Our first sixty years: one editor remembers

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ABSTRACT

2004 sees the sixtieth anniversary of *Irish Geography*. A former Editor of the journal here remembers some of the events associated with the journal's earlier years.

'Of course, you now hold a position of some power'. The words were spoken by one of my geographical colleagues in Trinity College. It was late in 1968. I had just succeeded Tom Jones Hughes as the Editor of *Irish Geography*. My colleague's words took me aback. Was my status really changed? Had I indeed now become some petty potentate within the geographical realm?

I fully understood the logic underpinning my colleague's observation. To edit a journal is to control a channel of communication. The editorial chair is the flight-captain's seat. My colleague was - is - a scholar deeply studied in things historical. His assessment of my new status arose, I am sure, from his knowledge of the power exerted by several famed bygone exponents of the editorial role. They had espoused causes. They had sought to sway public opinion. They had handpicked their contributors. They had themselves penned influential editorials. They had achieved fame. Such men were William Gifford (1756-1826) and John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854) of the Quarterly Review, Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850) of the Edinburgh Review, and Charles Prestwich Scott (1846-1932) of what was then the Manchester Guardian. At The Times, according to his entry in the Dictionary of National Biography, George Geoffrey Dawson (1874-1944) 'probably wielded more power and influence than most Cabinet ministers'. He certainly played a part in the 1936 toppling of the uncrowned Edward VIII, an event which had as one of its more obtuse concomitants nothing less than the new Irish constitution of 1937. But the men just paraded were all of them British editors. Has Ireland never possessed equivalent editors of influence and acclaim? Indeed it has. Peadar Ó Donnell (1893-1986) and Seán Ó Faolain (1900-1991) of The Bell are two such Irish editors of recent vintage who instantly spring to mind.

Powerful editors lead their journal - and their readers - down a particular path. Such figures are either for, or they are against. They are Left, or they are Right. They are Radical, or they are Reactionary. They are High, or they are Low. Now I ask you. Are you able to cite any editor of a geographical periodical who might with justice be hailed as a figure who has employed his or her journal as a vehicle for the swaying of public opinion? Has any such editor ever sought to emulate Geoffrey Dawson through the toppling of some college president who was perhaps advocating a morganatic marriage of geography with history? Did any such an editor focus their journal upon the Republic of South Africa in an effort to highlight the evils of apartheid? Is any such a geographical editor today bombarding us with editorials and invited papers - page after page, issue after issue - seeking to drive into us the implications of Western dependence upon Middle Eastern oil, or the perils to be faced as a result of rising global sea-levels? In short, where may I see a geographical editor wielding that style of power which my colleague in 1968 assured me was now become mine?

Perhaps I grow forgetful. Perhaps, having passed both my three score years and ten and my golden jubilee in geography, I no longer hold my finger upon the pulse of the discipline. Perhaps. But there is known to me not one geographer who from an editorial rostrum conducts a journal in the manner of a Furtwängler presiding over the Berlin Philharmonic. So far as I am aware such a maestro has never held an editorial chair within the geographical realm. Of course, I am not ignorant of the fact that at certain periods some geographical journals have displayed sympathy with particular causes. In Victorian and Edwardian England, for instance, the Geographical Journal lent its support to British imperialism. The journal was proud to publish accounts of British footprints being impressed into virgin soil, and of the red, white, and blue fluttering above snowy wastes. But, the journal's editors remained faceless characters. They were deemed to be of so little note that while the Royal Geographical Society's centenary volume of 1930 offers an appendix listing the presidents of the society, the members of its first council, and of its hundredth council, there follows no table of the editors of the society's Geographical Journal. Much more recently we saw the journal Antipode founded to further radical geography, and yet more recently a trawling of my memory reminds me that somewhere I met reference to the inauguration of a journal dedicated to feminist geography. Clearly, behind such periodicals there has to be a group of geographers holding themselves to be possessed of some agenda, but that is not the same as seeing seated in the editorial chair a single and powerful individual resolved upon the employment of their journal as a vehicle for the futherance of some personal and heartfelt issue.

