

THIRTY FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT

(REPORT FOR THE CALENDAR YEAR 1988)

INTRODUCTION

My Lord President, Mr Chairman, Rev Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen it is my privilege to welcome you to the Thirty-fourth Annual General meeting of the Council of the Irish Centre.

The completion and official opening of the Day Care Centre was our major development in 1988. The first lunches were served on 25th April. The Centre was blessed by Bishop Guazzelli and officially opened by the Minister for Labour Mr Bertie Aherne, on 25th May. It was an impressive opening with his Excellency the Ambassador and members of his staff, the Mayor and ex-Mayor of Camden Council and representatives of various Council departments, the Chairman and Executive of the Council of Irish Counties who contributed a generous £20,000 towards the furnishings of the Centre, Chairman of the Federation of Irish Societies, representatives from Allied Irish Bank, Bank of Ireland, Irish Tourist Board and many other Irish organisations. The long awaited refurbishment of the small bar with the new stairs and snug was completed and opened on St Patrick's Day. Thanks to the Counties who contributed towards the plaques. In late summer the McNamara foyer and Hall was painted - thanks to Munster Counties for their contribution.

During the year we had protracted serious discussions on future development of the old hostel section, renewing the ventilation system for Douglas Hyde and Kennedy and re-siting the chapel. Discussions took place in February with Bishop Casey and Fr John Gavin on possibility of making some space available for some Irish chaplains. To provide finances for this further development it was proposed to sell No 12 Murray Street and provide living accommodation for the Director and some staff in the Centre. This is a big undertaking which must be considered carefully both financially and otherwise. If properly done it would bring the whole building into full use.

The Community Services staff had another busy year, while the number of callers was slightly down on the previous year the new legislation seriously effected all who depend on Social Security. The biggest problem was the abolition of urgent needs payments and the payment of benefits 2 weeks in arrears. The abolition of payment to 16 and 17 year olds and closure of Homeless Persons Unit brought many complexities and insoluble problems. Very valuable work was done in helping to repatriate desperate cases and rewarding achievements in locating many missing persons. The hostels continue their great work and are providing over 90,000 bed spaces per year. The new hostel for elderly men is progressing very well and should open early in Summer. The new housing legislation which will effect hostels from 9th October 1989 will need close monitoring and liaising with

Nicholas Scott's offices. Our thanks to Fr Ryan and his very committed staff; to Sr Anthony, Sr Gertrude and since December Sr Brenda for a job well done.

During the year our discussions towards better communications between Ireland and London to provide more database information took a step forward. It is hoped that a computer link-up may be achieved to facilitate transfer of information on accommodation, employment and further education. To research and set up a training scheme especially in word processing and computers Toyota Ireland Ltd covenanted IR£15,000 per year for five years, other commercial companies have also shown an interest in the scheme. There were discussions with members of the Irish Government, DION and FAS in Ireland together with Camden Council, and various Polytechnics in London. There is a great deal of preparation and research needed on this project which we hope to get under way very soon in co-operation with Tom Connor's ALA scheme..

Our thanks to Paul Murphy and staff, best wishes to those who left and warm welcome to their replacements. A big thanks to Brian and Joan Duggan and Mary Kenny who got the Day Care Centre off the ground and to Una Cooper and her volunteers who continue the good work.

The financial report will be explained in detail by our accountants. Thanks again to DION, Camden Council, Festival Committee, Council for Irish Counties, Car Raffle sponsors and supporters, City Parochial Foundations, Ritz Records and Daniel O'Donnell, and all our generous donors, some of whom wish to remain anonymous. The social life of the Centre continues to develop and I wish to express our sincere thanks to Mrs. Florrie D'arcy for her years of service to the Centre and wish her every success in her new appointment. Many thanks to our secretary Mrs. Kay Leddy for her efficient work and to Fr Denis for his dedicated commitment to the Centre.

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 our very worthy volunteer, Mr Brian Duggan who does valuable work throughout the year tracing people reported missing by distraught

relatives. His services are greatly appreciated both by the Management and the distressed 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

The year was one of increasing difficulty for emigrants. The Social Security changes came into effect in April and there had been extensive publicity about this in the Irish press. Initially there was a decrease in the number of people coming to the Centre. It is also possible that there was a temporary slowing down in the numbers leaving Ireland. Some of those leaving came well prepared; they had sought advice in Ireland, and made adequate provision for living in London until they had found a job. Others left without making any prior arrangements. They were confronted with a host of problems on arrival; not enough money to survive for the first two weeks or until a social security payment was made; no money for a deposit and rent in advance to secure accommodation; inadequate addresses and contacts arranged; hostels full so they had to resort to night shelters and DSS resettlement units or try to find a squat. On presenting their identification to the DSS they were told it was inadequate and more was needed.

Though the Centre still helped some 10,000 people as in previous years by giving advice and information, the actual number of new clients was 2,078. The pressure on staff to provide solutions was increased by the social security changes. Whereas in the past it was possible to find a solution to clients problems in one day we find that this now rarely happens.

On the employment front there were ambiguous messages. While it is true that unemployment figures in London and the South East has dropped and there are many vacancies there is still a shortage of jobs for the unskilled and untrained and these are the people we mainly deal with.

