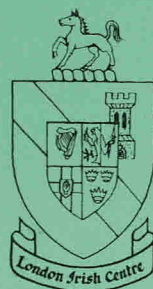


**THE VISION
AND
THE REALITY
FORTY-TWO YEARS
OF FRONTLINE
SERVICE**



The London Irish Centre
Annual Report 1996

CHAIR'S REPORT

The year 1996/97 was an important year in the history of the London Irish Centre. During which time the Community and Welfare Services of the Centre have developed greatly and for the first time the Centre is now providing a Youth Resettlement Service and an Elders Outreach Service. The Volunteer programme has just completed its first year and this project has been of immense value to many volunteers and to the Centre. The London Irish Centre continues to be the foremost agency providing frontline services to the Irish community in London. In 1996 the number of persons availing of our Social Advice and Information Service increased dramatically. The total number of persons using this service during the past year was 6364. We greatly regret the decision of the Dion Committee to reduce funding to our frontline services by 33% in 1997. Such a decision will only further the disadvantage experienced by the most vulnerable members of the Irish community.

The Centre is very grateful to Annabel Beerel for guiding it through a process of evaluation and strategic planning. This process led to a review of the constitution of the Council of the London Irish Centre and this review was carried out with great skill by Raymond Davern. The Centre has a clear departmental management structure, thus ensuring that each department of the Centre receives the time, quality of management and financial support necessary for the delivery of its services.

The Management Committee is deeply grateful to the various statutory and voluntary organisations that have supported our services during the past year - Camden Council, National Lottery, Irish Youth Foundation, Bridgehouse Estates Trust, Dion Committee, Lawlor Foundation, London Irish Festival, London Irish Society, Age Concern, Benevolent Society of St. Patrick, SVP, Council of Irish Counties, Allied Irish Bank and the Bank of Ireland. We are grateful to various Irish agencies for providing us with background support and co-operation - Federation of Irish Societies, Action Group for Irish Youth, Irish Chaplaincy, Solas Anois, Job Powerhouse, Camden Elderly Irish

Network, Irish Centre Housing, Cara, An Teach, Innisfree, Kerry Emigrant Association and many others who have been of immense support to us in the delivery of our services. The Committee extends its gratitude to the Director, Jerry Kivlehan OMI, to Vivien Harvey and staff in the Community and Welfare Services, to Mary Whelehan and staff in the Centre's Social and Catering Department and to the many volunteers that have contributed to the cultural, social and welfare services provided by the Centre over the past year.

Go raibh maith agat,
Austin Finan.

MISSION STATEMENT

London Irish Centre Community Services aims to respond to the unmet needs among the Irish people for a culturally sensitive and supportive welfare advice/advocacy and training service which celebrates and promotes Irish culture and counteracts the negative discrimination Irish people face as an ethnic group especially in terms of their access to employment and mainstream provision.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Centre has set itself a clear, ambitious and achievable development plan for 1997/98. Some of the key elements of our plan are as follows -

1. To continue to implement recommendations of the Beerel Management Report.
2. To extend the range of services in our Day-Centre.
3. To continue to extend the range of the Centre's outreach services.
4. To work with other agencies in developing a Vocational Guidance/Training Consortium.
5. To recruit and train additional volunteers.
6. To develop a planned programme of Irish Arts and Culture in the Centre.
7. To publish a monthly newsletter.
8. To up-grade office systems and IT equipment.
9. To commence a programme of redecoration and refurbishment in the Centre.

ELDERS OUTREACH PROJECT

This post has been funded by the Bridgehouse Estates Trust for a period of three years.

The aims of the project are;

- To make contact with frail or isolated elders in Camden.
- To provide a service sensitive to the needs of Irish elders.
- To develop and extend access to a programme of daycare and other support facilities.
- To actively promote the inclusion of isolated elders in Camden.
- To assist elders to remain in the community.
- To facilitate access, if required to mainstream health and Social Services provision.

Following my appointment to the post of Elders Outreach worker, I am now establishing a network of contacts and formal liaison systems with local statutory and voluntary agencies who have responsibilities for direct services to elders.

Working in conjunction with the volunteer co-ordinator and a team of trained volunteers a befriending scheme (consisting of home visits) will establish contact with elders in order to ascertain their needs and to introduce them to the range of services available, either at the London Irish Centre or through other agencies.