Within these islands, so far as I am aware, there has been but one Editor of a geographical journal who has even approached the status of the Furtwängler in my little philharmonic model. Innumerable other editors have performed their duties in a praiseworthy and thoroughly competent manner, but it seems that the performance of such duties has elevated only one individual into geography's valhalla. Here prepare for a surprise. The heavily skewed gender imbalance within the academic profession of geography results in the great majority of geographical editors being men. (In its sixty years Irish Geography has never been out of male hands.) But my unique geographical Editor - my Editor of geographical lore - was, indeed, a woman. She is Marion Isabel Newbigin (1869-1934), the Editor of the Scottish Geographical Magazine from 1902 until her death. The programme which she so enthusiastically espoused was the conversion of the Scottish Geographical into a scholarly but lively journal of modern geography. To this day I recollect one of the papers she commissioned - (Sir) Edward Battersby Bailey (1881-1965) on 'The interpretation of Scottish scenery', published in 1934 - with the deepest of affection. Newbigin's talent, determination, and fervour shaped the SGM into being one of that day's outstanding geographical periodicals.

It was while I was an undergraduate in the University of Manchester during 1952-53 that I first became aware that Newbigin was deemed to have been a paragon amongst geographical editors. Each week I then attended what our timetable termed 'Seminar'. A seminar it certainly was not. It was really a series of lectures delivered by Thomas Walter Freeman (1908-1988), who was the Reader-in-Charge of the department. The series might have been titled 'How I wrote my book upon the geography of Ireland'. In the estimation of many of many of my fellow undergraduates these 'seminars' became something of a joke. Freeman was not always on the same wavelength as that of his students, and it was all too easy to dismiss his course as a witless excursion into literary egotism. But that was certainly

not my assessment. I may have been in a minority of one, but I greatly enjoyed the classes. Freeman gave me a valuable insight into the craft of an author. The passage of time seemed only to add yet deeper significance to Freeman's words, and it was amidst those words that I first heard the name of Marion Newbigin.

Walter Freeman had opened his academic career as an assistant lecturer in the University of Edinburgh between 1933 and 1935. He was thus present in Auld Reekie at the close of Newbigin's long reign. He saw first hand what she had accomplished with the SGM; he was deeply aware of the high esteem in which she was held within the Edinburgh geographical circle. It was no happenstance that when Freeman wrote upon 'Forty years in geography' within the 1968 issue of *Irish Geography*, he should have singled Newbigin out for special mention. For him - as for so many other geographers - she was the beau ideal of all that the Editor of a geographical journal should be. That image of the *beau ideal* was stowed amongst Freeman's intellectual traps when he removed to Ireland in January 1936. That image of the beau ideal must have been foremost in Freeman's mind as he entered the lively (was there even a hint of acrimony?) debate that took place within the Geographical Society of Ireland during the autumn and winter of 1944-45.

In mid-May 1944 the society published, under the editorship of Anthony Farrington (1893-1973) the first number of Irish Geography, or, more correctly, of the Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Ireland, that being the title of the journal down to a committee decision of 27 February 1947. The first number held a mere twenty pages. It contained the society's annual report for 1943, an account of the society's field-week in Virginia, co. Cavan, during July 1943, and a list of the society's members. Freeman has placed it upon record that until a copy of the first issue came into his hands in September 1944, he had no inkling that the society had launched itself upon a policy of publication. He had been absent from Ireland at the crucial moment. Between March and September 1943, and July and September 1944, he had been away in Cambridge at work upon the first two volumes of the British Naval Intelligence Division's set of handbooks for China Proper. But, of course, you say, he must have been delighted to be so surprised by the society. He was not. He was much displeased by the Bulletin number 1. In conversation with me in later years he was emphatic. He recalled the opening of his first Bulletin by using words such as 'shocked' and 'appalled'. In a letter to me from Manchester on 12 September 1974 he wrote that 'the initial number of Irish Geogr made me shudder with horror'. But Why?

Even after eight years in Ireland, Freeman still had the model of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society firmly lodged in his mind. If the Geographical Society of Ireland was going to publish a journal, then that journal had to be capable of standing comparison with Newbigin's SGM. He desired to see emanating from Ireland a geographical journal of international repute. And such the *Bulletin* number 1 could not pretend to be. It was a feeble and flabby thing. From its pages Freeman was unable to shake even the seeds of any aspiration to greatness. This was merely a humble parish magazine.

