University College Cork
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Society

Archives
From before the society's initial foundings through to 2010

Presented by...
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Introduction from Founder Cathal Kerrigan

A society archive is the communal memory and is a vital resource. It contains the basic material on which our history is built. It can be used for individual nostalgia but more vitally it gives the group an awareness of where they come from. And it is only by having this perspective that we can determine where we are headed and how best to get there. For a university society it is even more urgent since the effective length of a ‘generation’ is only five years – by the fifth year there is usually a complete turnover in personnel and what is not recorded is not passed on.

All archives are at their root fragile – often depending on accident and luck for preservation of material. Archives of university societies and groups are even more fragile – as the story of my own involvement with this archive illustrates.

In 2003 I returned to live in Cork and take up a position in UCC Library. One of my library colleagues was Julian Walton and over lunch I had reminisced about my time as a student mentioning the founding of the GaySoc; Julian persuaded me that the then current members of the LGBT would be interested in my story – which was their history. I contacted them and they arranged for me to speak at a society event in spring 2005. On that night I brought along the few bits and pieces I had and noted what a pity it was that there seemed to be no trace of further material. However, this was to prove a spark which would lighten our darkness – the LGBT created an archive officer post and a series of serendipitous events helped bring material back from the misty land of mislaid objects.

I walked into the Boole Library one day to be told by a colleague at the main desk that a parcel had been left in for me – this turned out to be the Philosoph minute book 1979-86. To this day I do not know who left it in – just that it was a woman who said it would be of interest to me but insisted she did not want to leave her name! This find resulted in the Philosoph and LGBT deciding to do a joint commemorative event in November 2005 of the founding of the society.

The second serendipitous event happened when Donal Sheehan put me in touch with Josephine O’Halloran. When I contacted her she told me she had the society files from her time as auditor; she kindly gave them to me for sorting and they formed the bulk of the subsequent donation to the Irish Queer Archive.

The third lucky event was the tracking of the Sunday Tribune piece and photograph of the founding members. I remembered this piece but didn’t have a copy. I could not recall the details but luckily Dominic Daly put me right on the source; on a visit to the National Library I combed through the Tribune and tracked it down. To me it is a personal pleasure but also a great wonder that all these circumstances combined to ensure the archive survived. But even more wonderful is the attention the current society members have paid to it and the resources they have put into highlighting it.

Ultimately, the final and true value of an archive is the use made of it. I am personally pleased and very honoured to be associated with this publication. But much more than that I am reassured by the use the current society is making of the archive that it will serve its most valuable function – to inform future activities and inspire further achievements.
Introduction

In October 2009, the then UCC LGBT Society committee established a project aimed at recording the society’s turbulent and intricate history. What followed this important decision was months of locating past members of the society, archiving articles, letters, photos and any material of relevance so that this information could be published in book form.

As the coordinator of the project and also as a freshman to University College Cork, I entered myself and the Archives sub-committee into the project with excitement and determination. The stress and strain that ensued was immense, overshadowed only by the prospect of achieving something truly special in the notional future. Through our research, it quickly became clear that the UCC LGBT was quite inimitable amongst the plethora of societies that had been establishment by the student body. It’s ephemeral nature made it quite hard to construct a coherent timeline for the society since it’s official recognition in 1989, as it underwent name changes, committee modifications and some years where the society simply ceased to exist.

In recent years, the LGBT has gone from strength to strength, offering an intricate support system for the students of UCC while also acting as a powerful tool for education and indeed offering outstanding social opportunities. The courage and determination of those that fought for official recognition, and indeed those that upheld this victory through the continuation of running the society to the present day are the sole reasons for the success of the LGBT throughout the years.

We must extend our deepest gratitude to those that assisted the project through providing material for the publication. Further thanks must be extended to the 2009-2010 UCC LGBT committee with a special mention to those that participated in the archives project. Without this help and support the project simply would not have been possible.

Tiarnan O’ Sullivan
Coordinator UCC LGBT Archives Project
Proudly commemorating 21 years of official recognition.
Foundations of UCC LGBT Society

1980: Founding of UCC GaySoc

1 July 1980: Cathal Kerrigan begins term as General Secretary of Students Union.

7 Nov. 1980: Cathal attends inaugural Grad’s Ball accompanied by his lover Mairtin.

29 Nov. 1980: Philosoph Debate:
“That this house supports the Establishment of a College Gaysoc by the Students Union”
- GaySoc founded immediately after debate.


