

PADDYHACKERY!

Online Ireland and other green



The
IrishEcho

IRISHecho
AUSTRALIAN IRISH COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

classifieds, forums, your ads, your images
xpress

**IRISH
VOICE**

The Kerryman

The Sligo Champion

Nothing really would appeal to the average Ulster protestant in the foreign Irish-themed press. Through the looking glass, Ireland comes out looking not merely green, but sickeningly so – veridian.

There are several dozen Irish newspapers published in paper form and online globally. They have names like *The Irish Echo*, GAIRE (Gay Ireland Online), *The Irish Herald*, the *Irish Post*. They are multifarious, and published in Australia, N. America, the UK. Some are Irish in origin but exist only in cyberspace, like GAIRE.

Some, like the *Irish Post*, are substantial newspapers. What does it tell us about Irishness in and around the square mile of Westminster?

Well, think Irish dancing in Lemington-Spa. Think Irish Christmas cake, made, per the Irish Abroad website, 'with a lot of true Irish whisky'. But papers for the Irish diaspora, like those for the Irish at home, are less preoccupied with Irishness the more comfortable they are with it. Those that are most unquestionably Irish don't care about being Irish. Those that are a little insecure about it are overzealous. You have cultural impoverishment and apathy on one hand, and 'Celtic Feet Pound the World Beat' (from the *Irish Post*) on the other. There is no happy medium.

What of hard news? You have Darina Allen's husband in a child porn scandal. Page three in the *Irish Post* goes to a cheeky nudie photo of some chimp-grin footballers from Cork in a cheeky fundraising calendar: 'Footballers reveal cheeky new strip... and the result from fans is... score draw.'

Page six has the headline: 'Morrison defeats sex claims'. On the adjacent page one finds 'Irishman Brendan Keenan (is) trekking for charity'. Irishman Brendan is from Co. Offaly, and works in Birmingham airport. He is unmarried (as if we care), and apparently intends to trek through South Africa's Cedarberg Mountains. I feel that most would raise a glass to Irishman Brendan. But this is not news. It feels like small town gossip.

VILLAGE

For those who would leave the village want to take a little of it with them. This explains the poor writing, and the twee human interest. Page nine is devoted to showbands. There is a photo of the 'Rainbow Centre Ballroom of Romance' in Glenfarne. It looks like a shed. It is a shed. Also pictured, Big Tom and the Mainliners. Big Tom looks like he is Big into beef cattle, and his band has the eager-to-please look of a puppy dog that has just pissed into its bowl of Chum. In any case, the photo, like

the story, is forty years old. This is journalism of and for the culturally retarded.

As for op-ed comment, there is an article from 'Peter Makem in Belfast'. He mixes his metaphors when he writes of 'ingredients... growing' in a new Ireland; though his premise is clear. It is that Northern Ireland must become the 'centre of Ireland and of Europe in the image of the greatness it once enjoyed'. But how?

Is there nothing for the Irish ex-pat to do but lead a shadow dance of Irish life in a different culture? Well, one could consult 'The Pulse', the Ents guide of the *Irish Post*, and find a good gig or two around such hotbeds of Gaelic frippery as Swindon, or Lewes. This section is edited by a John Crowley. Above the caption, and a photograph, there is the note – 'contact me at...' John is a rugged man. He writes in clichés like a copyboy wearing boxing gloves. 'The Irish like to look after their kith and kin', he informs us, and refers poetically to the ocean just west of Ireland as 'the Atlantic wash'.

ECHO

Yet it is not all bad out there in the land of paddyhackery. *The Irish Echo* is based in Australia, and has a greater deal of normality about it. It is less strained than the *Post*. It aims to serve and not insult the intelligence of the permanent ex-pat community there, which given the flow of Irish backpackers, fluctuates in and around 100,000. It seems to focus on business pertaining to Irish people. There was one interesting story about a 22 year old Irish student backpacker who was charged with aiding the escape of a refugee from the infamous Woomera detention camp. A good balance of hard news and human interest is struck, all said.