Freeman's expectations were hardly realistic. He was demanding of the acorn an instant towering oak. The resources were just not there. On 1 January 1945 the Geographical Society of Ireland possessed but 122 members, and its bank-balance stood at a mere £21.2s.3d. Conditions in Ireland during the Emergency of 1930-1945 were far from easy, while overseas World War II was only slowly moving towards its conclusion. Given such difficulties, it is surely remarkable that in 1944 the society saw fit to launch any kind of publication. But

Our first sixty years 9

Freeman was adamant. He was determined that *Bulletin* number 1 must not become a precedent for later numbers to follow. The society must do better. He took his case to the committee, and as a result committee meetings became, in Freeman's words of 1984, 'less amicable than those of earlier (or later) years'.

Freeman was not always on the same wavelength as his Manchester students during the 1950s. Equally, he was perhaps never fully tuned into the wavelengths of Ireland and the Irish during the 1930s and the 1940s. He was a mildly idiosyncratic Englishman resident in an alien land. He could not understand that his was an Ireland that was deeply introverted. It was a land where the Geographical Society's own committee rejected Freeman's 1940 proposal for affiliation with Britain's Geographical Association on the ground that it would result in the society's members receiving the Association's journal *Geography* containing advertisements for *British*-published texts. It was a land where Ernest Thomas Sinton Walton (1903-1995) of Trinity College had to forego an invitation to join the Manhattan Project because there was available no obvious substitute to teach a few first-year students in Trinity's physics department!

The society's committee meetings may have become 'less amicable', but Freeman must have urged his case to good effect. He secured a change in the character of the journal. When the *Bulletin* number 2 appeared in 1945, the parish magazine image was gone. In its place there stood a modest, 32-page journal offering five academic style, research-based papers. At the head of the table of contents stood Freeman himself writing on '*The agricultural regions and rural population of Eire*'. But such papers were not easy of discovery. Irish geographical pens were then few in number because the entire island contained barely half a dozen scholars engaged in the investigation of geographical phenomena. Farrington, who edited the first two issues of the *Bulletin*, himself had to write two of the five articles in the second number.

In 1946 Freeman took over the editorship of the journal, and it remained his responsibility until his departure from Ireland late in 1949. Slowly he built upon the foundations which he had persuaded the society to lay in 1945, and by the completion of the first volume in 1948, the newly-styled *Irish Geography* was widely recognised as a serious geographical periodical dedicated to the geography of Ireland. The world was taking note. As early as the society's annual report for 1945 we find these words:

requests for the Bulletin have been received from various libraries, universities and other bodies in Ireland, Great Britain and the United States.

Soon *Irish Geography* was circulating to every continent save Antarctica, and for the success of the journal I suggest Freeman deserves more credit than he has hitherto been accorded. As a member of the committee, and then as the journal's Editor, he determined the overall character which *Irish Geography* has possessed down to the present day. He took the helm - some might say he seized the helm - and locked the journal onto the course which it continues to follow. If the Royal Scottish Geographical Society still cherishes the memory of the rich years when Newbigin was the occupant of the editorial chair, then the Geographical Society of Ireland should likewise remember with gratitude the noble editorial service rendered by Freeman during the 1940s. Financial and other constraints may have limited his editorial power, but what power he possessed he used to good effect.

As the society's Editor Freeman's task was far from easy. I have in my files a letter which Freeman wrote to me on 13 December 1971, and from that letter I quote the following passage.

When I was Editor of 'Irish Geography', material was far from abundant. In fact, for one number I was so short that at one stage the idea crossed my mind of inventing an author and writing up some of my material in a different style! Happily an unexpected and quite suitable article came in so my deception was not carried out. But it would have been amusing to try, and so far as I remember I even drafted the article.

I know that every one of *Irish Geography*'s earliest Editors would have expressed their sympathy with Freeman in his plight. It was the same each year. An issue has just been published and immediately the Editor's face would assume a worried expression. Would sufficient material arrive to render possible the next issue? Is the journal about to die of starvation? Year after year all such fears proved to be groundless. The Editor's filing-cabinet was the scene of an annual miracle. When the Editor opened the cabinet, then lo and behold there was therein just the amount of acceptable material necessary to make up the next number. An Editor must possess faith - and remembrance of the feeding of the great multitude described in St Matthew's Chapter 14.

