

Checking your bona fides at the Friday hop

Students today could learn a lot about unruly behaviour from those who enjoyed UCD's Earlsfort Terrace heyday. John Holden writes

The education and wisdom gained from going to university does not come exclusively from the classroom or lecture hall. As John Henry Newman once noted: "When a multitude of young men, keen, open-hearted, sympathetic, observant... come together and freely mix with each other, they are sure to learn one from another, even if there be no one to teach them; the conversation of all is a series of lectures to each, and they gain for themselves new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day."

According to former UCD graduate and student media, politics and sports enthusiast, Gerry Horkan, the extra-curricular activities of Earlsfort Terrace were a huge part of what he and his peers grew to become.

"In my time, there was a great sense that you could go in and do anything in UCD," says Horkan. "Being a young lad from the northside in 1950s Dublin, I didn't have a great family background

in academia but I settled into it fairly quickly. I got involved in politics and was on the Students Representative Council (SRC), so I got to know a lot of people in the college."

Horkan was part of a political group led by one Gerry Collins. Their party, which came to be known as "the Machine", controlled the student council for several years because of the support for Collins as leader, and the party's knack for electioneering campaigns.

"In those days there was no left and right in student politics, more rural versus city," says Horkan. "We didn't have a lot of power or money. One campaign I remember being involved in was to get a crystal ball for the dance floor in Newman House. We never got it though."

Newman House hall on St Stephen's Green was the location for dances in the 1950s and 1960s. "We called them the 'Friday night hops'," says Horkan. "They were run by societies or the SRC, and there would always be a few cases of beer hidden under the

stage where the drama societies performed in the hall."

"The dances were great for a sing-song and, of course, for dancing, but they weren't for everyone. There was a certain element of students - usually southsiders with money - who wouldn't be seen dead at a dance."

For this element and others, socialising took place in house parties or in the pub. Dwyers, (now Houricans), Hartigans across the road, and the Green Bar, all on Leeson Street, were popular hangouts for Earlsfort Terrace's student population. "The medicine, law and arts crowd hung out in Dwyers and Hartigans, while the Green Bar was for GAA heads and A&S," explains Horkan.

"Students also took advantage of the Bona Fide Travellers law. This meant you could get served after hours if you could prove that you were at least five miles away from your place of residence. So some people would go up to Lamb Doyles and Matt Smiths in Stepaside for late pints."

As is the case today, societies were an important part of college life. "The Literary and Historical (L&H) debate was somewhere to go on Saturday nights before you went out," recalls Horkan. "I wasn't the debating type myself, but I liked to have a vote for the auditorship."

Speakers at L&H debates over the years include the late Dermot Bouchier Hayes, Richard Johnson, Louis Courtney, Charles Lysaght and Maeve Binchy. "Listening to some of them debate would make you wonder how they could ever amount to anything. But they did," jokes Horkan.

Sport was also as much a part of UCD student life then as it is now. Horkan played soccer and badminton.

The badminton club had been set up by a number of Malayan medicine students in the 1960s and became the breeding ground for some of Ireland's best-known female players: Mary O'Sullivan and Hazel Irwin, as well as Maureen O'Brien and Patricia O'Gorman, who both became tennis internationals.

The student media kept Earlsfort Terrace authorities on its toes. "We started with a newspaper called *You-Who*, but it got banned because they printed a cartoon of a girl with a small bump on her belly standing outside a door with a sign saying *Chaplain's Office*," states Horkan.

After this small editorial hitch, a new paper, *Awake* came into being. "Awake was a great institution," says Horkan. "It was a wholly independent paper brought out in the college with some very good editors over the years."

There were also a number of staff members in Earlsfort Terrace who made more of an impact on life in the college than they might have known. The porters, who went about their daily duties, became the friends and role models of many students.

"Paddy Keogh, who joined in 1918, was well loved by everyone," says Horkan. "We all called him Mr Keogh, and he would always call you Mr Horkan. Only when you qualified would he call you by your first name."

"If a lecturer was out sick he would come into the hall and give a little discourse on one subject or another. He was a lovely man and knew everybody in the college. Then there was Jack Nugent who lived in the basement of the building. He got on well with 'the Machine' and used to let us sneak into the building the weekend before student elections to put up posters before anyone else."

Very little in student life, it appears, has changed.



As you were: a stand at UCD Freshers Week at Earlsfort Terrace in the 1960s.

Photograph: Bill Hastings