

## THIRTY THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

(REPORT FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 1987)

### INTRODUCTION

My Lord President, Mr Chairman, Rev Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen it is my privilege to welcome you to the Thirty-third Annual General Meeting of the Council of the Irish Centre. Reading through old reports one sees the Irish Centre slowly developing, always under pressure but trying to live through problems and at the same time continuing to meet the demands of the Irish in London.

Projects launched at the Centre have progressed and developed independently by providing excellent experience, especially for those specialising in the problems related to immigration. To mention just a few, Stacia Crickley who worked at the Centre for a few years, is now lecturing in Maynooth and advising the Irish Episcopal Commission on emigration; the Action Group for Irish Youth continue their research in London while other past members of staff are doing good work at the new Haringey Irish Centre.

The drastic increase in the number of new arrivals put pressure on all Irish groups to provide more and more facilities. This increase together with changes in staff put our Community Services Department under great pressure during 1987. Great credit and our thanks to the staff who maintained the services during the Summer months. Now with a new co-ordinator and full staff we brace ourselves for 1988 when new legislation will make life in England more difficult for many of our newly arrived immigrants.

As you can see the Irish Centre got a new face lift in 1987. Thanks to Community Industries the outside of the building got a clean up and a coat of paint while the long awaited refurbishing of the ground floor of 51/52 got under way in May, thanks to Camden Council for a Grant of £120,000 and the Allied Irish Bank for £18,250, to the Irish Government for their input through AnCO workers, to the professionals, especially our architect Liam Martin who provided great attention to detail and constant supervision throughout. This was a new venture - so many unknowns that it was not attractive to big contractors. The project would not have succeeded had it not been for the 8 AnCO apprentices and the patience, pride and commitment of Donie Egan and foreman Kieran Claffey of Heritage Contractors. Thanks to all their efforts the building of the new Day Care Centre was completed in 1987. My thanks also to C M Brophy Ltd for landscaping the front of the building.

As the Irish Centre continues to grow, offering new facilities so the workload is increased. To help us out Fr Denis Cormican arrived in October. We hope his stay here, though no doubt busy, will be a happy one.

## EXISTING SERVICES AT IRISH CENTRE COMMUNITY SERVICES

The list of services provided are as follows:

- 1 Services to the newly arrived.
- 2 Services to the domiciled Irish.
- 3 Educational Services.
- 4 Information Services.
- 5 Missing Persons Service.
- 6 Day Care Centre
- 7 Recreational Halls

The Missing Persons Service is undertaken by volunteer, Mr Brian Duggan who does valuable work throughout the year tracing Missing Persons, many of them young people. His services are greatly appreciated by the Management but especially by the families whom he helps to unite.

## REPORTS

The following reports will I hope convey some idea of the activities of the Centre for the year.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

This is by far the busiest section at the Irish Centre and as such a separate Report is issued. We now employ a Co-ordinator and four Community Care Workers who work hard to cope with the continuous flow of mostly young emigrants some of whom arrive penniless, with poor job prospects and no place to stay. As many of these young people have left home for the first time it is imperative that we at the Centre make every effort to set them on their feet and help them on the road to a better future. To give you some idea of the numbers we deal with, this year we had 11,000 callers, nearly 3,000 of whom were first time callers. Many of our new arrivals are very young and too often ill informed as to the conditions awaiting them in London. Nearly 360 were in the 16-18 age bracket with 10 under 16. Such very young people will face severe problems in the near future when the British Government ceases to pay social security benefits to them and from September will insist that they join a youth training scheme. One of our biggest problems in dealing with new arrivals is finding suitable accommodation and I am pleased to report that some of the counties and individuals are making efforts to help out in this area by letting rooms.

New arrivals come from all parts of Ireland but with a preponderance from the cities of Dublin and Cork. The new wave of young urban Irish with high expectations as opposed to rural emigration of earlier generations reflects the changing nature of Irish society over the past 25 years.

1987 was a difficult year in other respects. The introduction of the Nationality Act caused us a lot of problems when many worried Irish people rang up for more precise details as to what the new Act entailed.

Added to this Camden Homeless Persons Unit was closed during the greater part of the year which put even more pressure on the Centre to cope with the many families, often travellers, who called looking for accommodation. Camden Council faced with severe cutbacks and increased pressure on their housing resources in desperation began issuing travel warrants to people who were considered intentionally homeless. Not only did we have to deal with the distress of the people involved but were also inundated with reporters and journalists from radio and television, national and local, Irish and British as to our reactions to Camden's policy.

We also had a lot of media coverage from the continent with camera crews from Switzerland, France, Germany, Finland and Canada interested in the plight of our immigrants in London.