1989: Recognition of Lesbian & Gay Support Group

February 1988: SU President & Rights Officer help revive the GaySoc.

October 1988: Re-convened GaySoc decides to campaign for recognition.


March 1989: Students Union Executive votes unanimously to support application.

16 Mar 1989: Joint Board votes 4-2 in favour of recognition.


25 April 1989: Governing Body of UCC votes 13-7 in favour of recognition!
In July 1980 I took up the position of General Secretary [now called President] of UCC Students Union. One of the ideas I had was to split the usual SU Student’s Guide into two publications - a Welfare Booklet and a Handbook in diary format. Denis O’Donoghue, Deputy General Secretary, took responsibility for editing the Welfare Booklet. I asked one of my supports, Denis Lyons, to help put together the Handbook / Diary [Archive item 1.2]

In order to be able to fill the diary dates with events we contacted all the college societies, clubs, administration offices, etc. for details for events. The Philosopher – the debating society, properly The Philosophical Society – was one of these and the Auditor for 1980/81 was Dónal Godfrey, a law student.

I knew Dónal from SU council and when he dropped by my office in early August he brought a draft list of debates for the first term. I agreed to participate in a debate on 14 Nov. “that this house has confidence in the Students Union”. He had a ‘Gay’ debate pencilled in for a fortnight later. When he asked me to also participate in this I said I’d only do so if the motion was ‘for real’ and not the usual liberal wishy/washy ‘we think gays are nice cuddly people etc.’.

Dónal asked me to give an example of a ‘real’ motion and I said: “that this house supports the establishment of a GaySoc”. Dónal said I was on – this would be the motion and I’d have to help get David Norris who had a national profile & a reputation as a sparkling debater to propose it with me.

The Welfare Booklet

When Denis started to compile the Welfare Booklet he asked me to write the lesbian / gay section – which I did opening with:

“Homosexuality is not a problem – it doesn’t do you any harm and can be lots of fun. Despite this, homosexuality is taboo in women and in men and is believed variously to be sad, odd or kinky. This is where the problem starts and finishes – in the prevailing attitude about what is ‘normal’ sexuality.”

The Welfare Booklet contained much that was daring for the time – practical diagrammatic explanations of human sexuality and contraceptive methods, where to get contraceptives in Cork – as well as guides to eating well, worker’s rights, drugs (legal & illegal), etc.
In early October the 1,000 copies we proposed to sell of the Welfare Booklet arrived. That same morning Denis attended a meeting with the Dean of Student Affairs, Prof. Seán Teegan. At lunch hour Denis arrived into my office to say Teegan had seen a copy of the publication and forbade its sale. I immediately asked where the booklets were; when Denis said in his office I told him that if we couldn’t sell them then we’d give them away free! And that’s what we did that afternoon on the Quad – much to the chagrin of the administration.

One way of the move to change existing legislation on rape and to eliminate the common myths that have been attached to this crime.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality is the physical and emotional attraction between members of the same sex.

Homosexuality is not a problem – it doesn’t do you any harm and can be lots of fun. Despite this, homosexuality is taboo in women and in men and is believed variously to be sad, odd or kinky. This is where the problem starts and finishes – in the prevailing attitude about what is ‘normal’ sexuality.

Some Popular Misconceptions

Queer, Poof, Fairy or Pansy – terms about as accurate and helpful as calling an Irishman a “Mick” or a Jew a “Yid”. Yet society continues to encourage such discrimination without ever really thinking of the hurt and pain it is causing to the more sensitive Gay Person. Equally important to understand is that the outward appearance of a Gay Person is not of the stereotyped image, as many popular television personalities would have you believe, the about "Oscar, Elton & Co".

The Grad Ball

Another innovation I wanted to introduce was a Grad Ball. Having persuaded the SU executive it was worth the financial risk we went ahead. It was held on Friday 7 Nov in Jury’s Hotel. I attended as both SU Gen Sec and as a graduate myself – having received my BA that summer. As my guest I took my lover Máirtín Mac an Ghoill. It was a great night – the only photograph I have shows Máirtín clearly but I am to his left and my head is cut off – however, the SU Gen Sec’s chain of office is clearly visible on my stomach!