55% of the people calling at the Centre for the first time were under 24 years of age. We interviewed over 2,000 people over 25 who had come to see us previously. Some of these were the unlucky Irish who had floundered in their efforts to improve their way of life and were still struggling.

The Irish language classes funded by ILEA and organised by Seánán O'Neill continue to be popular and successful though there has been a fall off in the Saturday evening classes for children. This year the Centre was used as an examination centre for the first time.

HOSTELS

Irish Centre Hostels Limited which incorporates Conway House in Kilburn and St Louise Hostel in Westminster is included in our Annual Report. Both have been full to capacity throughout the year and do wonderful work in providing assistance to young vulnerable people. The Hostels are suffering from the strain of DSS payments in arrears and are becoming increasingly alarmed at the suggested change from present board and lodging system to Income Support and Housing Benefit payments. Delays and non-payment of benefits to some clients has resulted in increased bad debts. The hostel for elderly men will provide 20 bed spaces for lonely pensioners who emigrated after the war.

St Louise reports a big demand on its Hostel accommodation. Young untrained girls had great difficulty in finding satisfactory employment. The need for young girls to find safe accommodation now seems greater than ever. During the year we bade farewell to Sr Anthony and welcomed Sr Brenda in her place. Our thanks to Sr Anthony for all her good work in the past and also to Sr Gertrude and Sr Brenda who continue the tradition of providing a safe and homely residence for so many young girls.

DAY CARE CENTRE FOR THE ELDERLY

The Day Care Centre was formerly opened on 25th May by the Minister for Labour Mr Bertie Agern. The £200,000 project, grant aided by Camden Borough Council to the sum of £120,000.00, the Allied Irish Banks to the covenanted sum of £25,000 and the Council of Irish Counties to the sum of £20,000.00 was completed on schedule with assistance from AnCO, and managed throughout by Heritage Contractors.

Present membership is 70 and lunch is served from Monday to Friday on a rota basis. A charge of 60p is made for the subsidised lunch. Camden Institute agreed to provide tutors for a variety of craft classes and other activities. The Centre is operated by volunteers and its success is due to these dedicated workers.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Irish Language Classes

The Irish Language classes funded by ILEA and organised by Siobhan O'Neill continue to be popular and successful though there has been a fall off in the Saturday morning classes for children. This year the Centre was used as an examination centre for the first time.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

(1) COMHALTAS CEOLTOIRI EIREANN

The North London Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann continues to be active within the Centre, with 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.

At the music classes held at the Centre every Saturday afternoon tuition in all instruments is given by All Ireland champions Siobhan O'Donnell, Eilish Byrne and Thomas Nagle. We would like to encourage as many people as possible to participate in our sessions as they provide an opportunity for beginners to benefit considerably from playing together with experienced musicians, and acquire new tunes. Our sessions are absolutely free.

(2) UILLEANN 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. 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

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 and to its important cultural role.

ADULT CEILI DANCING CLASSES

The adult Ceili classes continue to be a great success and boasts of a very enthusiastic group of students that enjoy the experience of Irish Ceili dancing.

Ceili lovers are attracted from all over London and even further afield, once again demonstrating its wide appeal. Tom Nagle provides live accordion accompaniment.

Special Ceili evenings were organised for such occasions as Christmas, New Year's Eve and St Patrick's night. There was

a record turnout on New Year's Eve - one of the best nights ever at the Irish Centre. Thanks to the Ceili Committee for their extra efforts they were duly rewarded by the great success of many an evenings pleasant and lively entertainment.

We would like to say a special word of thanks to Eamonn Tierlihy and Anton Coyle for their unceasing efforts in making the Ceili evenings and classes such a success.

KARATE CLASSES

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

YOUTH

The Youth Club is organised by Miss Kathleen Fitzsimons who now has the use of the Kennedy Hall on Monday and Wednesday evenings on a regular basis. This should help greatly from an organisational point of view.

SOCIAL CLUB MEETINGS

The Social Club Committee makes great efforts to organise entertainment in our halls, maintain order and provide staff on the doors. They had a very successful dance on New Year's Eve with a record crowd. 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, Mary Furlong and Helen 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

This year our Fund Raising Committee helped organise a successful Festival Car Raffle. The '2000' member Car Draw ended in October. Although we made a profit of £30,000 we

decided to give it a rest for a few months and reorganise our Fund Raising Committee and get more sellers.

COUNCIL OF IRISH COUNTIES

The Council of Irish Counties continues to operate successfully. This year's St Patrick's Day Parade was a great success thanks to the efforts of the Committee. We hope the Counties will continue to support the Irish Centre by using the halls for their annual functions. The foyer and the McNamara Hall were painted with assistance from the Munster Counties. The Counties also very generously gave £20,000.00 towards the refurbishing of the Day Care Centre. Mary Allen opened 'The Shop' at the Centre in December. She stocks a variety of Irish goods and is open on Tuesday - Saturday 7.00pm - 10.00pm and Sunday 12.00pm - 2.00pm.

