

INTRODUCTION:

This report covers the period from January 1st to 31st December, 1976. It has been an eventful year dominated by an anniversary - the 21st of the Irish Centre. Assessing twenty-one years of existence and somehow projecting into the next twenty-one years was most consoling but also provided many anxious moments in peering into the future. Administratively the Irish Centre, its complex of activities has weathered the economic gales and the financial high seas of a difficult year. Throughout its course, we have dealt with an increasing load of work and that the standard remained so high is due to the staff personnel and its deep dedication to the functioning of the hostels and the Social Club and the Welfare Department. I gladly pay tribute to each and everyone of the staff at all levels of work.

SOCIAL:

The social and welfare dimensions of the Irish Centre have always been inextricably bound together and the former could be considered as an extension of the latter. The social facilities, while providing a milieu where the immigrant and his friends can meet and socialize in the accepted Irish tradition, are also the strong financial arm on which the welfare leans. The Irish Centre is better known to the majority of Irish people as a social centre. Over two thousand five hundred people come and go each week, unaware of the welfare work carried out at the same time. This chapter is devoted to a brief account of the various social activities undertaken and the philosophy underlying their development.

People to a great extent are a product of their culture and family environment. To deny them the opportunity to develop their personalities along set values would not only be an injustice, but would create social problems. Britain is a multi-racial society, which acknowledges the necessity of various immigrant communities and respects the rights of these groups to their unique cultural identity. Britain has perhaps, less deep cultural tradition than its immigrants, but as an industrial democracy it sees integration into the civic life of the country as a responsibility.

The large number of Irish welfare problems developing in the post war years highlighted the absence of adequate social and recreational facilities. The founders of the Irish Centre and the social committees which subsequently developed considered they had an obligation to enhance the quality of Irish social life and promote cultural pursuits.

The administrators were not unduly concerned about the profits or losses normally associated with business endeavours. Their compassionate welfare concern flowed over into the social and cultural dimensions, hence if running costs were marginally met, they were satisfied. This however, allowed little funds for property depreciation or expansion. Over the years, the welfare fund benefited more from donations than from any profits accruing from entertainment.

The Irish Centre Social Club has continued along lines similar to previous years. From the following statistics, one will see that facilities of the Club are used to near capacity. Figures comparing with last year are as follows:

	<u>1976</u>	<u>1975</u>
Meetings	379	374
Social events with food	110	91
Dances	52	32
Cultural activities	150	
Recreational activities & Sporting e.g., darts, bingo, quiz	343	243
Youth Club functions	50	

The Irish Centre Brass Band unfortunately seems to be disbanding while on the other hand, we have the resurrection towards the end of the year, under the capable guidance of Joe Farrell, a pipe band meeting twice weekly, and showing great enthusiasm.



Bar facilities - again the same as last year, about 1700 hours of trading. The Welfare Department greatly appreciates the work and the dedication of the organisers of functions. It is necessary that there be a Centre to provide suitable entertainment for our Irish community. It is a healthy sign, it is a demand of our character that we do have a place where we can associate together and entertain one another. I might say here regarding re-unions, there seems to be an increase in this type of function and in any circumstances, these are very very important. It is important that much work be put into the preparation of them in bringing our Irish people into the main stream of social activity.

From the administrative point of view, the physical set up of the Centre needs structural change and the year under review has given thought to this. Consequently, it was decided towards the end of the year to go ahead with major improvements and a firm decision was taken. It is a matter now of putting into effect in various stages, the extensions to the Centre and the improvement and rationalization of space within the existing centre.

#### WELFARE:

Despite the depression or recession, the Welfare Department can look back on 1976 with some satisfaction. September the 17th was the 21st Anniversary of its opening and to commemorate this event, a social function was held in Barkers of Kensington. The spirit of the occasion reflected concern for the needs of the Irish abroad, and this was expressed so well by many of the speakers during the evening.

From its inception to the end of 1976, the Irish Centre had found accommodation for 25,528 people - just one of the aspects of the work carried out by the Welfare Department. As we look at the annual statistics, our concern here is not with numbers. Behind each statistic is a person. To be able to say how many people have left their homes is not as important to us as to be able to say that those who have settled elsewhere have found work, a place to live, a place to raise their children healthily and look to a promising future.