I doubt whether Frank Sinatra will have been deeply touched by the Gospels, but I do know that everyone who has ever edited this journal would be happy to join 'old Blue Eyes' in a rendition of that line 'Regrets, I have a few'. There is one regret that all those of us who have been involved with the journal must share and feel deeply. It is that our journal never published a paper - not even a book review - from the pen of that most influential of all Irish geographers, the famed Emyr Estyn Evans (1905-1989) of Queen's Univeristy, Belfast. In June 1973, at San Diego, California, I attended a symposium held in honour of Carl Ortwin Sauer (1889-1975), then the doyen of American geography. (At the close of the symposium he delivered one of the most brilliant impromptu addresses that I have ever heard.) In conversation I asked Sauer if there was anybody whom he felt to have been especially significant in the shaping of his own geographical philosophy. His reply was instantaneous: 'Estyn Evans'. I felt ashamed that the journal which I then edited had never contained a paper from the pen of this Irish geographer who was revered by the great Sauer and whose fame encompassed the world.

Successive Editors and Review Editors of *Irish Geography* invited Evans to write for the journal, but all that he ever published with us was the two-page account of the department of geography in Queen's University contained in *Irish Geography* volume 5, number 5 (1968). His near total absence from our list of contributors is a mystery, the more so since Evans played his part in the foundation of the Geographical Society of Ireland during the 1930s. Freeman reflected upon the mystery. In a letter to me on 14 December 1984 he wrote:

My regret then, and indeed at times since, is that for some reason I could never fathom Estyn Evans was unfriendly: unwittingly, I must have offended him in some way.

That is as may be, but Freeman left Ireland in 1949, and Evans remained active upon the Irish scene for more than thirty further years. Our mystery is by no means solved.

One eminent geographer most certainly did take umbrage at an editorial decision made by the society's Editor. I will assume that the society operates a thirty-year rule for the release of confidential information, and the story may therefore be told as follows. In 1961 I was the youthful President of our society. At lunch one day in Trinity College, George Francis (Frank) Mitchell (1912-1997), then Trinity's Registrar, suggested to me that there should be published a special number of *Irish Geography* as a festschrift in honour of Tony Farrington who had

11

just relinquished his post of Executive Secretary at the Royal Irish Academy. I welcomed the suggestion, but posed the obvious question. If this was to be an additional issue of the journal, then how was the cost to be met? Frank assured me that he enjoyed access 'to certain funds' upon which he would be able to draw. I remain convinced that those funds were Frank's personal bank-account, and, on the understanding that the society would incur no additional financial liability, the committee resolved to proceed with the festschrift. Frank was appointed its Editor, and the festschrift duly appeared as *Irish Geography* volume 4, number 5 (1963).

For the festschrift Frank assembled his own panel of invited contributors, among them being Professor Arthur Austin Miller (1900-1968) of Reading University. Miller chose to write on the geomorphology of Kerry and West Cork. His paper incorporated a westward extrapolation of the views which he had first presented in the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy in 1939, and in *Irish Geography* for 1955. But when Frank read the new typescript he was far from happy. He brought the typescript to me, and we were both in full agreement that publication of the paper would neither add to the lustre of Miller's academic reputation, nor would it bestow honour upon Farrington's festschrift. It was left to Frank to perform the unpleasant duty. To Reading there was sent a letter saying that the essay, although invited, was now rejected. Miller was both annoyed and distressed. He was then approaching the end of a distinguished academic career - he was to retire in 1965 - and this was the first occasion upon which one of his literary submissions had received a thumbs down. The year following the rejection - 1964 - was the year of the London Congress of the International Geographical Union. I then heard a good deal about the festschrift episode. Francis Millington Synge (1823-1983), Tony Orme (now of the University of California, at Los Angeles), and I conducted an IGU party through the south of Ireland. We traversed the very ground which Miller had discussed within his rejected paper. Both Miller and another of the Reading staff - John Whittow - were members of our party.

