

Irish Studies Centre

Irish
studies centre



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH LONDON

“The Ireland I will be representing is a new Ireland, open, tolerant, inclusive. My primary role as President will be to represent this state. But the state is not the only model of community with which the Irish people can and do identify. Beyond our state there is a vast community of Irish emigrants, extending not only across our neighboring island – which has provided a home away from home for several Irish generations – but also throughout the continents of North America, Australia and of course Europe itself. There are over 70 million people living on this globe who claim Irish descent. I will be proud to represent them.”

Address by Mary Robinson on the occasion of her inauguration as President of Ireland, 3rd December 1990

The University of North London

For more than one hundred years the University of North London has served the higher education needs of people in and around London. We started in 1896 as the Northern Polytechnic and later amalgamated with the North Western Polytechnic to become the Polytechnic of North London. Full University status was granted in 1992.

Our central mission is to provide the best educational experience and outcome for the widest possible clientele. In particular, to open up learning and employment opportunities for “non-traditional students”.

In keeping with our mission, we established the Irish Studies Centre in October 1986, the first of its kind in Britain. The Centre aims to promote Irish Studies as an academic area and to increase the understanding and appreciation of the Irish contribution to all aspects of British economic, cultural, political and social life. The location of the University of North London at the heart of a large Irish community means it attracts a large number of Irish students to the range of degrees offered by the University.

The Irish Studies Centre

The main purpose of the Irish Studies Centre is the promotion of Irish Studies as an academic area through research, community liaison, teaching and documentation. It was founded by Professor Mary Hickman, Director of the Centre, in 1986 and two years later an undergraduate degree pathway in Irish Studies was established. The Irish Studies Centre acts as a unique resource and point of contact in London, through events such as the annual Public Lecture Series, its holding of the Smurfit Archive of the Irish in Britain, its publications and its links with Irish academics researchers and politicians.

The focus of the teaching and research programme of the Centre is the political, social, cultural and economic changes in modern Ireland and the Irish diaspora. The Irish Studies Centre at the University of North London was the first research centre in the country to be dedicated to the study of the Irish in Britain. The Centre has extensive links with Irish community organisations and has a wide range of resources for researching the Irish in Britain and the wider diaspora.



The Taoiseach Bertie Ahern meeting the Vice Chancellor Brian Roper on the occasion of the Taoiseach's private visit to the Irish Studies Centre on November 26th 1998

Research Activities

The Irish Studies Centre is the premier academic base for research about the Irish in Britain. In addition, it is now pioneering research about the wider Irish diaspora. When the Centre was established in 1986 there was very little published work about the Irish in twentieth-century Britain. It has been a major goal of the Centre to transform this situation and in so doing contribute to the documentation and analysis of the two major phases of Irish migration this century: the 1950s and 1980s.

Commission for Racial Equality Report

The Centre was commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality to carry out a national survey about the Irish community. As a consequence of the production of the research report *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* the public profile of the Centre has been considerably raised. Professor Hickman is now a regular media commentator on issues concerning the Irish in Britain.

The research report led to the recognition of the Irish in Britain as an ethnic minority by many local authorities and other organisations, and to the inclusion of 'Irish' as a category in the 2001 Census. This report has wide reaching implications, not only in the field of discrimination, but also in terms of campaigning for support for Irish groups and organisations which maintain cultural programmes.

The Irish in Britain Research Programme

Since the publication of the CRE Report the Centre has been developing a specialism in policy orientated research. For example, a community-based research project undertaken for the London Borough of Lewisham. The findings of the report, *The Irish in Lewisham* were accepted by the borough, and this is leading to changes in local policy in order to incorporate the Irish community in Lewisham into the various services and programmes for which the local authority is responsible.

In 1998, the Irish Studies Centre secured a grant from the Dion committee to extrapolate all available information about the socio-economic position of the

second and third generation Irish from existing databases. The report *Second Generation Irish People in Britain: a demographic, socio-economic and health profile* was published in 2001. Between 2000-2002 we are undertaking a national survey of the second generation Irish population with Dr Bronwen Walter at Anglia Polytechnic University, funded by the ESRC. Dr Louise Ryan has joined the ISC and is researching Irish women's migration to Britain in the 1930s.