Anna Daly
Elders Outreach Worker

Co-ordinator's Report

The Irish Community in London, a thriving well-established minority group, contributes to the economic stability and enhances the diversity of the boroughs in which we settle.

At points in our lives, however, we experience the same problems and difficulties as the host community.

Illness, unemployment, poverty and lack of access to affordable accommodation are not Irish-owned. Yet more Irish women and men show up in official statistics as surviving below the poverty line; as being in need of mental health services, and as living in temporary or substandard housing than any other group in Britain.

For more than a decade, social policy legislation - laws that have a direct impact upon our lives as individuals in terms of housing, health and pension or benefit provision has been changing rapidly.

The continued challenge for the London Irish Centre Community Services is to interpret these laws on behalf of the community we serve - to empower and enable our clients to access rights and entitlements, or to break the cycle of misuse or violence in their lives.

The individual case histories outlined in this report only serve to highlight the long term debilitating affects of personal crisis.

- Our success lies in the number of people who approach us.

- Our effectiveness in the number of elders, families and single people who access mainstream provision, housing and pension or benefits with our support.

- Our main aim to respond to the unmet needs of both newly arrived and settled migrants.

Our hope, however, is to become increasingly pro-active - to identify and establish strategies that educate and inform our community; that support and enable people to regain control of

their rights as citizens.

Our focus, therefore, is steadily shifting from intervention to prevention.

- Prevention of homelessness through outreach and resettlement support.

- Prevention of personal isolation through the development of day care services.

- Prevention of long term substance misuse through specialist assessment.

Prevention of ongoing poverty and personal disempowerment through liaison with appropriate agencies, either statutory or voluntary and up to date information delivered by trained staff.



Vivien Harvey,
Community Services Co-ordinator

YOUTH RESETTLEMENT PROJECT

This project (funded by Irish Youth Foundation) because of the dramatic raise in street homelessness and an increase in the amount of inadequately housed young people in the Irish community. The Youth Resettlement Project based at the London Irish Centre offers a free confidential service to young Irish people between the ages of 16-25 in housing crisis. The main objective of this post is for each client to feel fully supported and to know that they can access that support throughout their time in London. Our aim is to resettle young people in permanent accommodation but also to counteract the isolation that young people feel once housed, by actively involving them in group work

and specific work within the community.

To ensure an effective response to any persons needs we offer access to emergency and permanent accommodation, access to employment and training services, access to primary health care, counselling services and legal surgeries. We offer advice on drug and alcohol misuse and access to specific agencies both for clients and their families. We also offer support to persons with dependent children and advise them on their rights. They have access to our clothes room, shower and washing facilities and to the drop-in centre.



Mairead Carney,
Youth Resettlement Worker.

Susan

Susan fled to escape the beatings. Only when she had left did she realise that she had nowhere to go. Family and friends had their own problems. She did not know who else to ask, or what to ask for. She lost contact with her children, and the street seemed the only option.

She drank with the best of them, was beaten by the worst of them. She slept in the coldest places and tried to hide from a life that offered little. Her contact with the Centre came later, with the support of an Outreach Team.

One Friday morning, a few weeks later, Susan was a different woman. The son she had not seen in sixteen years was waiting to see her. It was a very moving experience to witness this woman reach out and begin the process of rebuilding contact - and her life.

The Irish Centre is privileged to assist in re-uniting families who have

experienced the trauma of loss. Over the last thirty years, many Irish women have been forced to leave their children because of domestic violence, poverty or social stigma. Our task is to ensure that other Susan's do know who to ask before the crisis in their lives becomes long-term or irreparable.

The London Irish Centre is deeply concerned and is committed to providing priority care to the ever increasing number of Irish women who are the victims of domestic violence, poverty, broken relationships and social stigma
Mairead Carney,
Youth Resettlement Worker.

HOUSING AND HOMELESS

Throughout the forty-three years that the London Irish Centre Community Services has been supporting the Irish Community, concerns with regard to housing and homelessness remain consistently at the top of the agenda for individual clients.

The 1991 Census showed that:

- Irish people make up 20% - 30% of the street homeless population of London.
- 17% of the Irish in London live in privately rented accommodation, compared with 10% of the remaining population.
- The Irish have the worst amenities and are less likely to have privacy and central heating.

