

The Return

As teenagers, who had followed the mod scene in Ireland, walking down the street in London in 1967, we didn't look too different and we had the same attitude as those our own age that we passed.

JAMES HARAN, SINGER, LONDON RESIDENT 1966-67.

That was the big difference from Limerick of course, we immediately sought out all the spots where the bands would play and they would be full of like-minded people.

MICHAEL DONOVAN, LIMERICK CITIZEN AND TEMPORARY NOTTING HILL RESIDENT, 1969.

Figure 9

Michael O'Donovan, Limerick,
in Notting Hill 1969.



When these returning Limerick workers described their exposure to multi-cultural events, communal living, and various situations of protest, they found receptive teenage audiences amongst their own peers. In spreading the reputation of Notting Hill as a purposeful destination for sixties Irish Youth, they were regarded as ambassadors for a new cause.

They made sure the tag of the returned London labourer with the one-dimensional experience of the work site tied to the London Irish communal social did not apply to them. Accentuating the cut between the new and the old experience of London, this generation would have responded to the countercultural graffiti in Notting Hill posted by the English Situationists King Mob 'Joyless work causes cancer' (Hopkins, 1968). Between 1966 and 1973, these youth imported an energy that ran through Limerick city centre. It coincided with the energy sprouting in the new estates that were a consequence of an Irish urban rebuild. By 1970, returning activity ranged in strength from (literally) shouting on street corners to a quiet sharing of the international free press that was promoted as revolutionary material. The maturity of the dialogue generated from this range of material differed in tone from what one would have previously gleaned from the pop magazines that were essential in supporting the early

33 OZ magazine, in both its Australian and London versions delivered articles referencing a more historical, philosophic and universal view of the notion of an alternative society than the others.

Mod scene. Then bands such as The Rolling Stones appeared rebellious simply in the context of style, but after 1968 they began to be reported as dangerous, even as political rebels. The socially-engaged agenda of publications of IT and OZ would track these cultural transitions, and as the parameters of the performer became politicised, emphasise that socio-political participation in pop culture was a requirement for the youth.³³



Figure 10
Noel Mullvill a Limerick man at a march in London protesting Bloody Sunday, 1972. Pictured in the issue of *Time Out* held in his archives.

Although there was a continuous readership of the English 'pop' press in Limerick City, by 1969 publications such as the *International Times* had made the cut from previous populist avenues by critically foregrounding pop and its transition to rock to emphasise its social context. One did not simply consume unconformity, now there was a responsibility in creating a setting and this was constantly underlined. With the tone of agitation contained in the free press, a more political type of participation in one's own locality was encouraged from its readership.³⁴ It was the presence of an underground narrative of protest held in the free press and related publications that assisted the lexicon of unconformity for this period in Limerick. Although such magazines as the *International Times* were available by mail order, they were subject to custom inspection where the shadow of the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act, which originally prohibited printed material whose content relied too much on crime, and even works that promoted the 'unnatural' prevention of conception. Receiving material that shaped elements of these in a youth context, accessed from a returned traveller circa 1968 had a *frisson* that acknowledged the contribution of this generation's unique conduit.³⁵

Reflecting on the history of the countercultural movement in 1972, the long term socialist David Widgery reminded readers in OZ magazine that, 'Of all the intellectually property speculators of the 60s (the underground) made the most sizeable incursions into capitalism's ideological real estate, the family, school, work- discipline, the "impartial

34 1967 is notable for the Irish government's unbanning of work by figureheads of the counterculture such as Albert Camus. The 1967 Censorship of Publications Act now limited the period of probation of books to twelve years. The significance of this in the Irish media did not register this as anything other than a routine act of government action, but passing it did allow citizens access to 5000 books that were previously banned. These included the classic French novels of Gide and Proust, and contemporary works by James Baldwin, and Norman Mailer.

35 Irish censorship existed to the extent that the English feminist magazine *Spare Rib* remained banned until 1977.

law courts” and the British Broadcasting Corporation’ (Widgery, year p.). Unlike previous movements of radical parties, it actually transmitted its mood of indiscipline to young people of all classes. Widgery celebrates the mission that ‘stumbled’ into being a force in which it is ‘cheerful apoliticalism became a major trial of strength with the authorities simply for the crime of not being hypocritical’ (Widgery, year p.).

Figure 11

A selection of material from 1966-73 found in the Little Catherine St Book shop Limerick. April 2016.



The lack of University status held by Limerick City before 1972 would also have contributed to an attitude of self-learning amongst groups once described as ‘working class hippies.’ It is significant that the reactionary self-knowledge generated by Limerick space was not shaped by any academic forum before the opening of the first version of a University for Limerick in 1970.³⁶ In and around 1970-72 Limerick Youth availed of the opportunities provided by the new grant schemes for third level education, whereby many spent time in the universities of Galway, Cork, or Dublin before returning to Limerick. This mix between a cabal of auto-didactic, non-conformists, new university graduates, and transients still sought to shape the city to represent generational concerns. Of course, Progressive Youth curious about the international counterculture still emigrated and in this maintained an alternative conduit.

The writer Kevin Myers wrote a biographical piece in a 1996 compendium called *My Generation*. He called the time around 1967 ‘the cusp between generations, between chronological cultures’ (Myers, 1996 p.). In discussing the particularities of the Irish condition for those that lived in the country, he confirms that there were those of his generation who remained conditioned and bound to the past but there were others sought to leave it behind. Due to clear boundaries the rigidity of the old was supported with the authority of the church and any concept of the new by definition was limitless and without boundaries (Myers, 1996)

We went over the edge of the waterfall, and nothing was the same. Some people I knew, the same age as me, were in the old culture and lost their virginity on their

[36 In 1958 a pressure group was formed to lobby for a university for Limerick which resulted in the National Institute for Higher Education being established in 1970.](#)

wedding nights, some tinkered a little bit and then married. But for a certain few of us, the old world was gone – socialism and sex were our future, our present, our everything (Myers, 1996 p.222).

Aishling Foster, a playwright and graduate of UCD, in the same compendium, sketches a Dublin college scene where 'draft- dodging students' were regarded as heroes to the Irish Youth who appreciated the breath of the issue. The Irish in UCD mixed with American students with Irish connections who had been sent to study in Trinity and UCD. No standalone data exists for numbers, but it was not uncommon for parents with Irish connections to send their children to study in Ireland during the war. Foster says of these times, 'we hated Johnson and then Nixon, (and) shouted 'Ho, Ho, Ho chi-Minh!' into the lenses of unmarked TV cameras' (Foster, 1996 p.). She references here a chant associated with international Trotsky supporters and heard often on the contemporary marches on the American Embassy in London (Green, 1998 p.246).

Figure 12

The Scene. Irelands
International Magazine.
August 1969.
(Brand New Retro. 2015).