International Research on Irish Migration and Diaspora

The Irish Studies Centre is linked to Glucksman Ireland House, New York University, and the Irish Centre for Migration Studies, University College Cork, in a collaborative research project about Irish migration and diaspora. Professor Mary Hickman has twice been invited as Visiting Professor by the European Studies and Irish Studies programmes at New York University. She is currently engaged in comparative work on the Irish in New York City and London and is writing a book about the Irish diaspora.



Photograph by Joanne O'Brien.

1985, Dún Laoghaire Harbour: leaving on the Holyhead boat

Smurfit Archive of the Irish in Britain

This is an important resource much of which was originally donated to the Irish Studies Centre by the Irish in Britain History Group in 1991. It contains a unique selection of documents, audio and video recordings, books and photographs which catalogue the history of the Irish in Britain in the twentieth century. The Smurfit Archive of the Irish in Britain is particularly rich in materials documenting the experiences of Irish people in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, a period of migration from Ireland to Britain which remains very under-researched. It is planned to develop this aspect of the Archive but also to actively seek out materials relevant to other eras, making the archive a fully comprehensive resource on the twentieth century history of the Irish in Britain.

The Archive is regularly consulted by researchers, students, academics and journalists. In addition to this, there are numerous telephone, email, and letter enquiries requesting information, literature searches and referrals to other Irish agencies in Britain. In June 2000 we launched a three year development programme of the archive funded by the Smurfit Foundation.

This is now progressing in three key ways:

● Preserving and Expanding the collection

The current collection of materials is being carefully preserved and expanded in order to ensure that the Archive continues to be a comprehensive documentation of the range of experiences of Irish people in Britain. This includes an active outreach approach to individuals and organisations in order to obtain new materials. In particular, the Archive would benefit from expanding its collection of books, photographs, badges and other ephemera related to the Irish in Britain at work, campaigning and socialising. We plan to develop a computerised photographic record and oral history collection of the Irish in Britain, safeguarding the integrity of the material and facilitating wider reproduction and access.

● Disseminating the collection

Widening the dissemination of the data held by the Archive is an urgent goal. Our plans include

publishing and up-to-date, annotated bibliography of the Irish in Britain to replace that published by the Irish in Britain History Group in 1986. The bibliography will help spread knowledge of the existence of the Archive and the value of its holdings. The creation of a website further advertising the holdings of the Smurfit Archive of the Irish in Britain will also, we hope, assist in attracting further deposits to the Archive. In addition a programme of exhibitions and illustrated talks throughout Britain is ongoing, which is designed to encourage regional participation in the project from both organisations and individuals as well as publicise the contents of the existing collections.

● Developing a network of researchers of the Irish in Britain

This will build on the database of researchers already held by the Irish Studies Centre. By facilitating networking among researchers and raising awareness of research being undertaken on the Irish in Britain, the Irish Studies Centre aims to positively contribute to the critical mass of research about the Irish in Britain. This will involve following up visitors to the Archive in order to discover the outcome of their researches and encourage deposits to the Archive.

By preserving, expanding and disseminating the Smurfit Archive of the Irish in Britain, the Irish Studies Centre aims to enhance understanding of the Irish community in Britain for British, Irish and other users. We are keen to encourage participation in the project through donation of materials, exhibitions and collaborative projects and to ensure that the history and contribution of the Irish to Britain is secured for present and future generations to consult.

Public Lecture Series

The Irish Studies Centre hosts an annual Public Lecture Series. This is open to any interested member of the public. The Public Lecture Series regularly has audiences well in excess of one hundred people. Our ability to attract high profile speakers from Ireland guarantees the event considerable public interest and media attention. Some of the subjects covered by the Series over the years have been Irish traditional music, Ireland and the European Union, modern Irish poetry, Northern Ireland and W.B. Yeats. The lectures are participatory, with a 'question and answer' session between audience and speaker. They are followed by a reception which provides an opportunity to meet the speaker personally but also acts as a networking opportunity.

