

# Remembering the centre of that life



After spending 10 years studying medicine in UCD, **Maurice Neligan** has happy memories of the campus, the pubs and the parties

I enrolled as a medical student in UCD in Earlsfort Terrace in the autumn of 1955. Once I had decided to do medicine, UCD had been the natural choice for a Blackrock boy. Those were the days of the ban on Catholic students entering Trinity. It was a truly illiberal Ireland.

I did not know what to expect on my first foray to the Terrace, where as an undergraduate and postgraduate, I was to spend the next 10 years. It was not without trepidation that I left the cocoon of my boys' secondary school and entered a strange new world.

We registered by faculties and I remember a long queue of

strange faces, handing over their fees and state exam results and receiving their student cards. This latter acquisition I fondly imagined to be the key to university life and to the wealth of pleasurable experiences that awaited me in this student future.

Two things struck me that first day. There were girls, loads of them, and there were clerical students and nuns, loads of them too. In fact, the arrival of the clerical students from the seminaries in the morning was like a crowd of black crows settling on the Terrace. This black crow is now a *rara avis*. Self-consciously, we began to explore this new "liberated" environment. We deferred to older students showing us the ropes and were easy prey for those selling us useless or overpriced books and "must have" lecture notes.

We learned early that most students were habitually broke and that a sort of communistic view of money prevailed. If you had it, you shared it. A dim view was taken of those who failed to get their round, or were adept at producing lit cigarettes from their pockets.

We gradually came to know our classmates from all over Ireland and abroad and came to socialise with our new college groupings from clubs and classes, rather than with the now dispersed friends from school.

Early on, I noticed that there were two basic groups of students - the airy ones and the earthy ones. The latter group tended towards the sciences, medicine, dentistry, engineering, veterinary and, I suppose, the "ags" (agricultural students). Nobody was quite clear as to whether the agricultural sorts really counted as they spent much time away from the centre doing unspeakable things to cows.



Earlsfort Terrace in the 1960s, above, and Neary's pub off Grafton street, above right



Who then amongst us could forget the pubs and cafes? Grafton St, Davy Byrne's and Neary's

The airy ones were centred on the Terrace and kept their brains free for the later complexities of life, by studying arts and law. The drama society and the literary and historical society (L&H) provided the fora for their exhibitionism, as well as the hockey and beagling which exposed them to the open air.

Commerce sat uneasily in the middle, not quite sure of its student gender. Where were the architects in such an arbitrary grouping? It was hard enough in that amorphous duffel coated

group to discern which were male or female.

The earthy group had a lot of their student life located away from the Terrace. Future engineers and scientists were located in the College of Science, Merion Street (now Government Buildings) and we medics, after an initial year there, were redistributed over the years to the various hospitals we had to attend.

Lectures, the library and the ultimate exams were the umbilical cord that bound us to the terrace. The sports clubs and the

societies also fostered the spirit of the college and it seemed a rare soul that was not involved in some extracurricular activity.

It was a constrained space and could hardly be called a campus, but for us the immediate environs were part of it. A back route from the Terrace led through the Iveagh Gardens to 86 St Stephen's Green, where the Students' Union and committee rooms of various clubs and societies were located.

There was also the *Aula Max* where student theatricals and

dances were held. As regards the latter, many students simply would not be seen dead there. The rugby clubs' "hops" and flatland parties provided more attractive social outlets.

The Crystal, Metropole and Four Provinces provided more dubious venues, where some pursued "the other thing", that in all honesty 90 per cent of us would have run from if proffered on a plate. That reality didn't stop us all talking about it; in talk and drink we were mighty men.

Who then amongst us could

forget the pubs and cafes? Hartigan's and the Green Bar, the Golden Orient and above all the Singing Kettle. Further afield, the Inca, the Kilimanjaro and Roberts and, off two-way traffic Grafton St, Davy Byrne's and Neary's. Generations of students skipped Friday lectures for more relevant offerings in the Green Cinema.

Colours matches in those days were conducted with the ferocity of the Battle of the Boyne and for the same reasons - them and us. In fact it was everybody and us,

we were UCD students from the Terrace and the world had better be aware that it was our oyster.

The graduates of my time spread through Irish life leaving their youthful prejudices behind. Even some of the airy group became gainfully employed, which says a lot about Newman's concept of a university. The Terrace is a fond memory to those who studied and played there.

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