

## 21ST ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE IRISH CENTRE

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INTRODUCTION: This report covers the period from January to December, 1975. It also happens to be the 21st Annual Report. The latter fact should not be allowed to pass un-noticed - twenty one years means coming-of-age, adulthood, responsibility. It also suggests stability, continuity and constitutional soundness.

In times of continual and precipitous change, twenty-one years of steady growth signifying singleness of purpose and loyalty to the founding ideals, is to be greatly admired. Tribute must be paid to the "Founding Fathers" for their human concern and the Christian care which prompted them to found the Irish Centre.

With deep gratitude, and already you have paid them a mark of respect by a moment of silent prayer, we recall the names of two who passed to their eternal reward during the last year - Father Tom McNamara and Mr. Laurie Arnold. Laurie who placed the Centre on a solid, secure legal foundation. Father Mac who inspired and motivated, who loved and cared. May these two beautiful souls rest in peace.

But many others there are, and some still with us who, day after day, week after week, year in, year out, have given up their time and energy attending numberless meetings, guiding the Centre towards its goal, inspiring fellow Irishmen and women to take their place in a new Community. Only God knows how well they have succeeded - enriching the receiving Country culturally, politically, socially and religiously. The Irish Centre has not been a ghetto, a separatist movement with narrow ethnic or selfish aspirations. Instead, by its spirit of brotherhood, its classlessness, its concern for the less privileged and less fortunate, it has breathed good-will and diffused Christian values appreciated in the so many tributes coming from all walks of English society.

The Irish Centre is not a Club, although it has a Club ; the Irish Centre is not a Church, although it supplies religious services ; The Irish Centre is a Centre at the service of the Irish Community but, not exclusively so. The wellbeing of the Irish is its primary concern.

We are all in need one way or another - for some, it is the basic essentials of life, for others, it is companionship, friendship, love and a source of belonging ; for yet another, it is cultural and educational, for yet another it is that quality by which one seeks and craves for the consolation of the love and friendship of God. These needs are enshrined in the objectives of the Constitution of the Irish Centre and I will deal briefly with them under the following headings:-

RELIGIOUS: Because of our Christian heritage, it is difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate religion from the life of an Irish person. We have been imbued with Christian faith and values from childhood. The Centre tries to fulfil that need by providing religious facilities. Daily and Sunday Masses cater for four to five hundred people regularly and it is gratifying to see an increasing number of requests for special Masses from Associations and family groups during the week. The spiritual welfare of the tenants - both in the Girls and Boys hostels, is served by close proximity to Parochial centres and services of Mass and counselling within the Hostels themselves.

Perhaps the Centre should consider the possibility of setting up a programme of classes helpful to the translation of our Christian principles to our living in 1976 with all the complexities, tensions and challenges that to-day's world presents to us. I have in mind problems such as the generation gap - parent and child, teacher and student, priest and youth, the cultural gap - particularly of parent and child with different environmental and educational backgrounds.

CULTURAL: One of the thrills of living in the Irish Centre is to see the great interest shown in our traditional music and dancing. It is most gratifying to witness the keenness of parents who each week, accompany their boys and girls to the four schools of dancing and music conducted at the Centre.



amendous credit is due to Tommy Maguire - School of Ceili Music, Paddy Mean - School of Dancing and John Galvin - Comhlitas Ceoltoiri Eireann and Youth Band in their tireless efforts, dedication and talent which enhances the cultural activities of the Centre and passes on to the future generation - a most important aspect of our heritage.

SOCIAL: The Irish Centre Social Club has continued along lines similar to previous years. The facilities of the Club are used to near capacity.

Meetings	374
Social Events with food	91
Dances	32
Recreational and Sporting with darts, bingo and quiz	243
Bar facilities	33 hours per week 1700 hours per year
Youth Club - enthusiastic leadership of Father Ryan	
	this year saw the birth of the Irish Centre Youth Club.

Recognised Business Management criteria would interpret the above statistics in people using the Irish Centre facilities at 125,000 per annum or, between 2,000 and 2,500 per week.

That such social activity could be carried on at the Centre and in conditions which are not ideal by any stretch of the imagination makes one say a very very sincere word of appreciation to the hard-working staff, both full and part-time, both salaried and voluntary workers and especially, to the Irish Centre Social Club Committee. As the social dimension of the Irish Centre is oriented towards Welfare i.e., all monies and profits are directed towards Welfare expenses; the work and dedication of the organisers of these functions is greatly appreciated.

The health and development of any community demands a meaningful and fulfilling social life. This is particularly true of our Irish Race. Through the years of hardship, persecution, poverty, the Irish preserved their sanity in no small way because they created entertainment and social gathering where, through song, dance and story-telling, the cares and anxieties of the day became bearable. Today's high pressure living also demands that healthy and balanced social activity be provided. Perhaps at this point in time, it would be advantageous to look into the improvement and variety of such functions at the Centre.