At the SU executive meeting the following Tuesday I faced a vote of no confidence for “having brought the SU into disrepute”. When this was debated it appeared that my behaviour at the Grad Ball was the issue. Luckily some of the executive were not phased by the prejudice of the movers of the motion and queried what exactly they were talking about. What it my orientation? Of course it couldn’t be – didn’t we have a pro-gay policy? Was it my dancing with my lover – was this lascivious? Of course not – it differed from others on the dance floor only in that my partner was another male. Then one of the advocates of the motion exploded: “but he was wearing the chain of office!!” At this point we collapsed into laughter and the motion fell.
Catering Dispute

On 4 Nov I'd called a meeting of students to look at the catering on campus – prices had been increased and services cutback. It was decided to have a boycott of college catering and a week later we occupied the Kampus Kitchen and ran our own alternative catering.

It was against this background that the Philosoph Debate of 15 Nov took place. The motion was: "that this house has confidence in the Students Union" and I had persuaded Brendan Dorris, then President of Bolton St. SU and a Maoist, to propose the motion. It was suggested that the Philosoph should adjourn its debate to the Kampus Kitchen – when this motion failed Brendan and I led a walkout. We then had a serious political discussion with those who followed us in the occupied Kampus Kitchen.

The Debate

A fortnight later and I was back at the Philosoph to debate "that this house supports the establishment of a GaySoc by the Students Union". I spoke to move the motion. The opposers were Denis Staunton – who put forward a coherent intellectual argument based on not priviliging minority interests – and someone who argued against from the religious perspective. David Norris was the final speaker – a sparkling performer he had the audience eating out of his hand.

The motion was passed overwhelmingly. I immediately stood up to say that anyone interested in acting on the motion and founding a GaySoc there & then, should follow me to my office. About twenty people did so – which I now feel sure must have been much to my surprise – and the GaySoc was set up there and then.
The GaySoc begins campaigning.

Of the twenty or so people who formed the GaySoc, the majority were heterosexual. Straight people became involved because they were friends of myself or some of the other gays, because they were already involved in supporting women's rights and saw this as part of the same broad agenda for changing Irish society, or because they were idealistic with a social conscience (social science students mostly!).

One of those who was openly gay from the start was Donnacha McCarthy. He was in third Med and his involvement in the GaySoc was his first move towards dealing with being gay. So – as is the way of things – we elected him as chair. We decided we would have to look for recognition for the society but knew we had a tough fight on our hands.

I advocated a confrontational approach – well, I would wouldn't I? The others however felt we should make links with the other societies – running joint events, etc. – and then try and get liberal support for recognition from as wide a base as possible.

At the word 'liberal' I bristled – hating them as half-hearted wimps. Throughout the year there would be a certain tension between myself and the rest of the GaySoc – Donnacha in particular. As the highest profile member and the SU leader I needed to take notice and act in line with the democratic decisions taken about how to proceed – but this was not always easy when my own proposals were rejected.

Recognition proposed & rejected.

Gay Society refused recognition by U.C.C.

During the next three months the GaySoc was active and very visible on campus. As we already had SU support for recognition of the society it was decided that we should put it on the agenda of the Joint Board – it would not be possible to get a motion onto the Governing Body without the Joint Board’s approving the proposal to recognise the society.

This was the final item on the agenda for the Joint Board meeting in January 1981. Denis O'Donoghue wrote a report on this meeting for the SU magazine Sage [3rd Issue / February.'81] and it captures the atmosphere perfectly:
"DISJOINTED BOARD: Joint Board – Farce or Faction?"

The Joint Board is comprised of four members of the Administration/Academic Staff of UCC and three student members, nominated by the Students’ Union. The January meeting, which was chaired by the College Registrar, Professor M. Morrell, furthers the view of many of the incidental presence of students on Campus.

Having passed the minutes (tempus fugit), the second item on the agenda was consideration of a list of newspapers and periodicals to be added to the Common Room supply. The students of the Committee were in favour of adding several new titles to broaden the somewhat provincial selection currently available. Those specified were: The Times, Belfast Telegraph, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Private Eye, Gay News, Left Perspectives, Morning Star and Spare Rib. (The Sage?!) .

It quickly became evident that a clash of philosophies existed: one arguing for a comprehensive range of titles to cover the deficiencies of the regular press, the other negating the that role for a University but using predominantly the argument of financial constraint, suggesting that if students wanted such publications they could purchase them themselves.

Finally it was agreed to give priority to the addition of the Belfast Telegraph, followed by The Times, then The Guardian and The Telegraph, all contingent on the approval of the Finance Office ("...fumble in a greasy till and add the half pence to the pence?"). Each of the other titles was vetoed, 4 – 3.