The Irish Emigrant, published in Boston and New York in paper form and available online, is equally, if not more, impressive, and seems to cater for the more established ex-pat. It is available throughout N. America, mainly in pubs, such as 'The Dubliner' of Kerouac's hometown, Lowell, Ma. There are local stories big and small here, such as the admission of the Irish Justice Minister that Ireland let down the Jews disgracefully in the last War; or the January 'digger' attack on a Co. Tyrone Orange Hall.

You can also find tongue in cheek pieces such as one in the December to January edition about cattle being selected by Duchas, the Irish Heritage Service, to control vegetation around Poulabrone Dolmen in Co. Clare. The major story in terms of current civil liberties issues in the

THE INSECURITY OF THE OVER ZEALOUS journalism for the exiles

Republic has not been let pass – the court appearance of seven Gardai, in connection with the rough policing of last Mayday's environmental protests in Dublin. This is good coverage. Paddy can play the journo of the Western world after all, and regardless of whether he is first or naturalized second generation.

EXECRABLE

Indeed, for all that London-based the *Irish Post* is execrable (and it is), you can look close to home for the example from which it was created. We are worse catered for here locally than some offshore compatriots are. *The Ballymena Times* is written by our rural cousins for the purposes of telling it as plain as sliced pan. The feature story 'Snap-py Memories for Councillor' told of one local representative being 'surprised' at seeing a photograph of himself as a four year old in Harryville in a previous edition of the paper. Councillor Clarke, "Couldn't believe it when he saw himself." Who cares?

Another example of a bad local newspaper, but this time in the Republic, is the *Sligo Weekender*.

'Margaret's got a Heart of Gold', says the *Weekender*. Local Mum Margaret herself has something to say about her having a heart of gold: "I believe if you can't do a good turn why do a bad turn." Quite, but what does this contribute to public discourse?

A permanent fixture of the Sligo paper is 'Nelson's Column', written by a turtle necked chorist named James Nelson. Nelson thinks that he has something to say, and say it he does: "I once calculated that in an average concert I would sing somewhere in the region of 6,000 words over the course of those couple of hours or so", he tells us. As such salmon leaps of mathematical calculation make clear, James has time on his hands away from his hectic singing career.

The Gay Online paper for Irish people GAIRE, is rather more of a notice/bulletin board really, and is mundane. The topics for discussion on this webforum include Film, Accommodation, Jobs. However, there are some poignant postings, such as that from a 'Susan' in Tipperary asking if there were any 'Bi-Curious Girls' in her area. Another lady from Drogheda requests contact with a 'Married Bi-Fem' in her area. You cannot help but think that these people will go lonely.

California has an Irish newspaper, *The Irish Herald*, founded in 1962. It has dealt with such hot potatoes as Ulster demographics, and the Loyalist feud in Belfast. There was also a fascinating article

featuring a visit to Bogota prison and the 'Columbia Three' by a journalist who got through the security on the coat-tails of Paul Hill and other friends of theirs. Of course, the viewing figures of the Rose of Tralee beauty competition got a look in too. In this paper, a wide variety of acceptable book/ents reviews make up for such twee mundanities. It is not on a par with the *Irish Emigrant*, but it is certainly better than Kerry's *The Kingdom*.

HANDLE

This paper features, in its online edition news section, a photograph of a fat man with a handle bar moustache and big pants, fitted out for a panto. 'Garda Pat shows he's game for a laugh', goes the headline. Language is hostage to platitude in *The Kingdom*. One article refers to the 9/11 terrorist attack as 'shocking' – bad, one would presume. AIDS is, says the paper, 'the gravest of the sexually transmitted diseases'. That AIDS is not transmitted exclusively by means of sexual intercourse has eluded Kerry's finest newsletter.



The picture that offshore Irish newspapers and web forums paint of Ireland is indicative of the difficulty of any emigrant (or emigrant community) maintaining a national 'identity', but perhaps also it points to how labile cultural identity is now, more than ever, in Ireland north and south. Dubliners see themselves as Dubliners first, Europeans second, Irish people third. Ulster nationalists see themselves as Irish, but Northern Irish, a difference that southern disdain for the black sheep province only reinforces. Ulster protestants are neither British nor Irish, but unique in their dilemma. What we Irish were is no longer what we would be, and what we shall be is a matter of supposition.

In the interim, surely we deserve good writing.