The vast majority of Irish people who have come to this country have found work and accommodation without making any demands on the Social Services of this country and only the minimum demands on Centres such as ours. The contribution of these settled Irish to the Church and State, to the economic life, statutory and voluntary services has largely been underestimated and unacknowledged. They are now substantially represented in many leading British organisations, a tribute to their intellectual calibre, industry and determination. While we proudly commend the achievements of this vast number, there are many reasons to be alarmed at the failure rate. Many of the latter are socially and economically non-viable before emigrating. Others fail to adapt or improve their socio-economic status and events over-power them. Others in their middle years become aware of their relative lack of achievement, their ideals and ambitions waned and they experience frustration and futility. Whatever our attitude towards them may be, it does not alter the fact that they come from every social strata and many who worked hard for years are now social casualties.

Our statistics show an increase from the previous year. Last year, we had 2,408 people making application to the Irish Centre. The total interviews given was 3,221, so while there may be a decrease in the overall numbers of people leaving home, there is that steady increase in those who are calling to the Centre for help of one kind or another.

The age range of those attending our Welfare Department was more satisfactory than for many years. The desirable migrating age group, that is 18-25 years had 1,492 people. This group on the whole are easily fixed up with a job and accommodation. The main motives for leaving Ireland were unemployment, low wages and lack of job prospect. Some were attracted to a new and better life in Britain. Some were leaving behind domestic problems or had some trouble with the law or place of employment. Some psychiatric cases were hoping life would begin all over again once they had arrived in Britain. A small percentage emigrating seemed prepared for the move. One might have expected the older people would have been better prepared, but some have little more than the clothes they wear to show for their life's earnings. It can be very difficult to place people in such poor circumstances in employment or



the biggest problem of course, as usual has been homelessness. Figures show that 2,312 were placed in suitable accommodation. Homelessness is one of the greatest evils of society. As a human condition, it preys both on body and soul. The homeless victim, already suffering considerable mental anguish moving in a restricted and socially unsupportive environment can find it extremely difficult to solve his problems. To get accommodation he needs money, to get money he needs a job or Social Security assistance which presupposes that he has an address. He is thus caught in a vicious circle. He is forced to either sleep out, squat or take up residence in one of the Social Security reception centres. In 1976, we found it more difficult to place people in satisfactory accommodation than in jobs. There is a great discrepancy between what people need accommodation-wise and what is available to them.. Families, couples and single people battle with the dilemma of finding appropriate accommodation. Local Authorities have become adamant not to help families except to offer them transportation back to their place of origin. Our success in this area has been extremely limited.

In spite of the high rate of unemployment experienced in Britain, we did not experience any extraordinary difficulties in placing Clients in jobs. The employment was mostly manual - buildings, catering and bar jobs. People who wanted specialised jobs were referred to the appropriate Agencies. Some cases presented difficulties because of personality disorders or other factors. Some young people who had neither money or accommodation did not have a change of clothes or the means of having a good wash. This made it difficult to present these people to prospective Employers.

Repatriation - we did have our share. Repatriation cases generally fall into three categories. Those who need to return home urgently e.g., a family bereavement and have no money to do so, secondly those who see no future for themselves in Britain and just want to go home fast and thirdly, minors or ill people who never had a chance of surviving here.

The usual problem cases presented themselves be they psychiatric, marital, single mothers, ex-offenders and alcoholics. One of the difficulties with such cases arises from the fact that many of them have done the rounds of all the known Agencies who are capable of helping them and yet for one reason or another, they remain handicapped by their problems. Our service to these people consists of listening to their problems and ambitions and placing them in the best situation available to us. Where possible, follow-up work is done and in all cases, they are invited back should they get into further difficulties. Some individuals are burdened with a complexity of problems and often find themselves being referred back and forth to different Agencies who purport to deal with the various aspects of their problems. However, the ability of the Client to assimilate and act on advice is often questionable, and to be subject to a type of 'ping pong' welfare service does nothing to contribute to the Client's adjustment. A slower more sympathetic approach might be of greater therapeutic value and here one must consider the possibility of a type of residence where such cases can get a more prolonged and in-depth counselling and perhaps in the near future, the Centre should consider such a residence.

During the year also, we became involved with a number of Irish people committed to prison or on remand. There is a need for real concern in this area. Information obtained from the Home Office revealed that the age distribution of Irish born in the prison population is not consistent with their age distribution in the population as a whole. In particular, more Irishmen aged 40 and over are imprisoned than could be expected from overall population figures. It also revealed that 20% of those in prison for crimes of drunkenness and associated crimes were Irish.