The lectures are particularly attractive to Irish people living in London and the South East, as well as politicians, journalists, academics and students, who have an interest in current and cultural affairs in Ireland, and the Irish abroad. Past speakers have included Professor Declan Kiberd, Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Professor Roy Foster, Professor Joseph Lee, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Edna O'Brien, Finlan O'Toole and Taoiseach na hÉireann, Bertie Ahern TD. An important aim of the Public Lecture Series since 1995 has been to monitor developments in the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. We have hosted Judge Catherine McGuinness, of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, Bernadette McAliskey, David Ervine, Ken Maginnis and Dr Bill Rolston.

We continue to maintain this high standard. For example, the 2000 Public Lecture Series was opened by Professor Seamus Deane who delivered a lecture on the

subject of Irish fiction between 1850 and 1930. This was followed by a presentation on the issue of conflict resolution in divided societies by award-winning journalist, Fergal Keane. The series was closed with Helena Kennedy QC (in conversation with Professor Mary Hickman) on the changing relationship between Britain and Ireland in the 21st century.

Over the coming years the scope of the Public Lecture Series will be broadened to cover a more international range of subjects and speakers. Transcripts from key lectures in the future will be made available, widening the impact of the Public Lecture Series.



Professor Mary Hickman meeting Edna O'Brien on her visit to the Irish Studies Centre to give a public lecture

The Irish Studies Degree Programme

The first students to take Irish Studies began their programme in 1988, initially on a part-time basis. In 1990 the first cohort of full-time Irish Studies students began the degree. Student numbers have since increased and there are currently about 120 students taking Irish Studies courses. There is also a Certificate in Irish Studies, consisting of eight units from the degree programme.

Aims of the Irish Studies Course

- To provide a study of Irish culture and society from historical, political, sociological, cultural, literary and linguistic points of view.
- To enable students to appreciate the significance of religion, nationalism and class in Irish society.
- To extend students' awareness and critical understanding of the significance of migration as a factor in Irish life in the experience of the Irish in Britain and of other Irish communities worldwide.
- To promote an understanding of the nature and significance of relations between Ireland and Britain at political, social, economic and cultural levels.
- To cater for the local Irish community through the provision and development of courses related to Irish emigration and the experience of the Irish in Britain.



Irish Studies Modules

The Irish Studies undergraduate degree programme offers a range of modules. There are five strands to the degree: the study of migration and the Irish abroad; contemporary Ireland; culture and literature of Ireland; Irish history; and the Irish language.

Preliminary level modules

Irish Migration to Britain
The Political History of Modern Ireland
Introduction to Irish Culture

Advanced level modules

Divided Ireland: Irish History 1922-1963
The Irish in Contemporary Britain
Conflict in Northern Ireland
The Modern Irish Republic
The Irish in the United States of America 1876-1945
Ireland and Irishness: Questions of Representation
Modern Irish Fiction
Irish Writers in London
Irish Traditional Music
Women in Irish Society
Modern Irish Drama

MA in Contemporary Irish Studies

We hope to launch an MA in Contemporary Irish Studies in the academic year 2001-2002.

Open Language Programme: Gaeilge

The Open Language Programme now offers courses in the Irish language, ranging from preliminary to advanced level, for beginners who have no previous knowledge of the Irish language, as well as those who have previously studied Irish. Modules in the Irish language may be taken as part of a degree programme or may be taken individually on a fee-paying basis.

Other Activities

Publications

Occasional Papers Series

Ten Occasional Papers have been published by the Centre. These cover topics about the Irish in Britain and contemporary Ireland.

Irish Studies: An Introductory Teaching Pack

This was developed for use in social and cultural studies courses; its aim is to widen the understanding of Ireland and Irish issues within the curriculum of secondary schools and colleges.

Conference Report

Northern Ireland: What Next? is a report of the major conference hosted by the Irish Studies Centre in 1995. Papers from all the speakers are included; the report covers the range of opinion, at that time, on the future of Northern Ireland. As such, it provides a unique insight into developments towards the current Peace Process.

