

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION
FOR
IRISH STUDIES**

(Interim Committee)

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The idea of forming a British Association For Irish Studies (B.A.I.S.) originated with a suggestion, floated informally amongst participants at a conference on literature, by Dr. Mary FitzGerald in July, 1984. She suggested that Irish Studies (that is: the study of Ireland, its history, cultures and peoples) had been developing piece-meal in the British educational system for a number of years and that the time had come to establish a forum, where people working in Irish Studies could meet and exchange materials and views, and which could be the vehicle to press for the expansion of funding support for Irish Studies, not only in higher education, but also in adult and continuing education and in the schools sector.

Following an informal meeting of interested persons, convened under the good offices of Dr. A. Kenny, Master of Balliol College, Oxford it was agreed to test the support for the concept of Irish Studies by attempting to hold a conference on the subject. To this end, it was agreed to approach the members of an Anglo-Irish intergovernmental organisation, Anglo-Irish Encounter at one of their regular meetings, to ask for financial support for the venture. Their willing agreement, and subsequent enthusiastic support, which we are pleased to be able publicly to acknowledge, enabled the Conference, which was held in September 1985 at St. Peter's College Oxford to take place.

In the meantime, during mid-1985, the existing *Ad Hoc* Committee set about gathering evidence to support the conviction of its members that there was already considerable activity in Irish Studies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It was agreed to formulate and circulate a questionnaire to all higher education institutions in the public and University sectors to locate centres of activity and to gain a clear picture of what courses were being taught and what research was being pursued. This exercise was undertaken for the group by the Department of Humanities, North Staffordshire Polytechnic. Following this meeting the *Ad Hoc* Committee constituted itself an Interim Committee by enlarging its membership. This was done by the simple expedient of inviting persons who were particularly enthusiastic for the idea of a British Association For Irish Studies when approached in connection with the Survey of Irish Studies and was to be taken further at the St. Peter's Conference when the Interim Committee was again enlarged - this was also in part undertaken to replace persons who no longer wished to participate in the work of the Interim Committee.

It is generally agreed that the St. Peter's Conference was highly successful in raising the profile of Irish Studies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It was well attended by academics present by invitation of Anglo-Irish Encounter and also by government spokespersons of both Ireland and the United Kingdom, the latter assuring the former that they were in no doubt that Irish Studies was an area of serious and valued educational endeavour, and one that might look to both States, and to agencies within and beyond them, for financial support to develop Irish Studies further. These assurances were welcomed, particularly since the preliminary returns of the Survey of Irish Studies, issued at the Conference, had shown considerably more activity in Irish Studies than had hitherto been suspected.

Following the St. Peter's Conference the new Interim Committee set about the slow task of providing all the various elements which would be needed for a functional British Association For Irish Studies. These have been assembled at four ² meetings since September 1985. The Interim Committee has drawn up a Draft Constitution, made outline arrangements for the new Association's first full Conference in its own right for April 1987, mounted a drive for subscriptions, conducted correspondence with similarly interested bodies (e.g. the American Committee For Irish Studies) and has begun to extend

Friday
10th April }
Sat
Apr 11th }
Sun

Acting Secretary's Report

the existing scope of the Survey to cover Further and Continuing Education and the Schools sector.

The final meeting of the Interim Committee took place earlier today. Its members now look forward to participating in the work of the British Association For Irish Studies.

David Cairns
Acting Secretary

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- ¹ Copies of the final Report of the St. Peter's Conference are available from Anglo-Irish Encounter, 9, St. James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE.
 - ² January, 1986 Keele; March, London; May, Leicester; July, London.