a large site on Moseley Road/Moseley Street. In addition, they have recently co-opted two members of the Irish Forum, one a member of the Executive Committee and our Development Officer, to their Board of Directors.



I would like to thank the members of the Housing Committee for their patience, perseverance and friendship, also my fellow members of the Forum Executive for their support especially during the crucial meetings with Birmingham City Council Housing Department.

In conclusion and on behalf of the Housing Committee, I would like to thank Gobnait and Cath for their generous help and advice, without them a difficult year would have been an impossible one.

Frank Ryan, Chair



Public Relations Committee

As chair of the Public Relations Committee, I would like to briefly report on the last years events

1. AGM

The AGM in my view is our biggest PR exercise of the year, so it is important to get it right. This involves a lot of meetings and the putting together of Annual Reports. Invites to the various Clubs and Associations, Businesses, the Council and dignitaries that support this Forum in one way or another. The satisfaction of all this is when you look at the end product.

2. President's Visit to Birmingham Irish Community

This year when the Forum entrusted me with the job as Chair of this Committee, I immediately thought of inviting President Robinson and what a coup to get her to Birmingham for the first time.

I wrote to Albert Bore (City Chair) and to my delight he agreed with my proposal. The Committee consisted for Fr Joe Taaffe RIP, Brendan Farrell (Irish Post), John Fitzgerald (Minstrel Music), Clare Cooke (GAA) and Brigid O'Neill. Lots of meetings and correspondence took place between the Lord Mayor's office, Irish Embassy, Metropolitan Police, West Midlands Police, the Media and Dublin Castle followed.

After several exhausting meetings it was agreed that President Robinson would visit Birmingham on 11 March 1996. She would visit the Council House, the Birmingham Pub Bombing Memorial and the Irish Centre. It was also agreed with the Chief of Protocol that approximately 200 people from various Irish organisations ie Schools, Churches and Businesses would be invited.

The great day arrived and everything was in place. The Irish Centre looked marvellous with its Flags, Banners and Guard of Honour. Clare Cooke was unanimously chosen to accompany the President throughout her visit to the Irish Centre.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody involved. Everything went according to plan. A comment was made by the Chief of Protocol that it was one of the better planned visits, and it was quite clear that we had done our homework.

3. Saint Patrick's Day Civic Reception

This was organised for the evening of 15 March 1996, hosted by the Lord Mayor at the banqueting suite at the Council House. It consisted of members of the Irish Forum, Councillors and various other Heads of Departments.

The opening remarks were made by the Lord Mayor, there was a response from Fr Joe Taaffe RIP after which there was a presentation to the Lord Mayor by the Development Officer from the Forum. There was an exhibition of Irish Dancing from the "Murphy School of Dancing" followed by music by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Irish Traditional Music Group).

Refreshments and a light buffet concluded a very successful and enjoyable day.



Pat O'Neill - chair





The Youth Group

WHO ARE WE?

The Irish Youth Group was formed over two years ago to help deal with the issues affecting young Irish people living in Birmingham. The Group is run by young Irish people who want to help other young Irish people get the best out of life here in Birmingham. It aims to be a voice for us through the links we have established with many organisations in the city.

The group is run by volunteers and encourages others to join and get involved. The work we do is very rewarding and, as a member, you can do something positive for yourself and others. The group is open to all young Irish people living in Birmingham between the ages of 11 and 25.

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR

Welfare Work

Most of the work which the Group has done so far has been to address welfare issues for Irish Students at the College of Food. The Irish community has had links with the College for many years, mainly thanks to the work of the Irish Welfare and Information Centre.

More recently the Youth Group has also given a positive contribution to the College with the preparation of an Information pack for new arrivals from Ireland, running an 'Open' afternoon for Irish students, (which enabled the revival of the Irish Students Society), negotiating better terms for Irish Students with Irish banks and regularly meeting with the College's management. The latter has led to the establishment of the Irish Students Welfare Forum which meets four times a year.

