

# Notes and Comments

## Ionad na Gaeilge / Centre for Irish Studies

Ionad na Gaeilge/Centre for Irish Studies has been established within the University of Edinburgh's Celtic Department in commemoration of a former student of the University. The Justin Arbuthnott British/Irish Fund which has been the source of initial funding, was set up to promote greater understanding between the peoples of Britain and Ireland. Justin Arbuthnott was tragically drowned with three other University of Edinburgh students in July 1989 when their boat capsized off the coast of Co. Donegal near Aranmore Island.

The new Centre differs from existing centres and institutes of Irish Studies in Britain, focusing primarily on the Gaelic dimension of Irish Studies. Such a Centre finds a natural niche in Scotland with its closely related Gaelic language and culture. Indeed the Centre will build on and benefit from the strong links which the Department of Celtic and the School of Scottish Studies in particular have developed with Ireland over the years. Moreover the Centre will act as a focus for the wide-ranging, and hitherto uncoordinated, expertise which exists in the field of Irish Studies among the staff of the University of Edinburgh.

As Scotland's first ever Centre for Irish Studies, the Centre aims to encourage, conduct and direct research in the area of Gaelic language and culture, particularly in those areas which have relevance to both Ireland and Scotland.

The Centre intends to establish reciprocal and cooperative links with similar institutions and centres both in Ireland and Britain. Links have already been established with The Institute of Irish Studies in Liverpool, the British Association for Irish Studies, Sabhal Mór Ostaig (the Gaelic college in Skye) and Bord na Gaeilge, the state agency responsible for Irish Language policy in Ireland.

The Centre will encourage and support research in the field of Irish Studies by promoting collaborative research between Irish and British scholars, by holding conferences, colloquia and seminars and by assisting in the publication of research work carried out at the Centre. This will partly be achieved by inviting visiting scholars from Ireland to the Centre. Two scholarships, one to Ireland and one from Ireland, will be offered and will be open to those whose research interests include a Gaelic dimension.

The Centre's first visiting scholar was Lillis Ó Laoire, lecturer at the University of Limerick and renowned sean-nós singer. During his visit to the Centre, he researched

the effects which national competitions have had on traditional Gaelic song in Scotland. He also delivered a stimulating lecture on the nature of the sean-nós tradition which drew parallels with developments in Scotland and Ireland.

The Centre provides a unique resource for students of Irish Studies in Britain. Its holdings include materials relating to the main areas of Irish Studies such as linguistics, literature, history, sociology and traditional song. Substantial donations have been received and promised from institutions, publishers, public agencies and individuals. This resource will provide the stimulus for the development of Irish-related courses and research within the University of Edinburgh and will, it is hoped, ultimately lead to the availability of an interdisciplinary course or degree in Irish Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

The Centre is located and managed from within the Celtic Department. An Advisory Committee reflecting the various disciplinary and cultural interests of the Centre advises on general matters and on the future development of its activities.

ROIBEARD Ó MAOLALAIGH

## Society's Bairns

At the south-west corner of Edinburgh's Chambers Street there is the new Museum of Scotland, scheduled for opening on St Andrews Day, 1998. Most people will remember the site as a small garden, which it was over the last decade of its vacant period. Prior to that, in the 1940s and 1950s, it was a bustling community of inter-related families in which as a child I gained a grounding in children's lore and the custom and belief of urban ethnology.

The layout of Society Buildings, as the site was formerly called, gave an insularity which added to its sense of community. It was a squarish area enclosed on all four sides by buildings. There were two entrances to the square, one a stone cobbled hill leading in from Chambers Street, and a more commonly used pend situated between the 'Territorial' and 'The Hole in the Wa' public houses in Lindsay Place. The entry from Chambers Street was dominated by a large unimpressive and unoccupied Victorian building which locals referred to as Brown's School. It was so large that it obscured the property and activities behind, and it had a large open basement area which to the minds of children was a moat, a dumping place and a playground. After periods of heavy rain the 'moat' retained water which lay stagnant until it weathered