

Helen Buckley's LEISURE PAGE

Edward Walsh, man of action



Dr. Walsh

MANY people look on the proposed Limerick Institute of Higher Education, at present in planning format, as an alternative or palliative measure handed out by the Department of Education in lieu of the accepted style of established degree-awarding university in this country.

strained by Civil Service procedures. When the constitution is passed we will be an autonomous body, and whatever funds are available to us we will be able to use as effectively as possible—within the legal limits of the constitution.

During the past months, Dr. Walsh and the Institute planning board have visited many places in Europe, studying the techniques of institutes, colleges and universities, and eventually decided to set up the Institute of Higher Education in Limerick on the lines of a Dutch technical university.

"Their approach," said Dr. Walsh, "was to set aside a sector of the college and start programmes right away, with a nucleus of staff, rather than wait until the entire building was completed before commencing studies."

"In this way the staff could work with the architects on the planning of the campus and one would be starting out with an initial structure which one could adapt immediately whenever the need arose."

Demands

"This seems to meet some of the demands of the region."

QUOTE

The fact that I suffered a drop in salary of 100 per cent. in returning (from the U.S. to Ireland) is not relevant.

and will also be an advantage to the people on the spot who will be able to recommend how the academic programme be developed."

This obviates the necessity of the three to four year wait which the establishment of the Institute would normally involve.

The Institute will commence with 'a corps of programmes' embracing maths, statistics, social and physical sciences and languages. Among the courses which are expected to evolve from these may be one on tourism.

Projections at the moment determine that the college will start with roughly 200 students with the numbers rising to three and a half thousand in ten years and to eight thousand after twenty years. The student teacher ratio is expected to be about eight to one.

The Institute's young director (thirty-one years old) is a man with quite extraordinary qualifications. He has a Ph.D. from Iowa State University in electrical engineering; an M.Sc. from the same university in nuclear engineering; and a B.E. from U.C.C.

Dr. Walsh has chaired research committees in the U.S. has had industrial experience with Pye Ltd., Iowa Power and Light Company and in the Industrial Affiliates Programme at Iowa University; he has served as industrial consultant to several American companies, and includes associate and assistant departmental professorships among his academic achievements.

He has been an associate of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission Laboratory in Ames, Iowa, and has produced a textbook, currently in use in American schools, on Energy Conversion. He has also produced many papers and articles.

Biographical

As well as being a member of eminent U.S. professional societies, Dr. Walsh is listed in the following biographical dictionaries:—Who's Who in American Education, Dictionary of In-

frustrations," such as delay at present involved in his job. In America, he says, "I had more money than I could cope with for funding the work I was doing. Here your time is wasted in the process of getting the money."

Talking of Limerick, Dr. Walsh considers that this has been a "very exciting year here." The city, he said, was obviously going through a lot of change, and had all the symptoms of a rapidly developing area associated with it.

"It is an invigorating place to be. As I see it, a whole lot of new things are taking shape here."

An example

"You have the Regional Development Organisation, which is an example to the rest of the country; the Limerick Branch of the Irish Association of University Graduates; the Limerick Scientific Council, and the Industrial Relations Organisation."

Educationally, Dr. Walsh considers that Limerick has a tremendous amount of material, that is, as he says, "there is a tremendous amount promised at least."

Listing the projects being built and those already in operation he spoke of the Jesuit comprehensive school, the comprehensive school at Shannon, the new addition to the vocational school in Henry Street, the new recommendations for development in the training college, the recently announced H.Dip. programme and the proposed college of Physical Education.

Dr. Walsh: "It seems to be me that in the field of education there is a whole lot, happening in Limerick, that there is a tremendous amount of educational activity here either in the planning stages or in progress."

A thoroughly unpretentious manner for one who has more claim to erudition than the pseudo-intellectuals amongst us and a decisiveness decidedly Cork-like imbued in Dr. Walsh, make one feel that he will succeed in gaining Limerick's admiration and the country's gratitude for his Institute.

He himself (in a polished lilt combination of Cork/American accent influences) says: "The success of the Institute of Higher Education depends on its providing something in tune with the needs of the country. If it does this it will be successful, no matter what it is called or what pre-conceived notions people have."



Gerry O'Neill with the Sugan Folk, the group which he manages, in his pub, The Duke of Wellington, Balls Pond Road, London N. 1. The group are shortly off on a tour of America.

WINTER GLEE AT BALLYB.