Research Publications

Research based at the Centre has led to academic publications which have contributed to the development of Irish Studies. These include the report of research undertaken for the Commission for Racial Equality *Discrimination and the Irish Community* in Britain and *Religion, Class and Identity*, in which Mary Hickman examines the role of Catholic education in the formation of the second generation Irish in Britain. The report *The Irish in Lewisham*, a community based piece of research is also available on the world wide web. In 2001, *Second Generation Irish People in Britain: a demographic, socio-economic and health profile* was published.

Other Public Events

Book Launches

The Irish Studies Centre has hosted a number of book launches. For example, the launch of Clare Barrington's annotated bibliography *Irish Women in England* was hosted in 1997 and Bronwen Walters book, *Outsiders Inside: whiteness, place and Irish woman* in 2001.

Conferences

In February 1995, the Irish Studies Centre held a major conference, "Northern Ireland: What Next?", on the emerging Peace Process. John Hume gave the keynote address. This conference, in bringing together politicians from all the major political parties in Northern Ireland, from Sinn Féin to the DUP, was the first of its kind at a British university. It enabled Irish people in Britain to participate in debates about Northern Ireland with some of the key individuals involved in determining its future. In February 1998 the Irish Studies Centre organised a conference at the House of Commons on "Prisoners and the Northern Ireland Peace Process". This was organised in collaboration with the Irish United Nations Association, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, the Centre for Peace Studies, University of Ulster and its deliberations were fed directly into the peace process. In November 2000 the Irish Studies Centre in conjunction with the British Association of Irish Studies held a conference "The Irish Diaspora: Writing, Researching, Comparing". This was very successful with one hundred and eighty participants from around the world.

Exhibitions

In June 2000 the Irish Studies Centre mounted the first public exhibition of the Smurfit Archive of the Irish in Britain entitled "When Did You Come Over: The Story of Irish Migration to Britain". Future exhibitions of the Archive are planned throughout Britain over the coming years.

Opposite: The launch of 'Irish Women in England' by Clare Barrington hosted by the ISC.

Left to right: Dr Ailbhe Smyth, Director, Women's Education Research and Resource Centre, UCD. Clare Barrington, author. Prof. Mary Hickman, Director, Irish Studies Centre.



Scriobh

Irish Writers in London Summer School

First established in 1996, this popular course runs for two nights per week for six weeks and aims to provide an informal but informative setting for students wishing to study Irish literature over the summer. The course consists of a mixture of lectures, seminars, readings and creative writing workshops. In addition the course will give you the opportunity to meet some of the finest Irish writers living in London.

Each week one Irish writer comes to read and speak about their work with students. Each writer will discuss their motivations for writing and their experience of emigration or growing up in Britain of Irish parents and how this has affected their work. They will also be providing advice about getting published for those students intending to pursue a career in writing themselves.

No prior qualifications are required to attend this course which is suitable for anyone who is interested in discovering the quality of contemporary literature.

Dates: mid June - late July

Times: Monday and Wednesday
evenings 6 - 8.30pm

Further details: Tony Murray 020 7753 3301
or email: t.murray@unl.ac.uk

Introduction to Irish Traditional Music

This course runs for one night per week for ten weeks and consists of a mixture of lectures, seminars, group-work, demonstrations and performances. In the first week of the course students are introduced to the history and background of Irish traditional music. During subsequent weeks, established Irish musicians living in London will perform and speak about their work and will also provide advice to students wishing to pursue or develop a career in traditional music. **Please note however that this course does not include instrument tuition.**