Next was a proposal of the Students’ Union, that of granting provisional recognition to a Gay society in UCC. A copy of the proposed constitution and a further elaboration of its principles was distributed to all the committee members. This stressed the openness of that Society to persons of all sexual persuasions, also its object as being the promotion and/or support of the political, social and legal well being of gay people in UCC and society at large.

The chairperson said he felt the issue had been sufficiently dealt with under item 2, the publication list, the logic of which was questioned by the now entrenched "3". Speeches in favour of the Gay Society were presented by the student members, including the Societies Officer [Tommy Barker], and there was none against. A vote was taken and the proposal was rejected, 4 – 3.

Released shortly after into the fresh air of the Quad, I noticed a small terrier on the grass running around and around in circles, around and around."
The GaySoc continued its activities right up to the end of the academic year but like everything else in student life it fell under the shadow of exams and future life once Easter had passed.

Immediately after news of the Joint Board decision came out I was contacted by a journalist from the Sunday Tribune who wanted to do a story about it. She came to my office with a photographer and ten members of the GaySoc agreed to be in the picture with me. It was published together with a piece headed Gays accuse UCC on 15 Feb 1981.

"UCC College authorities have been accused of discrimination and prejudice following the refusal of the Joint Board to recognise a newly established Gay Society in the college......

There has been speedy reaction from students to the controversial refusal. Many societies within the college have passed motions of censure on the joint board, while the students' union association and executive has offered financial support and the use of facilities to the gays.

Charles Kerrigan, General Secretary of the Students' Union and himself a gay, feels that it is very important that the society be recognised in College. 'You would imagine that in a third level institution of education there would be a high level of tolerance towards gay people and an awareness of the need of gay students but this is not so. The fear of being labelled gay is great and while there may be some level of tolerance the concept is still unacceptable.'

A spokesman for college authorities said that they do not always give recognition to applicants [sic] from societies, and the joint board did not consider it necessary to grant the application at this time."

In December 1980 I was involved in setting up Students Against H-Block / Armagh. Around the same time Mairtin and I founded Gays Against H-Block / Armagh. Within USI I was aligned with a broad coalition of large & small colleges with differing political outlooks who succeeded in breaking the hold of Sinn Féin The Workers Party ["Stickies"] supporters on the student movement. At the AGM in January 1981 our candidates won a complete sweep of the officer positions.

On the 21 February 1981 while I was absent at a meeting in Dublin Mairtin and I's flat was raided by the Special Branch (political police). They arrested Mairtin on an absurd charge and held him for over four hours during which time he was physically assaulted. Regrettably this was typical of the sort of harassment of political activists of the time.
In May Mairtin and I attended the funeral of Bobby Sands – on my return I was once again the object of another failed motion of censure at SU executive.

A year later I was living in Dublin but kept in touch on my visits back to Cork. In spring 1982 I met up with a couple of the women who'd appeared in the Sunday Tribune photo and they berated me for not warning them for what they were letting themselves in for. They said that the reality of such a photo being seen by their extended family, neighbours, etc. had only hit home over time. No one would believe their declaration of their heterosexuality; even a year later they were being subjected to anti-gay abuse in college and outside.

Looking back a quarter of a century later, recalling that conversation only serves for me to bring home forcefully how much courage all those involved in founding the GaySoc displayed.
Growing up in Cork in the 50s and 60s was joyful – a safe, secure though controlling society. All that changed in 1971 when at the age of sixteen I put a name on the growing awareness that I was different to my (school) friends: homosexual.

While I was a bookworm and came from a very politically aware and progressive background – my father was a Labour Party local councillor, senator and later, TD – I could see no life possible for myself. The only association the word had for me was with a bad taste joke in a TV comedy of the time called "Are You Being Served?"

So in the autumn of 1973 I insisted my GP arrange for me to see a psychiatrist; for ten weeks I was an out-patient at Sarsfields Court. My father was Lord Mayor that year and was horrified where I was going (though not why – I just said I was ‘depressed’). Luckily there was a progressive regime there – I was not given drugs but counselled. I left with the conviction that there was nothing wrong with me but rather with society.