CABARET, dancing, rooftop setting and delectable cuisine, though not uncommon attributes in a hotel, are not impossible to find. But add to these every conceivable day-time activity and the highly original gaiety of a hotel newspaper of cartoons and hi-bits of "esoteric" weekend gossip, and you have the atmosphere of the Ambassador Hotel, Ballybunion, last weekend—and the pattern of every weekend there from now on. That is, of course, if you are lucky enough to make it before the Ambassador's managing director, Ken O'Sullivan, has it "over brimming" with "Parisians et Parisiennes" after his sojourn at the Bord Falte workshop in Paris this week.



Cruise's Paddy Fitzgibbon . . . knows local families from generation to generation

ONE of the few people in this country who can get away with being dressed like a 19th century footman and yet look completely at home in modern day life is the hotel head porter.

His position is almost as ambiguous as his attire, for one minute he may be barking at an inattentive attendant and the next smiling politely, or even servilely, at a tourist or valued customer.

But whether one agrees or disagrees with his lush green or crimson, gold trimmed, uniform or his traditional position in one society, the hotel porter of long standing in a town the size of Limerick, must, if he has any powers of observation (and which of them hasn't?) have a unique insight into the lives and personalities of the people of the area who have been passing through "his hotel."



Tom Joyce, head porter, Limerick Intercontinental Hotel . . . a modern, travelled-type product.

for years, and through his general dealing with the public, must have a decisive knowledge of human nature.

Paddy Fitzgibbon of Cruise's is one of the old style head porters who knows local families from generation to generation. He joined Cruise's in 1937 as a pantry boy/silver burnisher, left it in 1940 to join the Army, where he spent five years before rejoining the hotel, left again when the hotel closed for renovation in 1947, returned when it reopened a year or two later and has been there since.

Tom Joyce, head porter of Limerick's Intercontinental Hotel, is, as one would expect from the hotel involved, a more modern, travelled-type product. He has been fourteen years in the business going

from Cruise's and the George to New York's Roosevelt Hotel.

Presidents

Here, he says, he met all the modern American Presidents: Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy—with the exception of Johnson. But he left them all behind to add his trans-continental touch to our "intercontinental" where he has remained since.

The George's Christy Coveney is, with his groomed tache and retained mannerisms the authentic porter of the old school and adds the flavour of another era to the chrome and glass of the modern hotel.

Christy served hotel work in London, started in the Grosvenor in Park Lane as a junior porter — "an ordinary little boy" — came back to Limerick after the War and after a sojourn in a few hotels including Cruise's and the Prince of Wales in Athlone, settled in the George.

All three head porters assert (despite the complaints which one hears to the contrary) that not only has service in hotels neither changed nor deteriorated, but it has improved.

Paddy Fitzgibbon did admit that nowadays "you do have a lot of youngsters working in hotels who couldn't care less." Tom Joyce considered that the efficiency of hotels had improved, though the young were not as devoted nowadays. Christy Coveney stated that one couldn't generalise on the subject: "If I say service has deteriorated, I'm speaking for everybody, and if I say it hasn't, I'm still speaking for the same amount."

"I can only speak about my own hotel, where I do have a lot of youngsters working in hotels who couldn't care less." Tom Joyce considered that the efficiency of hotels had improved, though the young were not as devoted nowadays.

"In the old days I'd say 'Oh, the Mr. & Mrs. So & So with their son and daughter coming.' In a lot of cases now you are only a number. I think it all stems from the build-up of tourism."

Traditional

One heard a lot of the traditional plight of the unfortunate bellboy or page of the old days, who was harassed by customers and bullied by his immediate superior in the "porter world."

He epitomised the picture of the over-worked, under-paid, ill-treated youngster who should have been sitting at a school desk rather than handing around drinks.

Paddy Fitzgibbon, however, didn't complain about his starting conditions: "When I started you couldn't pick and choose a job; you were lucky to get anything that time. Most of the trades were closed unless your father was in them."

Tom Joyce agreed that "actual bullying did go on once upon a time, but said: "There was much more freedom nowadays. There is a better atmosphere in the hotel business nowadays."

The union to which porters belong now prohibits the working of boys under 18 years after 10 p.m.

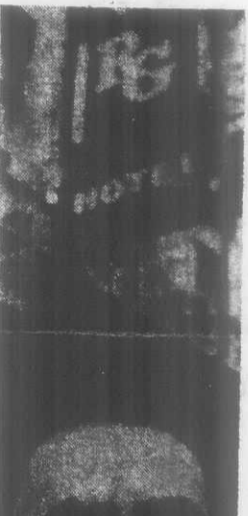
It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to find people to work in hotels nowadays. This is imputed, by the porters, to the lengthy hours, shift work, and the general lack of nine to five, five-day week.