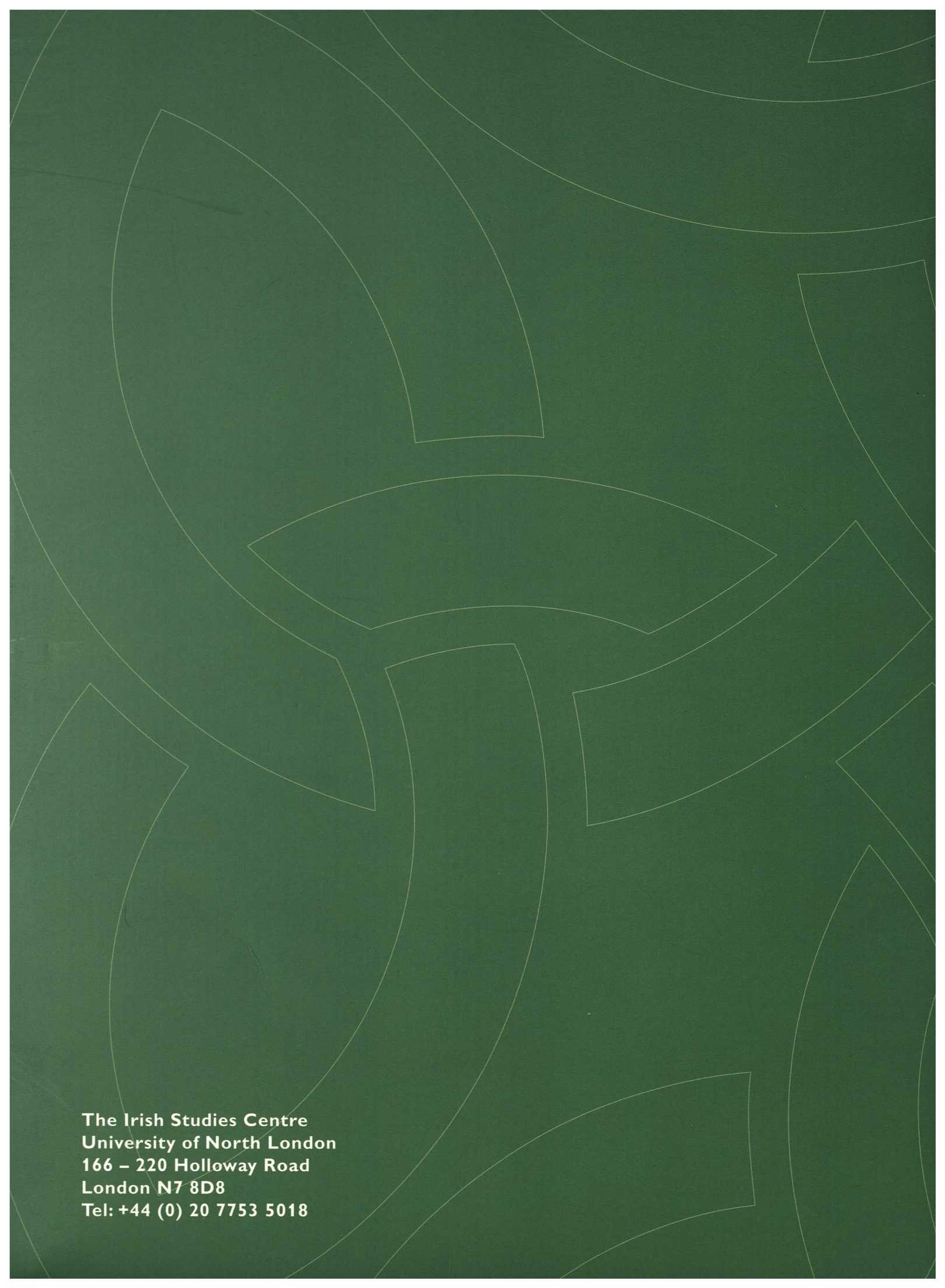
Students learn about a broad spectrum of Irish traditional music and gain valuable insights into the different aspects and approaches involved. Some of the subjects covered include:

- the Irish song and singing tradition
- emigration and the influence of America on the tradition
- the revival of the 1960s and 1970s
- Irish traditional music in London
- Irish dance from earliest times to 'Riverdance'

The final week of the course is devoted to a review of the course and an opportunity for students to join established Irish traditional musicians in a traditional pub 'session'.

Dates: the course runs from early October to mid-December every year

Further details: Tony Murray 020 7753 3301
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