Activities

The Group ran a storytelling workshop for the Irish Festival in March 1995 which was a great success.

We have been involved with the Council Youth Service and in particular, their review of it, which took place in late 1995 and early 1996.

The Group has spent a lot of its time trying to raise sufficient funds to appoint an Irish Youth Worker to develop and organise activities, events and support for young Irish people. To date we have not been successful.

WHAT ARE WE DOING NOW?

Due to a lack of progress with our funding bids we recently decided to split the Group into two sub-committees, one which would focus solely on running events and activities and the other which would deal solely with raising funds for these activities.

We are working closely with Splinters Community Arts Limited to organise an **Arts Open Day at the Irish Centre** in February. This is targeted at second generation young Irish, giving them the chance to observe and express their culture and identity through drama, music and dance. We hope that one of the outcomes of the Open Day will be to have a very exciting and visual arts display at the Parade on March 17th.

We are working with South Birmingham College to set up a number of **Irish Studies Courses** including drama and contemporary Irish dance.

The Group will continue to be represented on the College of Food's **Irish Students Welfare Forum**.

Funding bids are being put together for various Trusts and Charities to ensure that the activities are adequately resourced and therefore viable in the long term.

Rob Pasley - Chair

**BICF
Financial Report**

**Irish Community Forum
Office Account**

	£. p.	£. p.
Opening Balance		91.34
INCOME		
Birmingham University	91.10	
Birmingham City Council	1,000.12	
Building Fund Grant	1,193.75	
Bank Interest	5.18	2,290.15
		2,381.49
EXPENDITURE		
Petty Cash	600.00	
Travel Expenses	116.55	
British Telecom	209.26	
Building Fund Survey	464.13	
Stationery	100.00	
A.G.M.	30.00	
Sundries	61.50	1,581.44
		800.00

**BICF (Research DION)
On Health & Social Care Needs of older Irish Men in Birmingham
Over Three Phases**

Income	
Opening Balance	£8,179.23 Cr.
Expenditure	
Phase One	£2,750.00 Dr.
Balance at January 1997	£5,429.23 Cr.

St. Patrick's Day Parade

INCOME	
Revenue in respect of advertisements in Programme	10,432.00
Grant from Birmingham City Council	5,000.00
Sale of Programmes	1,649.65
Fund Raising (Disco and Press Launch Of Parade)	674.10
Bank Interest	55.45
TOTAL	17,811.20
EXPENDITURE	
Security, Street Closures, Toilets, Barbering, Advertising Boards in parks, Stage, Special events, Stewards, P.A.	3,000.00
Coach	350.00
O'Neill Pipe Band	2,254.00
Castlerea Band	400.00
Buncrana Band	200.00
Buncrana Band Treats (Sweets/Pop Etc)	139.43
Stationery	106.18
Printing	37.67
Parking	11.60
Postage	70.24
Films for Camera	10.18
Flowers, Bouquets for presentations	30.00
Materials for Banner Making	51.74
Photocopying	16.80
Comhaltas Ceoltoiri	100.00
Balloons	197.40
Chamberlain Hotel (4 meals for council & police)	36.00
Adverts missing from programme - Cash returned	35.00
Printing of programmes	5,495.00
Trophies	209.89
Irish Centre (donation for use of office for meetings)	100.00
Insurance	462.50
TOTAL	£13,313.63
Credit Balance as at 4 December 1996	£4,497.57

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all those whom the Forum has worked with and been supported by over the past 12 months.

