

## 23rd ANNUAL REPORT OF THE IRISH CENTRE

### INTRODUCTION

The Report that follows concerns the period from January 1st. 1977 to December 31st. 1977. When I started to write this report, not very long ago I admit, I glanced back at previous Annual Reports to find that a certain similarity runs through each. I am afraid that this year's will show up similar trends.

Indeed it is an unhappy commentary on our present-day life when one has to repeat, each year as it passes on its way, that the difficulties we have to solve and master continue to grow, while the financial means we need to sustain and expand our efforts remain as strained as ever. The Irish Centre is not alone in this experience.

Yet despite the problems, each successive year records the continued widening of the range of work of the Centre, added and accepted responsibilities, a continuing excellence of its case-work confronting in an imaginative way the problems which the ordinary individual or family faces in a hard-pressed and often violent world.

My very sincere debt of gratitude is expressed to the Staff of the Centre, at all levels for the quality of its performance during the year and to all those who gave of their time and energy in a voluntary capacity to support the works and ideals of the Centre.

### THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

The Administrative Committee which the Council gave to the Irish Centre at last year's Annual General Meeting has done trogan work during the year. It has proved a most important and responsible year for the Committee with decisions of immense importance being taken. The material care of the girls Hostel in Hornsey Lane, The boy's Hostel in Quex Rd., the development of the new girls Hostel in Westminster, the planning and development of the adjoining property in Camden Sq., and the Irish Centre Buildings rehabilitation programme in Murray St. ment long hours of work at the Monthly meetings and numerous meetings at Sub-Committee level every week. The interesy and keenness of the Committee numbers can be seen in the regularity of attendance over the whole year-on average 13 out of a possible 16.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE IRISH CENTRE

As expected most attention during 1977 was in the planning of the Development of the Irish Centre. In January we received from the Borough of Camden full approval of the Plans. By then the Architects and relevent professionals had programmed a work chart involving six consecutive steps of development namely;-

CONTRACT A	SITE INVESTIGATION	£2,500.00
CONTRACT B	TREE REMOVALS	£7,500.00
CONTRACT C	FOUNDATIONS AND VENT SHFTS AND NECESSARY PREPARATORY	
	WORK ON BRITISH RAIL	£203,424.07
CONTRACT D	HALL SUPERSTRUCTURE KITCHEN, LAVATORY BLOCK	£550,000.00
CONTRACT E	REHABILITATION OF 50, 51, 52, CAMDEN SQ.	
CONTRACT E1	REMODELLING OF MURREY ST. FRONTAGE	
CONTRACT E2	KENNEDY AND DOUGLAS HYDE LOUNGES	

The Administrative Committee at its March meeting decided that we should proceed with Contracts A.B.C.D.and E and that a P.C. sum be allowed for subsequent contracts. I must say that the Committee has been very practical and progmatic in its approach to each aspect of the development.



Factors such as inflation, unknowns in the rehabilitation of old buildings such as the Centre, the caveats and precautionary measures placed by the British Rail authorities on the leased adjoining property, the delay and expense at getting vacant possession of our property have made our task of development and planning development a nerve wracking experience. When all this is completed with the daunting task of the finance involved and the uncertainties of raising finance, you can readily see that 1977 was a most difficult year.

One other aspect I must refer to here, During all these meetings and studies the Committee has had the expert advice and willing service of an advisory body which has liaised regularly between the Administrative Committee and the Architects, and consulting Engineers and Quantity Surveyors. I know the Committee would want to mention here the tremendous work of Mr. Paddy O'Brien and Mr. Matt Brunton who have regularly left their own onerous duties to spend hours brooding over plans to help the Centre get what it wants and as economically as is possible. My very sincere gratitude to both these gentlemen.