Our own figures bear this out - out of 1366 people approaching Community Services.

- 21% of women and 34% of men were homeless. Total 29% overall
- 9% (women) and 16% (men) lived in hostel or bed and breakfast. Total 14% overall
- 15% (women) and 17% (men) lived in lodging. Total 16% overall

Figures which indicate that well over

50% of all our clients live in temporary accommodation - inadequate and insecure - or have no home at all.

London Irish Centre Community Services campaigns vigorously on behalf of the Irish community in London to have the right to access to affordable secure housing.

As an organisation with specific referral rights to Cara, Innisfree, An Teach and Irish Centre Housing Association, our close working relationship provides valuable move-on or permanent housing to our most vulnerable clients - those presenting with issues around homelessness; alcohol or drug misuse; mental health or relationship breakdown.

We actively support Irish Housing Associations in their determination to grow in order to provide a more effective response to the housing needs of the Irish in London.

The question remains, however, as to why London's largest ethnic minority continues to experience such difficulty?

ADJUNCT SERVICES

Drop-In:

The Drop-In Service has been operating since the start of April 1997 and offers soup and sandwiches to vulnerable clients, offering a shower facility and a clothes room, this service has been used by over 80 people in the short time that it has been in operation, including young persons just arriving in London as well as older longer term clients.

Volunteer Initiatives:

The informal atmosphere in both these services has enables service users and volunteers to develop confidence and build self-esteem. The volunteers have recently organised a successful fund-raising initiative (which raised over £375.00) and are currently planning a series of events for later this year. In addition two of the volunteers have started work on a Newsletter aimed at keeping Irish and

other organisations informed of the work that goes on at the Centre as well as the current programme of Irish Cultural activities held at the Centre. It is hoped that the Newsletter will serve as both a volunteer recruitment tool and help to highlight the work done by the LICC's Community Services Department.

Volunteer Enablement:

The first year of the project has attracted some very committed volunteers and it is clear that it has played an important part in shaping some strong and supportive friendships. A number of volunteers have taken up the offer of training schemes offered by Jobs Powerhouse and it is clear that the scheme has the potential to play an important role in helping volunteers develop the confidence and skills to move on to paid employment.

Counselling

Ongoing specialist support can make a real difference in the lives of the women and men who approach us.

Drink Crisis Centre (Wednesday Advice Service)

D.C.C. operates a satellite service at the London Irish Centre every Wednesday between 2-4pm. It's primary aim to provide support and advice to clients who wish to address their drinking habit. The work undertaken is client centred and completely confidential.

CASA (Dual Diagnosis Counselling)

A new counselling service at the Centre, a Casa counsellor is available every Tuesday morning. Casa operates a Multiple Needs Service, a specialist service for people with mental health problems who also misuse alcohol or drugs.

Independent Counselling

Access is available to a range of independent counselling services, both in-house and external. The Advice Team have details upon request.

Legal Surgeries

Two culturally sensitive legal surgeries are available on site. David Long, specialising in Benefits support, is available every Thursday evening; and Fintan Farrell a qualified solicitor operates a drop in service on Saturday mornings. Although the information and support on offer is independent London Irish Centre is happy to provide office space to such vital services.

Health Promotion and Home Safety:

As part of the Health Promotion Initiative, a series of Aromatherapy/Massage sessions were held for older women on Wednesday afternoons and a Stretch and Relax class has been running every Friday morning for all Luncheon Club members. In addition a programme of talks on general health and personal home safety and planned for 1997.

Outreach and Befriending Service:

A number of volunteers are currently participating in a training programme with a view to developing an elders befriending scheme. This group of volunteers with work in close co-operation with the elders outreach based at the London Irish Centre.

If you would like to be a volunteer at the London Irish Centre - contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator 0171. 916.2222 for an information pack.

Danny's Story: Missing Maybe, Vulnerable Certainly!

When Danny first arrived at the London Irish Centre he was like many other young newcomers to London;

hopeful of gaining employment and accommodation but somewhat overawed and anxious about his future. He had decided to come to London because of family problems at home and because he could not get a job there. However, he had not planned or saved for his stay in London and so arrived at the Centre in dire need of housing, work/training, money and food.