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|--|---|
| <p>Ace Copying
 Action Group for Irish Youth
 Age Concern
 Allied Irish Banks
 Bank of Ireland
 Birmingham City Council
 ☆ Economic Development Department
 ☆ Education Department
 ☆ European & International Affairs Task Force
 ☆ Housing Department
 ☆ Leisure and Community Services
 ☆ Personnel and Organisation
 ☆ Planning and Architecture Department
 ☆ Race Relations Unit
 ☆ Social Services Department
 Birmingham College of Food
 Birmingham Health Authority
 Birmingham TEC
 Birmingham University
 Birmingham Voluntary Services Council
 Brent Irish Alcohol Service
 Cara Irish Housing Association
 City Pride Office
 Co-Enterprise
 Coventry Irish Advisory and Resource Group
 Dion Committee
 Episcopal Commission for Irish Emigrants
 Family Housing Association
 FÁS/Employment Service</p> | <p>Federation of Irish Societies
 Fireside Day Centre
 Focus Housing Association
 HARP
 Irish Chaplaincy of Great Britain
 Irish Embassy
 Irish Post
 Irish Studies Centre, University of North London
 Irish Welfare & Information Centre
 Irish World
 Islington Women's Counselling Centre
 Member Organisations;
 ☆ Conradh na Gaeilge
 ☆ County Associations
 ☆ Dancing Schools
 ☆ GAA
 ☆ Irish Centre
 ☆ Irish Mental Health Forum
 ☆ Irish Welfare and Information Centre
 ☆ Irish Women's Support Group
 ☆ Rose of Tralee Committee
 ☆ Troops out Movement
 ☆ Women and Ireland
 Pam Wells, Printers
 Princes Trust
 South Birmingham College
 Standing Committee Forum
 Street Drinkers Network
 The Globe</p> |
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Birmingham Irish Community Forum - Executive Committee

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>☆ Sylvia Brennan Acting Vice Chair
 ☆ Mary Carway Chair of Fund Raising
 ☆ Mary Connolly
 ☆ Clare Cooke
 ☆ Tony Downey Acting Chair
 ☆ Martin Earlis
 ☆ Eddie Falahee</p> | <p>☆ Pat McAllister Secretary
 ☆ Phil McCarvill Youth Group Representative
 ☆ Pat McGillicuddy Chair of Employment & Training
 ☆ Cllr. Mike Nangle
 ☆ Pat O'Neill Treasurer/Public Relations Chair
 ☆ Frank Ryan Chair of Housing
 ☆ Fr. Frank Ryan</p> |
|---|--|

Special thanks also to members of the Forum Executive who have left us during this year, including:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>☆ Fr. Joe Taaffe
 ☆ Eamon Duffy
 ☆ Brenda Fleming</p> | <p>☆ Ursula Keane
 ☆ Pauline Roche
 ☆ Olive O'Sullivan</p> |
|--|--|

Birmingham Irish Community Forum Sub Committees i.e. Public Relations, Employment & Training, Education, Fundraising, Health & Social Services, Housing, Parade & Youth Group which includes the following people in addition to members of the Executive Committee

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>☆ Liz Chaloner
 ☆ Val Cleary
 ☆ Anthony Duffy
 ☆ Celine Finn
 ☆ Willie Finnegan
 ☆ Winnifred Flanagan
 ☆ Marin Flynn
 ☆ Jane Gallagher
 ☆ Teresa Gardner
 ☆ Barney Griffin</p> | <p>☆ Laura Grigg
 ☆ Clare Holden
 ☆ Melissa Kearns
 ☆ Tony Kennedy
 ☆ Ewan Lenoach
 ☆ Martin Mac an Ghaill
 ☆ Georoid Mac an Mhaoir
 ☆ Paul McElroy
 ☆ Tom Mullen
 ☆ Noel Mulvey</p> | <p>☆ Rory Murray
 ☆ Denise Ní Loinsigh
 ☆ Julie Nugent
 ☆ Rob Pasley
 ☆ John Peters
 ☆ Ted Ryan
 ☆ Sr. Sabina Staff
 ☆ Paul Smith
 ☆ Iestyn Williams
 ☆ Ian White</p> |
|---|--|---|

Birmingham Irish Community Forum Staff

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>☆ Gobnait Ní Chrualaoi Community Development Officer</p> | <p>☆ Cath Beniston Administrative Assistant</p> |
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This Birmingham Irish Community Forum is funded by:



The Birmingham Irish Community Forum is a member of the Standing Consultative Forum and is affiliated to the Federation of Irish Societies