Now what has been achieved in 1977;-

- 1 Over £15,000.00 has been paid to get vacant possession from the industrial and residential tenants on our property.
- 2 CONTRACT A, Mainly site investigation at a cost of £1,015.25., has been completed.
- 3 CONTRACT C, Involving tree removals (32 of them) demolition of five structures and clearing of the block- estimated at about £12,000.00, was done through the generosity of Mossie O'Riordan and his excellent band of men at not one penny cost to the Irish Centre. The gratitude of each one of us is due to these men and their spontaneous gesture, I would hope, stands as a monument to the co-operation and dedication of Irish people to the cause of the Irish Centre.
- 4 CONTRACT C, was put out for tender to twelve short listed contractors and was given eventually to the lowest tenderer- John Murphy & Sons Contractors Ltd, at a cost of £203,424.07. That work is now proceeding
- 5 The next step is a very major part of the development and brings us into the present year 1978, and therefore not a subject for the report in question. However in parenthesis I can say that within the next few weeks CONTRACT D, will be tendered for and we would hope that work will commence in June, next month. That section will provide the new building areas of the development, namely a new toilet block, the McNamara Hall, the new Kitchen and Cellar and a new covered way. The estimate here is in the region of a half million pounds.

#### WELFARE

Welfare staff at the Centre presently consists of two full time Social Workers helped by the Chaplains and some willing volunteers. They operate in extremely confined conditions, having the use of only one small office and one multi-purpose interviewing room. In the likely event of there being a queue, a corridor has to act as a waiting room. The work continues regardless, its quality mostly unaffected by the physical surroundings.

Over 50% of new arrivals come to the greater London area. This is not surprising considering the increased urbanisation at home and the lack of employment opportunities in some of the traditional midland emigration areas. It is no longer enough to offer a rescue service to those with acute problems. We must try to stop the unnecessary development of such problems, through the provision of personnel and facilities to encourage self-help, continuation education, youth and community work, further social casework and the establishment of a career guidance and more comprehensive information service. The crucial extension of our service is heavily dependent on the rapid completion of the present Irish Centre Development Programme.



For some, the job and accommodation may take only half an hour to arrange, for others it may be necessary to spend half a day untangling a long list of difficulties, and then to follow up with other interviews, visits and referrals to other agencies. In 1977, while overall attendance remained similar to the previous year, the problems dealt with were more complex. This is reflected in the extent of the follow up and outside work undertaken. During the year 204 visits were made to clients at hospitals, institutions, homes and other points of meeting. In a sophisticated and multi-lateral society we see the increasing magnitude of the problems presented as a continuing trend and look to our own expanding professional service to meet the situation adequately.

#### UNDER 18

This is the emigrant we will always have with us in spite of pre-emigration education and irrespective of social-economic conditions at home or here. Informed and uninformed, deprived or not, the frustrated young person comes armed with expectations and dreams and a whole range of suddenly surfacing needs. We must gear our service to meet these needs and gear ourselves to understand them

The expectations of these young people are, as we have said, considerably changed from a decade ago. Even without qualifications, most of today's emigrants are not prepared to accept on a long term basis 'dead end' jobs whatever the monetary reward. Our long awaited Career Guidance Service therefore, is now an urgent need. The inclusion in our staff from this Autumn of a trained psychologist will, we hope, help make this dream a reality.

#### FAMILIES

Displaced families are an annual subject for reports of Irish Welfare Agencies in this country. While understanding that few families leave their native land except for the most pressing reasons, one can only repeat the message- destitute arrival accompanied by children does not guarantee council accommodation here. Families in this position are usually told that since they are 'homeless of their own volition', they are not entitled to any help. Most arrive on their own misguided advice, but some are assisted by Helping Agencies in Ireland. The misery left behind may be nothing to what is to be encountered here. It is not enough to discourage families from emigrating, they must be made positively and practically aware of the difficulties and dangers involved in such a move. Exporting problems does not solve them.