Death sometimes occurs violently or suddenly, catching the victim completely unprepared and while the deceased is well known on the job or in some social circles, it has not always been easy to trace the next-of-kin. This is particularly true of those who have changed their name a few times or who have been out of contact with home or whose contact with home has been by telephone - a number memorised in the deceased's mind. Friends are often dismayed when they learn that the body will not be released for burial until it is officially identified.

The increase in the number of people coming into our Welfare Department with marriage problems would indicate that Ireland has not been exempt



from this world-wide phenomenon. Perhaps associated with this is the increase in the number of young people who are socially discontented and in some cases unemployable. The presence of distressed people in our environment should challenge our Christian consciousness. The sacredness and dignity of the human person has nothing got to do with age, place of origin, appearance or wealth. Christ's compassion for these distressed people has often been confused with softness. In fact, he saw them as individuals, more sinned against than sinning and kept down by prejudices of their leaders and officials. When people come looking for help, they are seeking what is theirs by right, not comparison. Our obligations therefore, are clear.

This year, we have had an increased number of requests to trace missing relatives. Some of the letters asking for help are very pathetic. So often, they are from elderly parents who have not heard from their children for years and now they may never see them again before they die. These cases present great difficulties and need very tactful handling, but when they are successful, they are extremely rewarding.

The passing of the Childrens Act 1975 may be expected to bring in other enquiries from people who were adopted and now wish to trace their parents. These cases are even more difficult and delicate and they are likely to increase.

It is heartening to see progress being made on the new welfare department. The progress as yet, is not visible but we have now the plans almost complete to start work on No. 50 Camden Square, work that will convert this building into suitable offices and rooms necessary to look after our welfare cases with the dignity that these people command. We look forward to the completion of these long promised plans which should enhance the quality and efficiency of our welfare services and provide a private and dignified atmosphere in dealing with those in need. The year has also seen the examination of the current needs of the Irish immigrant and how the Centre can adapt its services to meet these needs. Much credit to this is due to those working in the Welfare Department and the keen interest taken by the Administrative Committee in all aspects of the welfare scene. A great tribute of thanks is due here to the two Sisters who during the year have manned, day in day out, the offices of the Welfare Department, and also to the voluntary workers give up their spare time in helping the cause.

#### HOSTELS:

During the year, the Irish Centre administered three hostels, Hope House in Quex Road, Kilburn with beds for 98 young men, the Girls Hostel in Hornsey Lane Gardens, Highgate, with beds for 40 girls and the newer hostel, 33 Medway Street, Victoria. The policy of the Irish Centre in running its hostels is to create a homely atmosphere and allow as far as possible, the maximum amount of freedom of access to the residents, but where many people live together, awareness and concern for the needs of other residents must exist. A certain standard of responsibility is demanded of residents in this regard.

The demand for beds in the hostels far exceeds those available so residents are not encouraged to settle down permanently. While admissions are on a first come, first served basis, there is a need also to take the common good into account. Great care must be taken not to accept more problem cases than can be handled. Being kind to an excessive number of problem cases is neither being helpful to them or to those seeking rest and contentment.

During the year in Hope House, 427 new applicants were given accommodation in the hostel and at least 800 unrecorded applicants were referred elsewhere. Of those admitted, 292 were placed in employment, 15 were psychiatric, 15 ex-offenders, 13 had drink problems, 9 were gamblers, 13 had been living rough and 6 were illiterate.

At Hornsey Lane Gardens, 245 new residents were admitted during the year. The hostel was not fully occupied during part of the Winter months - approximately 3 beds were vacant. Of those admitted, 40 were placed in employment, 5 were psychiatric, 3 had drink problems, 2 were single pregnant girls and 2 were illiterate.



the girls hostel - Medway Street - is being administered and run by the Irish Centre for this its first year. The premises which housed 200 girls when it was run by the Sisters of Charity is now partially closed for redevelopment. Plans to this end are currently being completed at a cost of something like £740,000. At this juncture, I must mention the extraordinary co-operation we have received to date, from the British Government. Following the registration of Irish Centre Hostels Limited under the Housing Corporation Act in January 1976, a fresh approach was made in developing our hostels. To take the pressure of our own fund raising through the social functions, appeals etc., to the Irish community other funding agencies were approached especially the Housing Corporation. I wish to pay tribute to Richard Marke because through his expertise, we have been able to make such progress during the year. The result I may say now, although it is outside of the year under consideration, but as a result of his work, we received from the British Government £87,671.00 to wipe out the mortgage on Hope House on the 31st March last and through his tireless work, the British Government through the Housing Corporation and the Department of the Environment have committed themselves to providing £730,000 for the rehabilitation of 33 Medway Street into a modern hostel for 125 girls. This will probably go down as the highlight of the year as far as the development of the Irish Centre is concerned and in its present inferior condition, 445 girls were accommodated and 320 of those were placed in jobs. Many of those accommodated were students seeking seasonal work. The hostel offers only short term accommodation because when the money comes through from the Government, the work on the rehabilitation will commence immediately.

#### DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME:

It is true to say that the development of the Irish Centre formed the bulk of the discussion at the monthly meetings of the Administrative Committee during the year. Besides these meetings, the Executive met on many occasions to go into greater detail and depth in order to present matters to the full Committee.

Coupled with this was the Working Party of experts in "Construction" who met regularly with the Architects and Consulting Engineers and reported back to the Committee. The work of this group of men was invaluable. Freely they gave their time to attend meetings during the day, put the interests of the Centre before the professionals and with their building expertise have undoubtedly, saved the Irish Centre thousands of pounds. I would like in a special way to pay tribute and express the gratitude of the Irish Centre to Messrs. Matt Brunton and Paddy O'Brien for their great and generous effort.

By the end of 1976, the situation was that the Administrative Committee had committed itself to the development programme comprising of extensions of New Hall, new Kitchen and Boiler House, the refurbishing of the existing Irish Centre entailing two new toilet blocks, creche and youth club facilities, re-arranging of bars in the Kennedy and Douglas Hyde Lounges, an administrative wing and reception foyer from Camden Square and finally the refurbishing of No. 50 Camden Square as the new Welfare Department. That part of the adjoining property between 44 and 49 Camden Square to be subleased to Community Housing Association for the erection of 23 flats from which sub-lease the Centre should receive about £50,000 and flats will be built from money forthcoming from the Housing Corporation.

No words of mine can do justice to the conscientious, dedicated and responsible approach taken by the members of the Administrative Committee, headed by an excellent Chairman - Mr. M. Moroney - in coming to this momentous decision. They are deserving of your highest regard and wholehearted support. I will be pleased to bring you up to date on the progress made since the beginning of this year if you so desire in the discussion to follow.

TO CONCLUDE: The Irish Centre is no small enterprise. Both in volume and quality of its work it commands respect. After 21 years, it can still take progressive steps. Yes, we have our weaknesses and with them we face the true test of our maturity. Having learned our limits, are we prepared to marshall our strengths? or merely to shrink in frustration from our new challenges? It is a crucial question for now our home Country - Ireland, our country of abode, England, and might I say the world of mankind needs our optimism, our faith, our creativity. Harnessing the talents of the Irish community in Britain and the talents represented here tonight we can do all these things. I myself am willing to face this challenge. I believe



## FINANCE :

The Accounts show that our liabilities have increased by £966.00 to £26,585. Fixed assets have increased by £20,005 to £157,658 due to initial Capital Expenditure incurred in the development of the Centre.

It should be pointed out that Fixed Assets represent Capital Expenditure to date, less depreciation and bear no relation to the aggregate current market value of the properties.

In reviewing the reliability of our sources of revenue, it will be noted that the total received during the year from Covenants, Donations, and Management Charges together with surplus on Revenue Account amounted to an overall surplus of £36,246.

### COVENANTS

Messrs. Arthur Guinness & Co.	£870.00	
Messrs. M.J. Gleeson & Co.	149.00	
Mr. M. Brunton	149.00	
Mr. J. Canny	149.00	
Mr. J. McCann	104.00	
Mr. B. McLau	75.00	
Mr. E. Kennedy	75.00	
Mr. B.F. Mullin	65.00	
Mr. W. Smythe	30.00	
Sundry	85.00	£1,751.00
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### GRANTS - LONDON BOROUGHS

Camden Borough Council	£2,750.00	
Islington Borough Council	360.00	
Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council	100.00	£3,210.00

### DONATIONS

Car Raffle Prize (Mrs. M. Moroney)	£1,750.00	
London-Irish Festival	1,532.00	
Archdiocese of Westminster	1,000.00	
Mr. M. O'Riordan	846.00	
Truman Hanbury and Buxton	633.00	
Council of Irish Counties	350.00	
Sligo Association	250.00	
Allied Irish Banks Limited	250.00	
Irish Clergy - Refund of Loans	210.00	
Mayo Association	188.00	
Fermanagh Association	100.00	
St. Patrick's Day - Sundry	133.00	
Clare Association	63.00	
Anonymous - Sundry under £50.00	1,238.00	8,543.00
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