PARISH REUNIONS

These have been very successful during the past year and attract many young people. It enables them to get together in pleasant surroundings where they can make new friends and contacts.

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. Unfortunately we were very unlucky in 1988 as it rained from 9.00am until 6.00pm, the sun came out just as we were getting ready to wade home through the mud. But in spite of the rain people enjoyed themselves and it was a very good humoured crowd.

FUNCTIONS AND MEETINGS

As mentioned earlier the McNamara Hall was decorated and the small bar - now known as the Counties bar was officially opened. A continuous effort is being made to refurbish and keep the Centre clean and attractive. We are aware that it is the focal point for many Irish Associations and we do our best to attract as many people as possible to the Centre.

Mrs Florrie D'Arcy left in November after giving 12 years service to the Irish Centre both as Secretary then as Manager. We wish her success in her new career.

ADMINISTRATION/MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

The Irish Centre is administered by an Administrative Committee composed of 7 lay members who are elected at the AGM and 4 who are appointed by the President. The Patrons appoint 3 clerical representatives. The Administrative Committee meet 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.

The following is an analysis of Income received from various sources during the year.

GRANTS

| | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| London Borough of Camden | 34,746 |
| BIDN - Irish Government | 63,000 |
| | 97,746 |

DONATIONS

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Anonymous | 50,000 |
| COIL - Day Care Centre | 28,000 |
| Toyota - Ireland | 12,510 |
| London Irish Festival | 10,000 |
| London Irish Society | 5,000 |
| City Parochial Foundation | 3,000 |
| Laois Association | 1,500 |
| Cavan Association | 1,000 |
| Waterford Association | 500 |
| Lislick Association | 300 |
| Irish Bank Officers Association | 500 |
| Anonymous | 500 |
| Anonymous | 495 |
| Byrne Bros | 300 |
| Coalhallas Coalfield (W London) | 250 |

FINANCE

The accounts for the year 1987 reflected the development of the Day Care Centre which was completed in early January 1988.

In the early months of 1988 the Lounge bar together with the snug and back stairs were refurbished at a cost of £55,000. the Lounge Bar now known as the Counties Bar had individual County plaques installed. Donations for the latter have been received during the year from some County Associations. The McNamara Hall and precincts were re-decorated at a cost of £7,000.

The indebtedness of the Centre to Commercial Credit Ltd and Breweries at the end of 1988 amounted to £275,945. Abnormally high interest rates prevailing in 1988 reduced Capital repayments on the term loan from Commercial Credit to £4,880 whilst interest charges for the year amounted to £25,888. The Centre's Management continues its endeavour to secure improved terms of repayment of loans and particularly on the long term loan and they are currently pursuing negotiations to this end.

The accounts show that our fixed assets have increased by £47,932 to £1,819,554. It should be pointed out that fixed assets represent capital expenditure to date less depreciation and bears 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 income received during the year from all sources including surplus on Revenue Account showed a surplus of £130,697.

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| | £ | £ |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|
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| Laois Association | 1,500 |
| Cavan Association | 1,000 |
| Waterford Association | 500 |
| Limerick Association | 300 |
| Irish Bank Officers Association | 505 |
| Anonymous | 500 |
| Anonymous | 495 |
| Byrne Bros | 300 |
| Comhaltas Ceoltoiri (N London) | 250 |

.....Cont'd

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| | £ |
| Allied Irish Banks - Collection | 220 |
| Kilkenny Association | 214 |
| Wicklow Association | 200 |
| Nestle | 200 |
| B Barclay (Aer Lingus) | 200 |
| Proceeds Epping Ceili | 183 |
| Kilmallock Reunion | 150 |
| E Kennedy | 150 |
| Kerry Association | 150 |
| Clare Association | 150 |
| Leitrim Association | 125 |
| Ardagh Deanery (Longford) | 100 |
| Offaly Association - Television & | 100 |
| Dr K Leddy - Video | |
| Galway Association | 100 |
| Wexford Association | 100 |
| Knockmore Association | 100 |
| Fermanagh Association | 100 |
| Charmway Construction | 100 |
| Meath Association | 100 |
| Abbeyfeale Reunion | 100 |
| Donegal Association | 100 |
| Dublin Association | 100 |
| Longford Association | 100 |
| Sundry and under £100 | 663 |
| | <u>110,165</u> |

Less Anon. Development a/c

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------|
| Balance Sheet | <u>50,000</u> | 60,165 |
| <u>COVENANTS:</u> | | |
| Allied Irish Banks PLC (five years) | | 5,000 |
| CAR RAFFLE FESTIVAL | | 10,412 |
| CAR DRAW - 2000 Club | | 30,682 |

CONCLUSION

My sincere thanks to all our benefactors and patrons who continue to support the Centre and enable us to make progress. Our real appreciation to all our staff for their commitment and service. Thanks to all members of the Administrative Committee, especially the Chairman, Tommy Dunne, to all who served on Sub/Committees, to the Irish Government, the Irish Embassy, the Council of Irish Counties, the Festival Committee, ILEA, the Hierarchies, the auditors and so many people here and in Ireland who continue to support our efforts.

" Go raibh mile maith agaib go leir".

Rev T Scully OMI
DIRECTOR