Mitchell had wielded his editorial power. It is not really for me to examine other Editors of *Irish Geography* in assessment of their own particular employment of their editorial powers. Suffice to say that I doubt whether any of us will be accorded an esteem to rival that which Freeman's generation bestowed upon Marion Newbigin. Aside from any other considerations, both retrospective perspectives and the garlanding of our predecesors are today pursuits somewhat fallen out of fashion. At the foot of this essay I have therefore erected just a simple wayside memorial in memory of the ten geographers who, as Editors of *Irish Geography*, have toiled to bring the journal to that state of excellence which today it so clearly displays. I must be one of the very few geographers remaining who have had the pleasure of having known personally all the individuals represented by the names upon my little memorial.

A detailed inspection of each of the editorial regimes lying behind my memorialised names may be inappropriate, but I am surely at liberty to review the period of my own editorship (1968-1978), and to ask the question of how I may have employed that power which my colleague informed me was now mine.

With the assistance of John Andrews as Review Editor (that post he assumed in 1969 while continuing, anonymously, to compile the section of the journal entitled 'Recent geographical literature relating to Ireland'), and with Des Gillmor holding the responsibility for the 'Changing Ireland' enclave of the journal (a duty which he had performed since 1965), we successfully maintained the annual flow of the journal. The work of one other individual

I also remember with the deepest gratitude: that of John Archibald Kenneth Grahame (1912-1987). Mr Grahame (very few had the temerity to address him as 'Jack') was possessed of both a precise legalistic mind and the eye of an eagle. Rarely did I pass to page-proof stage without allowing Mr Grahame to carry a set of our galleys off to his bachelor apartment at 13 Palmerston Park, Dublin 6. There he must have passed long hours weighing the niceties of punctuation, spelling and syntax.

For the journal there were some papers that I invited. With the expert guidance of referees, there were some submitted papers which I rejected. In 1970 we gave to the journal a slightly more modern cover, despite the half serious protest lodged by one member of the editorial committee. His point was that since most journals had recently revamped themselves, *Irish Geography*'s antiquated appearance lent to the journal an air of traditional distinction! The 1973 issue I turned into a festschrift devoted to Freeman. He was thrilled. Even after twenty four years of residence back in England, the society - and especially its journal - meant to him a great deal. But in the festschrift I made a small editorial error which pains me to this day. I placed the dedication to Freeman upon the reverse of his portrait frontispiece. Newbigin would never have done it. I was pennypinching. The following year - 1974 - we turned green. This event carried neither of the political connotations which might have been placed upon it. The development was simply a result of our printers having exhausted their stock of the cream card hitherto used for our covers. Something else had to be selected. Green was available. Green was cheap. So green it became. We hoped there would be no unfortunate repercussions!

I tried one other innovation. In 1976 I inaugurated what I hoped might be an on-going series of shorter papers entitled 'The making of Irish Geography'. There was then - perhaps there still is today - a marked tendency to myopia in the Irish consciousness. We tend to be blind to Irish achivements dating from before ... well, shall I say before the founding of the GAA in 1884? There are, for example, those who seriously imagine the Irish theatre to possess no history before the foundation of the The Abbey. Similarly, among geographers there has been a widely held myth that Irish geography began with the foundation of the Geographical Society of Ireland on 14 November 1934, and with Freeman's stepping ashore at Dun Laoghaire on 17 January 1936. Such a notion is absurd, and my series 'The making of Irish geography' was intended as a corrective of the prevailing delusion. But the series was short-lived. Perhaps the fault was mine for failing to submit further contributions to my successors in the editorial chair. Alternatively, perhaps my successors were displaying their own editorial powers by the suppression of a series that they disliked! I had invited Freeman to write for the series upon the subject of Samuel Lewis (died 1865), but the essay was never completed.

In just one respect I now wish that I had employed my modest editorial powers to fuller effect. Throughout the period of my editorship there was taking place in Ireland so much that was possessed of broadly geographical implication. From the exploration of our continental shelf, through the blossoming of environmental concern, to the outbreak of civil unrest in Northern Ireland, those were exciting years. I might have added spice to the journal had I each year invited some authority to write a guest editorial dealing in overview with some topical issue falling within the purview of their expertise. Clearly, the implementation of such a scheme would not have been easy - Frank Mitchell's experience in 1963 is there to warn us of the danger of inviting contributions - but the experiment might have proved fruitful.

That reference to civil unrest in Northern Ireland gives me the opportunity to introduce one episode which, although trivial, afforded me with much satisfaction. But first, a little scene setting.