The Irish who have prospered do not forget their countrymen. We are very grateful to those who phone us with news, always welcome, of job or accommodation vacancies and particularly to those who are prepared to give a second chance to their fellow countrymen. We look forward to hearing more from them and also from the many others who have not yet picked up the phone.

We have the usual problem cases, or specific areas of concern, I will mention just a few.-

1 Girls arriving here noticeably pregnant will have difficulty in getting employment. Mother and baby residences can take only those for whom a Local Authority or Borough will afterwards accept responsibility accommodation-wise. Local Boroughs are obviously slow to accept responsibility for people without an established residency period in their area. Voluntary Agencies for the single mother, conscious that no statutory support will be made available feel there is little they can do.

The problems of the Irish travelling community are becoming more and more apparent to us at the Centre. Voluntary and Statutory Agencies make referrals to us and ask for advice and information concerning travellers.

In 1977, fifty-one persons were reported to us as missing, 33 males and 18 females - of these 13 were later traced and we were informed that seven others turned up.

We receive many requests for information about different aspects of life in Ireland from people intending to return and settle at home. Press and other reports have shown that those who return home ill prepared become quickly disillusioned and sometimes see re-emigration as the only course open to them.



Irish Statutory Bodies help people find business and employment opportunities at home. Social, education, health and assistance services in the two countries vary also. Parents often forget that teenage sons and daughters, born and brought up here may not consider themselves totally Irish, and cannot be expected to do so. We hope in the future to have available extensive information and professional help on these and other aspects of returning home, as part of our total service to the emigrant.

Often at the Irish Centre, one does not need to read the papers to be aware of developments in Ireland. A new industry means less from a particular area. An industrial closure is reflected in the increased numbers of emigrants from that town or county e.g., the Ferenka closure in Limerick towards the end of last year.

We are no less concerned about those who have been here twenty or thirty years, they also are Irish emigrants and entitled to the best our service can offer. The difficulties faced by our very varied clientele were many. We are particularly concerned, not for the first time in most cases, about some issues.

Elderly Irish people in London and alone or in hospitals need more contacts i.e. one of the reasons for the current work being done to organise volunteers to help with Welfare work. It is also hoped to use these in literacy work, the missing persons Bureau and other areas of concern. To help co-ordinate all the agencies with a high proportion of Irish clients a meeting has been arranged here at the Centre, of people working full time with the Irish Community.

The emphasis today is on helping people to help themselves.

Prevention, we feel, is always better than cure?.

Informally, and on a voluntary basis, great work of community development nature has been undertaken by the County and Parish Associations down the years. Through their meetings and get togethers they have generated a spirit of cohesiveness and a sense of belonging for many. Similar trojan work has been done by the Social Clubs, like the one here at the Centre, Traditional Music Cultural and Dance groups and others. Some would see these groups as isolating the Irish Community. We see them as a step towards greater participation in the host society. The past and present members of the Irish Clubs and Societies up and down the country who are now playing prominent roles in the life of the land are witness to this. Our hope is to build on, and compliment the work already being done by these groups and to make available facilities for those who may not identify with any existing organisations.

## SOCIAL

The Irish Centre Social Club continues along lines similar to previous years. Rightly or wrongly the Irish Centre is very often judged by the Social activities of the Centre. One occasionally hears comments to the effect that e.g. if one penny is added to the price of a pint, if the cabbage is not properly cooked, if the heating apparatus breaks down etc., that the Centre is finished or on the way out. Running the Social activities of the Centre is brimfull of every-day problems, from Management Staff to part time Staff, from paid staff to voluntary staff, from buildings whose facilities are very depreciated, the reluctance to spend money on buildings and amenities to be pulled down shortly to make way for the development programme, the reaction of clients to price rises as if the Irish Centre was isolated from an inflationary world.