From the administrative point of view, the physical set-up of the Centre needs structural change to provide more comfortable and dignified premises for our Clients.

The Committee is actively considering this right now.

WELFARE: The Welfare Report for 1975 shows up the perennial problems of irresponsible immigration, drifting youth and rootless middle-aged, battered and deserted wives, single mothers, damaging loneliness and insecurity.

One must resist the temptation from the beginning of being coldly statistical when treating Welfare and Welfare cases. Behind each statistical unit is a human being, with sensitivity, with feelings, with a pride, a person who can be hurt, who is suffering, a person moulded benificially or adversely by a combination of fortune or ill-luck, by suffering self-inflicted or by sheer ill-fortune, by circumstances of birth, nationality, culture and a complexity of environmental influences. He or she, is a child of God, and a brother or sister of mine.

A country's true greatness should not be measured by its military might or its economic wealth. It should be measured by its standards of justice, integrity and humanity and by the way it protects the weak. The same holds for an institution such as the Irish Centre. Let us be judged by the way we care for the weak and the needy.

There is a definite increase in the numbers calling to the Irish Centre, each expressing one or more needs. For the past three years, the steady increase is as follows:-



WELFARE (CONTD):

<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>
1791	1828	2366

REPRESENTING PERSONAL  
INTERVIEWS

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2240	2384	2987
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Sixty per cent of these people are under twenty-five years of age. These are a cause of concern for accommodation in our hostels because of their immaturity, lack of sophistication, personality problems and proneness to exploitation. A trend is showing up here which perhaps could be looked into - namely, the unsettled, drifting youngster perhaps with a psychological problem who, whilst continuing this way of life, eventually finds himself the middle-aged unemployed or un-employable attracted towards the skid-row of drugs and alcohol.

Perhaps in this field, a closer liason with the County and other Associations who might be interested in welfare might succeed in bringing the individual into his County community and giving the client a sense of belonging.

There is another aspect of these figures already given that calls for attention. In the forty age group, there is an alarming increase of 50%. These are usually single men who if unemployed for a few weeks, are penniless and have no savings to fall back on. These usually have been hard workers, hard gamblers, hard drinkers, without Insurance Numbers and unable to claim Social Security. Let it not be a question of moralizing and criticizing these unfortunates. This is a 'here and now' situation of people in need.

Educationally, there are also problems, the type of problem technically called 'functional illiteracy'. Should it not be an objective and I think such an objective is implied in the Constitution for the Irish Centre to conduct what might be called 'Adult Education Classes' e.g., basic economics, domestic science etc. Nobody should be satisfied with an education received ten, fifteen and twenty years ago; there is always room and need for an on-going education, but more especially for those who were deprived of it through no fault of their own.

On the specific problem area, there are some disturbing facts. For example, marital problems show an increase of 400% on the previous year. Psychiatric cases show an increase of 262% on the previous year. I would like to say with some satisfaction, that the Administrative Committee is very conscious of the enormity of these problems and is working hard to provide the facilities by which our Welfare and Counselling services can be improved and deepened.

The enormity and volume of work performed in the Centre during the year was only made possible by the tireless, selfless and dedicated application to the task by Sister Joan, Sister Ann-Marie and Father Ryan. These three people are worthy of our highest praise, appreciation and commendations. Statistics tell part and a small part, of Welfare work. The long, tedious hours, night and day, of patient, intense counselling means a great human effort.

HOSTELS: Both hostels have been full to capacity during the year and requests for accommodation were far in excess of what was available. "It is estimated that for every one person accepted, six were refused" - Welfare Report 1975. Despite this, the enormous task of work performed by the Management of the two hostels can be gleaned from the figures.

Practically all through the year, 138 boys and girls were accommodated and fed; over the year, that represents 50,000 people. No words of mine can do justice to this gigantic effort to Father Carolan and Sister Thecla and their respective staffs. Certainly, this work-load is not a forty-hour week. It is more like a twenty-four hour day. The standard of the two hostels is extremely high. It also says a lot for the quality of our young Irish boys and girls who form the majority of the tenants.



The shocking lack of accommodation for the single homeless in London is a major problem for all Bodies, both Statutory and Voluntary. In our case, we are experiencing great difficulty in getting flats for our tenants so that they can vacate the Hostels and make room for newcomers. Consequently, the tenants in the Hostels are remaining longer than in previous years.

A positive step forward was made also regarding our Hostels when having applied to be registered in the Housing Act 1974 - March 1975, we were informed in January of this year that Irish Centre Hostels Limited in now a registered body of the Housing Corporation. This gives a status to our Hostels of Government recognition. Hopefully, too this recognition will mean financial advantages.

The growing need for hostel accommodation, the expense and difficulty of travelling from City Centre to Hornsey Lane Gardens spurred out Committee to look around for more central accommodation. When St. Louise Hostel, Medway Street, Westminster became available, the Irish Centre accepted first option. Realistically, the purchase and rehabilitation of this large building is completely beyond the financial grasp of our funds and so as a registered body, we are pursuing all avenues to get the kind of support that will make the premises a modern central hostel, housing one hundred girls. The time consuming efforts, meetings, letters and phone-calls entailed in these negotiations will be well worth it if and when, this project becomes a 'fait accompli'.