Year by year an editor toils over the production of a journal. Periodically there arrives that satisfying climax. An issue is completed, published, and circulated. But for an editor this all too often proves to be a somewhat hollow achievement. There is no feedback. There are no reviews of the issue. The editor has little evidence that anybody out there is actually turning the pages of the issue just received. Even contributors communicate with their editor only if they have cause for complaint ('The captions to figures 3 and 4 are transposed, and there's a line missing on page 181'). Many an editor might be forgiven for concluding that each issue of the journal was simply disappearing into some intellectual black-hole.

In 1969 Dr F. W. Boal of Queen's University, Belfast, published with us a highly topical paper not unrelated to the civil unrest in Northern Ireland and entitled 'Territoriality on the Shankill - Falls divide, Belfast'. The copyright of the articles published in Irish Geography remains with the journal, and shortly after 1969 I received a publisher's request for permission to be allowed to reprint Boal's essay. Clearly somebody out there was reading the pages of our journal, and if my memory does not play me false, exactly the same happened in the aftermath of our publication of Boal's 1971 paper entitled 'Territoriality and class: a study of two residential areas in Belfast'.

By the 1960s, the editorial committee was giving repeated consideration to the proposal that instead of one issue of *Irish Geography* each year, there should be two. Successive Editors were opposed to the suggestion, and it was 1986 before the journal finally began to appear every six months. The reason for the earlier editorial opposition to an increased frequency of publication was that preparing the journal for press was a laborious task in those days of hot-metal printing. We all passed long hours first with typescripts - sometimes they were replete with an author's deeply obscure manuscript amendments - and then with galley proofs. Finally, there were expended many days as, with scissors and paste, the galleys were blended with the figures to impart to the journal its paged format. I used to reckon that, following the circulation of galley-proofs, the completion of any number of the journal would take almost four weeks of my time, and the only period of the year when I was free to undertake so demanding an activity was the few weeks following the close the of the university's summer term. The duties of our Editor are always onerous, but these days advances in printing technology have, I trust, done something to lighten the editorial burden.

One year - I suspect that it was 1975 - the journal came close to disaster. I then had a room in House 38 standing in the New Square of Trinity College. One Friday evening in June I completed my editorial task. The paged proofs were ready to go to our printers on the Monday following. That weekend there was a fire in House 38. Arson was suspected. The target was my colleague from the Irish Department on the opposite side of the corridor. The door of my own room was severely charred. The flames must have been within centimetres of *Irish Geography*, But, thanks to the prompt efficiency of the Fire Brigade, the contents of my room suffered damage neither from fire nor water. Nevertheless, like the Battle of Waterloo, it was a close run thing. It was with some relief that I carried the paged proofs off to our printers on the Monday following the fire.

That mention of the delivery of paged proofs to our printers allows me to offer one final reminiscence arising from my editorship. At that time our printers were the admirable firm of

Messrs John English & Co. Ltd of Wexford, and it was to Wexford that I journeyed each June carrying with me the bulky package containing my paged proofs. Since my schoolboy days I have been a devotee of railways and all connected with them. So, of course, I invariably went to Wexford by rail. To be able so to travel as a part of my editorial duties was ever a great joy. Paradoxical it may seem, but some of the happiest of my editorial recollections are of sitting in a railway carriage clutching my precious package as the train snaked perilously around Bray Head, or as it rumbled over the Avonmore before coming to a halt in Rathdrum Station alongside the wreck of the Railway Hotel. In that hotel there in June 1853 stayed my 'friend' Joseph Beete Jukes (1811-1869) while he was investigating the local geology. He himself was a vastly experienced editor, but one thing that he disliked was condemnatory comments made by anonymous referees. Such, he observed, had no right to give an author 'a kick in the dark, and then run away'. I trust that above I have delivered no kicks in the dark, but I am now happy to run away, after a brief and respectful pause beside the memorial that follows.

The editors of Irish Geography

1944 -1945	Anthony Farrington
1946 -1950	Thomas W. Freeman
1951 - 1960	Anthony Farrington
1961 - 1968	Thomas Jones Hughes
1968 - 1978	Gordon L. Herries Davies
1979 - 1981	John H. Andrews
1982 - 1984	William J. Smyth
1985 - 1988	R. William G. Carter
1989 - 1995	John Sweeney
1996 -	Joseph Brady