Despite these and more occupational hazards, the Centre has continued to provide facilities where our Irish people meet and enjoy one another's company, where so many Irish organisations hold meetings, organise Social functions, engage in darts or quiz competitions and bingo. Two human factors must of necessity be mentioned here. The first is the untimely and unexpected loss of Larry Gosling, our Chef for so many years. Larry who loved the Centre and its people, who dedicated his life and energy without stint to provide Thousands of people with pleasurable social and gastronomic niceties. We lament his passing and will forever remember him where remembrance is best. The other human factor is the tremendous work of Mary Kenny, who almost single handed has day in day out night after night has worked head and hand organising social activities and raising money for the development fund. I do hope that in the next few weeks at the Social Club Annual General Meeting Mary will get what she deserves



a dedicated number of co-workers for a very critical year that lies ahead.

Our Irish people and their friends demand and deserve a Centre, a Centre independent of any other organisation, existing in its own right, whose clients as well as staff co-operate to its health and atmosphere.

On the Social side, one of the greatest events of the year was the London Irish Festival. The Irish Centre together with the Council of Irish Counties staged a wonderful day, of quality Irish entertainment for the people of Britain. This was a remarkably successful event that all Irish people are proud of it. It must continue as an Annual Social event of the highest class providing healthy family entertainment and financial resources for the less fortunate.

### CULTURAL

Culturally the Centre continues to promote traditional aspects of our Irish Heritage. Through the tireless efforts of Tommy Maguire Paddy Crean, Joe Farrell and Comhaltas Ceoiltoiri Eireann, Irish Music song and dance as an entertainment and discipline is preserved and passed on to the younger generation. In 1977 this communitarian aspect of the Irish Centre was recognised in one of the ten Community Awards given to the Centre in appreciation of its work. In parentheses again, I might add that only last week, was Tommy Maguire recognised and presented with one of these ten prestigious awards. The two awards are exhibited here on the top table.

### HOSTELS

Irish Centre Hostels, an integral part of the Irish Centre and answerable to the Management Committee of the Centre continues to grow. Its service to the needy and homeless is assured through the great work of the respective Managers and Manageresses. Needs in the hostel field are changing no less than needs in other areas of service. Young people want security of accommodation, but not institutionalisation. Our new Girls Hostel at Medway St. Westminster, presently closed for redevelopment, will consist of units of six independent bed sitters grouped around a communal kitchen. Also provided, for those who want to use them, will be facilities for social and recreational activities and a launderette. When completed, it will house 120 girls. A warden and assistant will live on the premises as well as a full time maintenance person. As was forecast in my report last year, the British Government through the Housing Corporation has made available to the Irish Centre the purchase price and relevant fees for the new Hostel premises in Medway St. Westminster. On December 12th last, the purchase was made and the deeds became the property of the Irish Centre Hostels Ltd. Plans are almost ready now to go out for tender and September 1st. has been named as the date for work to commence on site.

During the year Hope House, the boys Hostel lost its 1st Manager, Fr. Carolan. Fr. Carolan had done tremendous work in developing Hope House as a healthy and successful Hostel. On your behalf I thank him most sincerely and wish him well in his new appointment in Bristol. My forecast in last years report materialized this year when the heavy burden of an £87,000.00 Mortgage was paid by the Housing Corporation. This relief will take a great strain off the Management and ease somewhat the current debt on the Hostel. Tribute must be paid here to Richard Marke and Donie Egan. Through Richards endeavour and expert knowledge the door was opened to the Housing Corporation and both he and Donie have given long hours of their valuable time to the progress and betterment of both Hostels.

During the year, 717 boys and girls were accommodated at our hostels. Not all applicants for places are well adjusted individuals able to pay for their keep. The norm in both cases is that the hostels are for young working people to give them a chance to get on their feet, but where possible the less fortunate are helped also. A supportive therapy situation can be built up with residents helping each other informally, but its continuance is dependent on their being enough strong members in the group.



The number of people with difficulties it is possible to absorb at our hostels therefore, varies from time to time depending on the current residents and the staffing and economic situations. There is no point in accepting people and then finding that their problems cannot be helped in our environment.