A place was found for Danny in a hostel, he applied to have his birth certificate sent to the Centre where he could collect it, he was advised where and how to apply for benefits, given information on the Job Powerhouse regarding employment and training and given luncheon vouchers and bus fares to the hostel.

Unfortunately, Danny was unable to settle into life at the hostel, he did not manage to find work quickly and he became disenchanted and upset at the lack of stability he was experiencing. He returned to the Centre a week after his initial visit requesting that he be repatriated. He had come to the conclusion that he would be better off at home where he had the support of some members of his family and his friends.

Danny presented as very vulnerable and potentially at risk and because of this arrangements were made for him to return to Ireland straight away. All Danny had to do was go to the travel agency to pick up the tickets but he never did. He has not contacted the Centre since and we still wonder what happened to him.

Danny's story is not unique; many young people still arrive in London with little money, nowhere to stay, no identification and no work or training arranged in advance. This forces young people into difficult and stressful situations.

In the last year 303 clients under 25 sought information/advice on housing, employment, education and training and were given advice on welfare rights at The Irish Centre.



Jacinta Marron,
Social Advice Worker

Missing Persons Service: Brian Duggan.

The London Irish Centre's Missing Persons Service has over the past ten years, located and reunited 625 people with their families. Some of the most moving and satisfying moments in the life of the Centre takes place when families are reunited. The Centre is very proud of this service and of the excellent work done by Brian Duggan.

Total number of cases received in 1996	98
Total number of people LOCATED	43
Cases not accepted	5
Cases - closed due to lack of Information	24
Cases received but not followed up by enquirer	10
Cases still being processed	16

We continue with some success to help to restore broken family ties with a missing relative. This service is carried out in a very sensitive and confidential manner and no information about a missing person will be released without their consent.

Aisling

The Aisling trip, now in its fourth year, offers a unique opportunity for mature or elderly vulnerable and isolated Irish women and men to return for a short time to their homeland.

As well as being a much needed break, the trip can often be the turning point for people in real need of support. Families can be reunited after long absences and at least 3 of the participants have now been resettled in Ireland.

This year, LICC and Bridge Housing have formalised their partnership, in acknowledgement of Aisling's patron Ardal O'Hanlon (Father Dougal) and this year twenty participants and eight volunteers will travel to Cleggan in Galway.

Some comments to treasure . . .

"It was good to visit my parents grave for the first time" (Charlie, Yougal 1996)

"I'm delighted to be going - a reason to live again" (Patrick, Cleggan 1997)

Patrick

The meteorological office records will show that the night of 6 Dec.1996 was a very cold night. A blessing in disguise for one Irish man who slept in a local park that night. On the morning of the 7th December he came to the London Irish Centre. Patrick presented as a strong, 33 year old shaking from head to toe, agitated, frightened and already at 9.30am, somewhat intoxicated. During the interview it was clear that he was experiencing severe anxiety for which he (had been hospitalised twice). He dreaded the prospect of another night sleeping rough.

On the basis of vulnerability he was considered to be 'in priority need' and was referred that day to the Homeless Persons Unit of the local Borough for emergency accommodation. he was given temporary, supported hostel accommodation that night and asked to provide medical proof of his vulnerability. We contacted doctors, counsellors and a social worker who had worked with him previously. Eventually, after several weeks of liaison enough evidence was secured to warrant an offer of permanent accommodation from the local council.

Since Patrick's first contacted us he has regularly visited or phoned the Centre, building up trust and self confidence. As he stabilised his drinking pattern changed. To this end he is currently getting help from the Alcohol Recovery project - Camden Community Support Team. Through use of the phone at the Centre he has gained employment which is proving to be a great boost.

On the 10/5/97 Patrick was offered a flat by Camden Council. The Centre helped him secure furniture. Since

then Patrick has continued to visit the Centre once or twice a week.

Recently he commented "I am content and managing O.K., thanks to the London Irish Centre.

Mossie Lyons,
Social Advice Worker..

Aimless Wandering Immigrant Dead

The following poem was given to us by a regular visitor to the Irish Centre - he was murdered in 1996.

I walk with the rest of them up and down
Between Mornington Crescent and Camden Town
Pain in the belly, sore in the head
Aimless wandering immigrant dead.

I dug that hole then filled it in
I'm buried there up to me chin
You can leave me in it, I'll tell no lies
And for the traffic light you can use my eyes.