One of the interesting aspects of hotel work is that even though you may be working late at night or on Saturday afternoon you never know who may drop in on you.

Since he took over from the late Paddy O'Dwyer (head porter in Cruise's for forty years), Paddy Fitzgibbon has met quite a few well-known people.

"One of the nicest people I met was Archbishop Ramsey, who was here about five years ago."

LIMERICK'S HOTEL 'ADMIRALS'



Christy Coveney of the George . . . the authentic porter of the old school

On the question of facilities in Limerick, one complaint head porter, Tom Joyce, dealt with was the lack of night entertainment for tourists and visitors in the city.

"It is very difficult to find entertainment for people who are here for three or four nights. The first two nights they go to Bunratty and to Cruise's cabaret and there is nothing for the remaining nights. The cabaret shows, which started recently, have helped a lot."

On April 3 and 4 next year, the international congress of Clefts d'Or will be taking place in Limerick. This is a non-political, non-political organisation, whose aim is to promote the business for hotels and look after the traveller and cater for all his needs, whether big or small. Irish porters have had their own branch of the Cleft d'Or since 1956.

Now, a parting piece of advice: if you have a problem, get in touch with a head porter. No matter how unusual it is, he will have heard it before from several people, and will have formulae solutions for you.

And you needn't be afraid that soon there will be a lack of porters, due to the five day week. Paddy Fitzgibbon (he comes from a family of 21 himself) has nine children who can be commandeered to the forces!

"Gerry O'Neill's father was once Postmaster in Limerick and his family connection with the city goes back over 400 years, mainly as coopers."

"At one time they ran the Coopers' shop somewhere near Nicholas Street."

"He tells some funny stories about Limerick personalities of legend, such as the 'Rabbit' Lawton, the greyhound man, and many, many more."

You know them . . . and they know you

Limerick's Hotel 'Admirals'

Speaking of the knowledge of their local regulars which porters acquire, Paddy Fitzgibbon said: "I used to know all the families who came in but I'm getting kind of lost now. Though I know the fathers, the young fellows coming up now I wouldn't know. Donogh O'Malley came in here a lot, he was a great friend of mine. He was a great play cards here with Richard Harris."

Tom Joyce says that because of the contact it involves with people, his job is educational. A "funny" encounter he had with a customer (taught him not to tuck things at face value).

"I saw a fellow coming in the door with dirty dungarees and slouch hat and I told him the hotel was full. I thought he was some sort of bum. The man turned out to be a Texas oil millionaire with a Cadillac outside. I was slightly embarrassed but I got over it."

Christy of the George considers that you retain mere dashes of events which have passed down the years but only the more tragic ones, such as the case of the man who died after coming from the U.S. to Ireland with his wife, having been away for years.

He did recall one amusing incident though: "A couple came in one day and one couldn't help getting the feeling that it was their first time in a hotel. The receptionist allocated them a room which had a double and single bed and I took them up because I wanted to see their reaction."

Luggage

"We got to the room and I stood in front of a great big mirror watching their reaction. After a few minutes the man turned around to me and said: 'Excuse me, sir, will there be anyone else in this room with us?'"

Christy is now thirty years in the porters' world and is known to his customers by many names. One clerical friend of his constantly refers to the figure he presents in his regal suite by calling him Admiral.

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Favourite

Baddy's favourite, on personal experience, from the film world was J. Carroll Nash. "You meet all sorts though," he remarked, "the good, bad and indifferent."

Now-goffe

"The 'Sugan Kitchen' which occupies the rear part of the pub is an attempt to recreate of a more cosmopolitan atmosphere of a musical evening and to that end has been imported from Ireland the sugan chairs."

"He has succeeded to some extent: devotes from all over London visit the place and the

Gerry's little bit of Ireland

London, his pub being well sprinkled with notices for theatre shows, poetry readings and folk sessions. Something of a more cosmopolitan version of The White House, in fact.

The picture, he says "is of a Limerickman in the folk kitchen of his pub in North London. The Limerickman is Gerry O'Neill (at the microphone in the pic) and the group is his own creation, called 'The Sugan Folk,' which he manages and directs though, as he says, he is not a Mr. Ten Per Cent."

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