We also keep a list of reputable landladies for those not interested in hostel life and where necessary, can refer people for emergency accomodation.

Our Girls Hostel suffered a very severe set back when Sr. Thecla fell ill last September. Her health continued to deteriorate until last month when she passed away resignedly and peacefully in the presence of her Community. Sister was a most devoted woman. She loved her work, she loved her girls, she had a special love for the poor and distressed. We lament her passing. She is a great loss and our sympathy goes out to her family at home in Tipperary and to her Religious Sisters. Her Superior was so kind to let us have two Sisters from the same Congregation, Sisters Beatrice and Francis to carry on the work in Hornsey Lane.

#### FINANCE

Our current accounts and daily finance committments did not demand extraordinary effort prior to the commencement of the Development Programme. Good and efficient work has always kept the Irish Centre on a happy financial basis.

Facing a new phase of development, the curse of inflation and the uncertainty of the economic world put great demands on ones faith in the Irish Centre and all it stands for. To the Committee this was a daunting task. But thanks to the Bank of Ireland whose Management after a thorough examination of our financial resourses made a supreme act of faith, undoubtedly backed by business principals and gave facilities to go ahead with the programme. My thanks to the Bank of Ireland. The detailed statement will be given by our Accountant following my report.

#### COVENANTS.

ARTHUR GUINNESS & CO.	£390.00
MR.B.BEATTY	£215.00
MR.M.BRUNTON	£149.00
MR. J. CANNY	£149.00
M.J.GLEESON & SONS	£149.00
MR.J.McCANN	£104.00
MR.E.KENNEDY	£50.00
MR.B.McLUA	£77.00
MR.B.MULLEN	£39.00
MR.W. SMYTHE	£30.00
	<u>£1352.00</u>

#### GRANTS- LONDON BOROUGHES

CAMDEN BR. COUNCIL	£1000.00
ISLINGTON BR. COUNCIL	£400.00

#### DONATIONS

ROME	£5000.00
LEGACY-MISSJ.KELLEHER	£1755.00
CLARE ASSOCIATION	£1280.00
ARCHBISHOP FLAICH	£500.00
PR. SR. THECLA (DECEASED)	£441.00
MR.T.MAGURIE	£278.00
YOUTH CLUB	£200.00
ROSCOMMON ASSOCIATION	£200.00
P.DAWSON	£182.00
NORTH CLARE REUNION	£175.00
COMHALTAS CEOILTOIRI	£150.00
FED. OF IRISH SOCIETIES	£40.00
MOYNE & TEMPLE PARISH REUNION	£40.00
ST,PATRICKS DAY BANKERS ORDERS	£327.00
SUNDRY(UNDER£25) & ANONYMOUS	£509.00
	<u>£11,077.00</u>
CHARITY WALK-MAY1977.	£1731.00

£15560.00



The Accounts show that our liabilities have decreased by £6248 to £20,337. Fixed Assets have increased by £27901 to £185,559 due to initial 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, Charity Walk and Donations together with Management Cheques and surplus on Revenue Account amounted to an overall surplus of £43,367.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion I thank you for your attention. The report has been very long but indeed much more could be said. And while we look back on another successful year, we are certainly not unaware of our deficiencies. We have our human weaknesses and you have noticed these in our mistakes during the course of the year. We regret them and beg your pardon and thank you for your patience. The purpose of the Staff is and always will be to serve you.

It's impossible to thank all individually who have helped the Centre. But a few I must, - the delightful and efficient leadership of Martin Moroney as Chairman, the members of the Committee, the Social Club Committee, the Social Welfare Staff, Fr. Ryan, Fr. Butler, numerous benefactors and donors, County Associations for their patronage and generosity towards the Centre, the Federation of Irish Societies, volunteers and the thousands you people represent who have been so generous to the Centre during the year, The Camden Borough, The Housing Corporation, May God bless you all.