I sit in capps and drink black tea
And try to think what's wrong with me
The night is weeping and full of cries
But I can't join in I've got no eyes.

I've left them buried in London clay
They'll stay there now 'til Judgement Day
Flashing green and flashing red
As the City roars above my head.

In the pub you hear the saddest chaps
Straight from their souls into your lap
A fella shouts - 'I left years ago and
There's no one there alive I'd know.

There's a woman walking down the street
With Autumn hair and Winter teeth
I'd like to kiss and tell her lies
But she'd see my face hasn't any eyes.

London tore them from the sockets
Destroyed my mind, emptied out my pockets
The drink has all but ruined my liver
And the Subby's sold me down the river.

So I walk with the rest of them up and down
Between Mornington Crescent and Camden Town
Pain in the belly, sore in the head
Aimless wandering immigrant dead.

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LONDON IRISH CENTRE

The Centre was privileged to host some of the key events in the Irish community in 1996/7. The Green Ink Book fair was as usual a great success. A number of Internationally respected speakers participated in the Agreed Irish forum Options for Peace Conference. "I am writing primarily as a local resident and Borough councillor to thank the London Irish Centre for having hosted the 'Options for a Lasting Peace in Ireland' conference this weekend. The high profile, influence and experience of the speakers alone is testimony to the value of this event" Dave Horan. The Centre was privileged to host a number of Annual Dinner Dances for various Irish County Associations. The Centre played a prominent part in many campaigns for Justice. We were able to host the freedom celebration of The Bridgewater Four. "I just wanted to write to thank you all for the marvellous hospitality that you provided on Friday night, at such short notice. I know that the three men, their families and campaign's supporters all appreciated your marvellous support".

The London Irish Festival:

The twenty-second London Irish Festival took place on the first Sunday of July in Roundwood Park. While other may endeavour to replicate this event in other places the London Irish Festival is the most available and inclusive celebration of Irish culture in London each year. We are deeply grateful to the Festival Committee for their exceptional work and for the support they give to the London Irish Centre.

We will Remember, them:

During the past year a number of very prominent and founding members of The London Irish Centre passed away. Canon Ambrose Woods, Canon George Groves and Fr Patrick Mee, a former director of The London Irish Centre passed away.

Social Committee:

The Social Committee under the excellent leadership of Peggy Finucane provided an excellent variety of entertainment for its members during the past year. Mary Kenny, Mary and Paddy O'Brien organised the weekly bingo sessions.

Tea Dance:

The London Centre is privilege to host the Camden Pensioner's Tea Dance and this continues to be an excellent afternoon of socializing and entertainment for the large number of pensioners that attend.

Irish Cultural Activities:

The London Irish Centre has a long history of being the primary centre of Irish culture activities in London. A significant feature of life during the past year in the London Irish Centre has been the growing interest in Irish culture, music, dance and language. Each Monday evening we have Meitheal Cheoil (a community group which aims to promote the learning of Irish Traditional Music) providing music classes for young and not so young under the skillful guidance of Karen Ryan and Kathy Walton. We greatly admire the commitment and dedication of the members of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann.

Tuesday night is Set-Dancing Night and tuition in this distinctive form of Irish dancing is given by Geoff Holland. Set-Dancing workshops take place each month. Sunday night is Ceili night, a night of traditional Irish dancing is organised and directed by Anton Coyle.

The Uilleann pipers club meet on Thursday night and it is wonderful to see the increasing interest in playing the Uilleann pipes. Since the success of Riverdance Irish dancing has become very popular and we congratulate Marie Halpin on running a very successful school of dancing in

the Centre on Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

Irish Language:

The London Irish Centre is the regular meeting place for Conradh na Gaeilge and Comhluadar Ui Neill on Friday evenings. Irish language classes for beginners and for those wishing to improve their fluency in speaking gaelic take place in the Centre on Saturday mornings. Mairead Holt is the tutor.