One outcome of the wide interest in our young people has been the setting up of agencies in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and provincial towns to provide advice for would-be immigrants. Here we have helped by providing them with some of our literature such as a Survival Guide for those coming to London and accommodation and Job Centre lists.

### HOSTELS

Irish Centre Hostels Limited which incorporates Conway House in Kilburn and St Louise Hostel in Westminster is included in our Annual Report and this year has brought out its own colour brochure. Both have been full to capacity throughout the year and report an increasing number of young people coming from Ireland, mostly willing and eager to work but unfortunately some of them lacking in sufficient skills to earn a living wage in London. New development at Conway House is a project to house 17 elderly people costing approximately £500,000 and funded by the Housing Corporation.

St Louise reports a dramatic rise in the number of girls seeking accommodation and mentions that there is a tendency towards younger and more vulnerable girls seeking accommodation. Our thanks to Sr Anthony and Sr Gertrude who provided a safe and homely residence for these girls.

## DAY CARE CENTRE FOR THE ELDERLY

The year 1987 has seen many striking changes at the Irish Centre, the most important being the completion of work on our Day Care Centre/Luncheon Club for the elderly - in order to provide services for a group of people who tend to be forgotten in the clamour for facilities and activities. We hope that when the Centre is opened in 1988 it will ease the loneliness and bring happiness as well as wide and varied interests to our pensioners.

## EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

### Irish Language Classes

The very successful Irish Language classes funded by ILEA are organised and taught by Siobhan O'Neill. Approximately 38 students attend the Friday evening Intermediate/Advanced class while there are 17 children in the 9-11 age group on the Saturday morning register. The Irish Centre provides a focal point and clearing house for interested language students. The Autumn term revealed a wide variation in familiarity with the Irish language. From the Centre students can be recommended to classes elsewhere more suited to their abilities.

Some of the students are fluent enough to attend an intensive week-end course in Derbyshire. The adults had a very successful holiday combined with improving their language skills at Colaiste na Rinne in Waterford in the Summer. For several years the Irish Centre has acted as host (at its own cost) to classes of two kinds of Irish language one for children and one for adults. I would like to thank Siobhan for the enormous effort she puts into making the Irish classes such a huge success especially this year when she has had to cope with a lot of family illness as well as her work here.

## CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

### (1) COMHALTAS CEOLTOIRI EIREANN

The North London Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann continues to be active within the Centre, holding music, song and dance sessions on the second Friday of each month. The Branch also has an established Ceili Band that plays regularly throughout the London region.

Music classes are held at the Centre every Saturday afternoon between 2.00 - 5.00pm and also on Wednesday evenings. Tuition in all instruments is given by All Ireland champions Siobhan O'Donnell, Eilish Byrne and Thomas Nagle. We are fortunate that these young musicians are prepared to pass on their expertise and experience to our junior members

## (2) UILLEAN PIPERS

The Uilleann Pipers meet regularly every Thursday and are very popular. The main functions of the Club are to provide a meeting-place for pipers and to provide lessons on the pipes for learners at various stages of development. At present there is a nucleus of three or four teachers, and pupils attend as travelling or commitments allow; two of the members travel up from Bristol and Somerset every few weeks.

Lessons on the pipes are difficult to come by - the London Pipers' Club is the only one in England and Wales that meets on a weekly basis. We thank Paddy Keenan, Michael O'Brien and Liam O'Flynn who gave recitals at the Centre during the year and hope that the Pipers will continue their involvement with the Centre.

## (3) THE CEILI CLUB

Maintained their busy schedule of dancing activities:

### WEEKLY CEILI

In addition to the 'regulars' the Sunday night Ceili in the Douglas Hyde Lounge attracts its usual quota of visitors from home and abroad. It continues to make a significant contribution both to the Centre's finances (£3,306.00 excluding bar proceeds) and to its important cultural role. Thanks to the classes, the variety of dances was greater than ever and music by the talented young trio - the Tommy Maguire Ceili Band - served as a continuing reminder of a sadly missed friend.

### ADULT CEILI DANCING CLASSES

Over 60 new recruits to the Monday and Thursday (Camden Institute) Beginners' classes discovered the unique experience that is Irish Ceili dancing.

Ceili lovers came from all over London and further afield - demonstrating once again its wide appeal. Tom Nagle provided live accordion accompaniment.

Special Ceili evenings were organised for such occasions as Christmas, New year's Eve and St Patrick's night, and for the Committee's big Anniversary Dinner/Ceili evening. Artistes were engaged, spot prizes offered and the lounge was specially decorated for the occasion. Thanks to the Ceili Committee for their extra efforts they were duly rewarded by the great success of all evenings.