**FINANCE:** The Accounts show that our liabilities have decreased by £3,388 to £25,619. Fixed Assets have increased by £12,490 to £137,653 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, Collections and Donations, together with surplus on Revenue Account amounted to an overall surplus of £27,842. This was a contributory factor in the reduction of our liabilities.

COVENANTS

ARHTUR GUINNESS & CO.	£870	
MR. B. BEATTY.	299	
MR. M. BRUNTON.	149	
MR. J. CANNY.	149	
MR. J. McHALE.	149	
MR. J. McCANN.	104	
MR. E. KENNEDY.	75	
MR. B. McLUA.	75	
MR. J. MURPHY.	37	
MR. W. SMYTHE.	30	
MR. J. KEATING.	15	
		£1,952
		=====

LONDON BOROUGHs:

CAMDEN BOROUGH COUNCIL	£2,500	
ISLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL	500	
		£3,000

Continued . . . .



DONATIONS:

LONDON-IRISH FESTIVAL COMMITTEE	£2,680	
CHRISTMAS BAZAAR - SUNDRY	1,436	
R.C. ARCHDIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER	1,000	
CHARRINGTONS BREWERY	1,000	
LEITRIM ASSOCIATION	901	
WESTMEATH ASSOCIATION	300	
ROSCOMMON ASSOCIATION	200	
FEDERATION OF IRISH SOCIETIES	189	
CLARE ASSOCIATION	150	
CORK ASSOCIATION	100	
ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE COMMITTEE	100	
MEATH ASSOCIATION	100	
MCDONALD DEMESEY	140	
MAYOR O'SULLIVAN	50	
ST. PATRICK'S DAY - SUNDRY	112	
ANON. AND UNDER £50	424	
		£8,882
		£11,882
		=====
ROYAL ALBERT HALL - 1975	375	
CHARITY WALK - 1975	£1,669	£2,035
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We would take this opportunity of placing on record our most grateful thanks to all contributors who have been so helpful and generous during the year. A special "thank you" to the Council of Irish Counties and the individual Counties for their generous interest in and practical co-operation with the ideals of the Centre.

ADMINISTRATION: During the year, the Administrative Committee met at least once a month with the executive meeting occasionally in between. To the outsider, it was not obvious that much was being accomplished. However, the time spent in healthy dialogue, realistic discussion, analytical assessment of a project can prove very beneficial in terms of time, energy and money later on. I believe this sums up the work of the Administrative Committee during the year.

The increase in hostel accommodation and housing on the one hand, the development and extension of the Centre, on the other absorbed hours of what might seem fruitless and frustrating efforts. This was not easy. The members of the Committee whose regular attendance was excellent, showed great patience, unselfish effort and a sincere desire to improve the Irish Centre image in every way. These efforts have culminated in the registration of Irish Centre Hostels as an approved Housing Association, outline planning permission for a block of twenty to twenty-three flats on the adjoining property, outline planning consent for extension to the Centre, namely, a new Welfare Department and multi-purpose hall and the re-structuring of the interior of the entire building. Not least of their worries at such a critical stage of the life of the Irish Centre and he is still with them, was the acceptance of a new Director with all his too many limitations. I am sure you, the Council, appreciate the great work of the Committee and persons express a deep debt of gratitude to the body of sixteen and in a special way, to it's Chairman - Mr. Moroney, for his endless patience, kindness and interest in the welfare of the Centre and all it stands for.

CONCLUSION: To conclude: It has been said that a man becomes mature when he begins to realise how much he owes to the past, in particular, to his parents grand-parents ; in general, to the traditions of his people. This is especially true for the Irish. Because of Ireland's harrowing history, our forbears could bequeath us little of worldly goods, but they did leave us a rich spiritual endowment of Christian heritage. We have all been living off that endowment.

Continued overleaf . . . . .



CONSTITUTION

LONDON-IRISH FESTIVAL

I propose that we express in a practical manner, our filial gratitude for that inheritance. Let us make known to future generations, the kind of people from whom we have received such a legacy. A repetitive line in Irish folklore goes like this "We shall not see their like again" Lets keep their memory fresh by starting a building fund to complete the Irish Centre demonstrating your appreciation of the past, your love for your own kith and kin and let others see and appreciate your Irish inheritance.

454	ST. PATRICK'S DAY - 1975
112	MAYOR O'SULLIVAN
20	MCDONALD DEMPSEY
140	MEATH ASSOCIATION
100	ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE COMMITTEE
100	COCK ASSOCIATION
100	CLARE ASSOCIATION

28,882

28,882

25,000	ROYAL ALBERT HALL - 1975
25,000	CHARITY WALK - 1975

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