SERVICE COMMITMENT

Our commitment is to

- Provide an efficient and effective culturally sensitive service at all times.
- Treat everyone with fairness and respect.
- Tell you of our standards and how well we meet them.
- Welcome your suggestions and regularly ask your opinion of the services we offer.
- Deal with your complaints in an open and objective manner.
- To the best of our ability, provide accurate and up-to-date information at all times.
- Show you how to complete any necessary Benefits or Housing Application forms.
- Make appropriate referral and appointment - and give clear direction about how to get there.
- Reply to your letter within one week.
- Aim to answer all telephone calls within five rings during office hours.
- Ensure, that within ten minutes of arrival, that you know who will see you and how long you will wait.

VOLUNTEER CO-ORDINATORS ANNUAL REPORT

The London Irish Centre has opened a newly refurbished facility with the support of the National Lottery, which incorporates a new luncheon club and provides a comfortable, welcoming environment for Irish people during the day. It provides an opportunity for people to meet and make new friends and perhaps recapture some of the spirit and neighbourliness of 'home'.

The Centre is ground floor level with street access on Murray Street (just around the corner from the main entrance to the Irish Centre on Camden Square). The new facility is accessible for wheelchair users and transport to the centre can be organised for clients who need assistance to use public transport or who may be eligible for one of Camden's community transport schemes.

The new luncheon club aims to provide an inexpensive cooked meal for elders of the Irish community and for isolated people who find it difficult preparing meals for themselves. We also offer a safe space for people to meet and forge friendships, pursue recreational activities or perhaps become involved in supporting the work of L.I.C.C through fundraising activities.

Now that the core services are fully established, we will be organising special talks, group meeting facilities and possibly a job club to assist clients experiencing difficulties around Job Seekers Allowance. Sue Dowd/Pat Callaghan.



Sue Dowd/Pat Callaghan
volunteer co-ordinators

Financial Statement: Summarised Balance Sheet: at 31 March 1996.

	1995/96	1994/95
Fixed Assets		
	1,786,309	1,791,327
Current Assets		
	46,092	72,839
Current Liabilities		
	71,872	72,839
Long Term Creditors		
	223,724	254,132
Total Assets Less Liabilities		
	1,536,805	1,573,885

Facts and Figures for 1996:

Total number of clients interviewed	6349
Total number of new clients	1366
Total number of telephone enquiries	16,794.

Borough of Residence of clients availing of the services of the London Irish Centre:

City of London	4%
Camden	48%
Hackney	5%
Hammersmith	3%
Islington	16%
Kensington	1%
Lambeth	1%
Lewisham	1%
Newham	0%
Southwark	2%

Statistical Breakdown of Advice:

Housing	25%
Welfare Benefits	22%
Health	15%
Domestic/Family	16%
Employment	8%
Financial	5%
Discrimination	3%
Education	2%
Other	1%

PATRONS

Cardinal Basil Hume
Archbishop Michael Bowen
Bishop Thomas McMahon

TRUSTEES

Rt Hon Lord Farnham
Philip Fitzpatrick
John Higgins
Rev Paul Byrne OMI.

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

A. Finan (Chair)
M. Sills
M. Fitzsimons
M. Allen
M. Kenny
N. O'Malley
J. Coote
Rev F. Phelan
T. McAssey
M. Kearney
J. O'Brien
T. Ganley

STAFF TEAM

Director
J. Kivlehan OMI.
Community Services Co-ordinator
V. Harvey
Social Advice Workers
M. Lyons
J. Marron
Youth Resettlement
M. Carney
Elders Outreach
A. Daly
Volunteers Co-ordinators
P. Callaghan
S. Dowd
Secretary/Administrator:
M. Cooke.
Missing Persons
B. Duggan
Volunteers
M. Kenny
J. Coote
A. Small OMI
Social & Catering
Mary Whelehan
Manager
0171-916-7272
Ian Wakefield
Bar Manager

AGENCIES BASED AT THE CENTRE

Job Powerhouse
Catherine O'Hara
0171-916-9191
Federation of Irish Societies
Mark Kelly
0171-916-2725
Sean Hutton
0171-916-2733
Solas Anois
Tracy Clark
0171-813-0595
London Irish Festival
Mary Allen
0171-916-2659
Migrant Training Company
Auditors:
Allen Tully & Co.,
Hibernia House,
113 Station Road,
Sidcup, Kent.
Bankers
Bank of Ireland
43-45 Seven Sisters Road
London N7
AIB Bank
629 Holloway Road
London N19
Solicitors
Prince Evans
77 Uxbridge Road
London W5