Several teams of 'ordinary' Ceili goers joined in the challenge and fun of our Ceili Dancing Competition and, with her usual professionalism Sheila Clerkin (ADCRG) undertook

the difficult task of choosing 1987's winners of the London Irish Centre's perpetual trophy.

On behalf of the Ceili Committee I would like to express thanks to the management and staff of the Irish Centre, the resident musicians and the many singers, dancers and other artistes who entertained so obligingly, sometimes at short notice and also the Irish Post, Irish World, London Irish News and other publications who were unstinting in their coverage of their functions. Lastly a big thank you to the countless individuals who continue to attend regularly the weekly Ceili and other functions at the Centre.

We would like to thank Eamonn Herlihy and Anton Coyle for their unceasing efforts in making the Ceili evenings and classes such a success. If I may quote Eamonn:-  
"Braitheann an Ceili ar dhaoine mar thusa! Tar chuige, led' thoil, agus do chairde in eineacht leat, chomh minic agus is feidir."

Indeed we are grateful to all our friends at the Irish Centre for their continued encouragement and support in helping us to preserve our Irish culture and heritage.

#### KARATE CLASSES

Weekly classes continue to be held at the Centre and are very popular with children and young people.

#### YOUTH

The work of Miss Kathleen Fitzsimons who organises activities was hampered this year because of lack of a hall. We are hoping to put this right and in the near future she should have facilities which will enable her to organise activities for the young people who come to the Centre.

#### SOCIAL CLUB MEETINGS

The Social Club Committee makes great efforts to organise entertainment in our halls, maintain order and provide staff on the doors when necessary. Bingo sessions, which are very popular with the older generation are organised by Mary Kenny, Paddy and Mary O'Brien while card evenings, featuring '25' are arranged by Frank and Maureen Screene. We thank the organisers of these activities who give up a lot of their time to ensure the smooth running of events and to the people who support these activities.

#### VOLUNTARY WORKERS

Like any charitable organisation we rely heavily on our voluntary workers to lend a helping hand when needed. We are very appreciative of the efforts of all these wonderful

people but I would like to add a word of special thanks to Mary Kenny who is our mainstay in the Social Reception area, Tommy McGuinness who answered the telephone in the Social Services Department until he was injured in an accident. I am pleased to report that he has now fully recovered, Mary Furlong and Alice Ellis who are receptionists on Mondays and Wednesdays and Gerry O'Flynn who comes every Thursday evening in the Social section, and Rose & Jack Rutherford who look after the oratory and arranges the Hall so tastefully for masses.

#### FUND-RAISING

We had another successful fund-raising year, the main activities of our fund raising being selling raffle tickets for our Annual Car Raffle draw at the Irish Festival in July and selling our Monthly Car Draw tickets. This is the second year that we have organised a Monthly Car Draw and though we did not manage to sell the maximum number of 2000 tickets we are pleased with the number sold. A lot of work goes into organising such a Car Draw and I would like to thank sincerely all the people who helped sell tickets for us. A special word of thanks to Peggy Finucane for all her efforts in making this draw a financial success.

#### COUNCIL OF IRISH COUNTIES

The Council of Irish Counties continues to operate successfully. Thanks to all the Counties who patronize the Centre for their annual functions and the many gifts and donations to the Centre. It is most encouraging that so many County Associations are endeavouring to help new arrivals with accommodation and employment.

#### PARISH REUNIONS

These have been very successful during the past year, the local connection helps attract new arrivals and enables them to get together with the settled Community and integrate more easily into their new environment.

#### LONDON IRISH FESTIVAL

Our thanks to the London Irish Festival Committee for their wonderful support down the years. The success of the Festival depends on the hard work of the Festival Working Committee - 5 from the Irish Centre and 5 from the Counties with a large number of stewards who operate so efficiently on the day. It is a big undertaking and its success depends so much on the weather. One of the most beautiful days in 1987 attracted over 70,000 people to Roundwood Park. The net proceeds of the Festival are donated in equal amounts by London Irish Festival Ltd to the Welfare Funds of the

Council of Irish Counties and the London Irish Centre. The Irish Centre Community Services benefits substantially from the Festival. The 1986 Festival gave us the sum of £18,000 while the '87 revenue will be split this year. Thanks again to all who work so hard to make the Irish Festival such a success.

#### FUNCTIONS AND MEETINGS

The Centre remains the focal point for many Irish Associations. Almost every night all available rooms are occupied - a fact sometimes overlooked by those who criticize the very high overheads of the Centre. Arranging rooms for all the meetings, trying to please various groups and manage four bars is a job well nigh impossible and I thank Mrs Florrie D'Arcy for her efforts to manage the Centre. Thanks also to Jimmy who can produce a dinner second to none in London. Sometimes we criticize and demand better but we all appreciate their efforts. The Irish Centre is yours and we all have the responsibility to ensure it succeeds. We need your full co-operation to ensure the premises are fully and financially utilized. It is sad that such servicable function rooms remain idle during the day while conference rooms are in huge demand in London. The GAA expressed concern in their Annual Report about the quality of service and management and gave this as their reason for taking their annual function elsewhere. Similar comments have come from some County Associations. If this is the problem then we must face up to it. But I wish to remind Associations of the importance of booking properly, giving accurate numbers in time and getting the dinner started in time. We all want to get it right. With goodwill, constructive criticism and business expertise we should all aim at 100% efficiency.

#### ADMINISTRATION/MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

The Irish Centre is administered by an Administrative Committee composed of 8 lay members who are elected at the AGM and 8 who are appointed by the President and Patrons. The Administrative Committee meets on second Tuesday of each month to receive reports and to decide policy; the Executive consisting of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary meet with the Director and Administrator on a regular basis to discuss policies in greater depth and ensure the smooth and efficient running of the Centre.

We owe a special thanks to Tommy Dunne who also comes to the Centre two days a week to help out with correspondence, reports and organise special events.

Mr Paddy Keegan is full time Administrator and responsible for accounting procedures at the Centre and at our two hostels, namely Conway House and St Louise. We thank him for his dedicated commitment.



## FINANCE

During 1987 the Centre expended over £200,000 (excluding VAT) in refurbishing a part of the premises to incorporate a DAY CARE CENTRE for the elderly. The London Borough of Camden gave a Capital Grant of £120,000 towards this project and Allied Irish Banks contributed £18,250 by way of Deposited Covenant. The Centre's indebtedness to Commercial Credit Services Ltd (Mortgagor) and Breweries at the end of the year amounted to £292,102.

Negotiation to review repayments on Brewery Loans took place in 1987 and were concluded satisfactorily with Interest Free Repayments over 8 years with one exception (Whitbreads) which carries 5% interest.

The Centre's Management is constantly endeavouring to find ways and means of achieving improved terms of repayments of loans and to this end we are currently pursuing negotiations on the long term loan.

The following is an analysis of Income received from various sources:-

<u>GRANTS</u>	£	£
London Borough of Camden	38,606	
Irish Government	<u>58,262</u>	
		96,868

## DONATIONS

London Irish Festival Ltd	18,000	
Cavan Association	2,000	
Bank of Ireland	1,500	
Poor Servants of Mother of God	1,000	
Space Oak Construction	600	
Leitrim Parish Group	560	
Irish Club Belgium	492	
Comhaltas Ceoltoiri (N London B)	400	
Longford/Clonmacnoise Deanery	282	
Waterford Association	200	
J F Murphy	150	
F McCormack	150	
O'Donnell School	145	
Caterham Parish Club	100	
Charnway Construction Ltd	100	
Donegal Association	100	
Galway Region Tech. School	100	
Kilmallock Renunion	100	
Legion of Mary	100	
W Martin	100	
Offaly Association	100	
Sundry and Annonymous	<u>744</u>	
		27,023

Cont'd....

£

COVENANTS:

Allied Irish Banks PLC(four years)	4,562
Car Raffle Festival (5.7.1987)	13,191
Car Draw - 2000 Club (Year to June 1987) - £20,000 (W/off - Year 1986 - £ 8,000)	12,000

CONCLUSION

There is steady progress at the Centre in the year 1987. The Day Care Centre was completed and the exterior part of the building was in great part refurbished.

Once again it is our pleasant duty to place on record our deepest appreciation to the many who work in the background, to all our members and helpers, to our regular staff who oversee the day to day running and cleanliness of the Centre to our Welfare staff who do such wonderful work, a word of sincere thanks to our Administrative Committee, to those who served on Sub-Committees, to the Irish Government, the Irish Embassy, ILEA, the Irish Festival Committee and the Council of Irish Counties, to Mr Tony Beatty representing our Auditors BEATTY & CO, the Hierarchies and to so many people here and in Ireland a very sincere 'thank you'. Lastly I would like to welcome our new Secretary Kay Leddy who has done a wonderful job in the past year and helps to alleviate some of the frustrations which are inevitable in this work. May we all continue to work together for the benefit of the Irish in London." Go raibh mile maith agaib go leir".

Rev T Scully OMI  
DIRECTOR