In 1974 I had a job as a clerk with the Southern Health Board. That summer the SundayWorld was launched as a taboo-breaking paper and it covered the founding of the Irish Gay Rights Movement [IGRM] in Dublin. By this time I still had not met another gay person and this news electrified me! I immediately made contact and through them was put in touch with local gays.

The scene at the time was very limited. Most people lived with their parents; those with their own place were the nucleus of a party scene. There was a tiny surreptitious bar scene; most sexual contacts were made in the public toilets – relationships were rare. In an effort to be helpful to a novice a couple of the guys decided to ‘show me the ropes’. We came out of the Imperial Hotel Bar and walked up together to the public toilet located at the junction with Grand Parade; then I watched as they cruised and had sex in a cubicle. I was shocked and repelled; I determined this not for me – I was going to create a better life than this for myself.

Meanwhile I had become aware of the international Gay Liberation Movement – I subscribed to Gay News, Gay Sunshine
and Fag Rag; I read Denis Altman’s “Homosexual Oppression & Liberation” in ecstasy. Many of my new gay friends found me ‘too political’; they warned that things ‘are bad now but would become much worse if we become visible’.

As my confidence grew I decided to tell my family about being gay. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm ran away with me and when the whole family — myself as eldest together with my two sisters and brother — sat down to dinner one evening I literally said: “I have something to tell you — I’m gay”. Needless to say this caused consternation and tension. I decided to move out of home and took a bedsit in Sunday’s Well.

In 1975 Sean Connolly came down from Dublin to help set up a branch of IGRM in Cork; at a meeting in the Imperial Hotel a committee was formed. And at the age of twenty, I went back to see the book collection of one of the more suave members of the committee and — finally! — lost my virginity.

After some fitful stops and starts — trying to meet in pubs, holding cheese ‘n’ wine dos in bedsits — we were able to open a disco/club at 4 McCurtain Street. We invited the Garda in from the station across the road to reassure them there were no drugs or fornication on the premises! But once word spread that the place wouldn’t be raided by the guards or burned down by an angry mob, it was a roaring success and began the transformation of gay life in Cork.

In 1977 the proverbial split took place in IGRM. I found myself in a minority of one on the committee and so resigned. I moved back home and concentrated instead on my education — re-sitting the Leaving Cert and going on to study Arts at UCC. There I had my first major relationship with a fellow English Lit student. He was welcomed into the family home and stayed over occasionally; it meant a lot to me to get this acceptance and endorsement from my family.

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In July 1979 my father died of cancer at fifty-one. Back at college that autumn I
helped form a social gay group. We met in the house of a lecturer I was having an affair with at the time. Our second or third get together there was great excitement as an openly gay man had started working in the restaurant and he was coming along. Laurie Steele was a tall blond blue-eyed tanned Australian in his mid-twenties who looked like he’s stepped off the set of “Neighbours”.

He brought his lover – Arthur Leahy - with him; Arthur was slightly older and had the intense air of a cult leader. He shook up the cozy atmosphere by declaring halfway through the night that the Cork gay scene deserved more from college than “a knitting circle”! He went on to propose a radical activist group.

While this was too much for most of the others, it was music to my ears. A fortnight later Arthur, Laurie, Kieran Rose, Tony, and myself set up the Cork Gay Collective. One of our first actions was to lobby the ICTU Annual Conference by distributing leaflets calling for trade union support for gay rights to delegates as they entered City Hall. In 1981 we organized the first ever National Gay Conference which was held in Connolly Hall; the papers from the workshops at this conference basically set out the agenda for gay activism for the next two decades.

In 1980 I was elected President of the Students Union at UCC. I initiated the Graduate’s Ball which was first held that September; I attended with my then lover, Mairtin Mac an Ghoill. This led to an attempt by some members of the executive to censure me for ‘disgracing’ the union – however, I defeated this challenge.

That autumn the college debating society had a motion in support of founding a gaysoc in UCC; David Norris and I were invited to speak in favour. We won overwhelmingly and the first UCC Gay Society was set up there and then. While we had the support of our fellow students, the college authorities refused outright to recognize the GaySoc and our campaigns for recognition failed. A few years later the GaySoc folded but in the late 1980’s a new GaySoc was formed and gained immediate recognition; it still thrives to this day!

When my term of office finished in June 1981, Mairtin and I moved to Dublin where well, sin sceal eile! [Photo of Cathal with Friends (3rd from right)]
Key Personalities

A recognition of all those heavily involved in the society in the early days

Barden, Dr. Garrett
Dean of Arts in 1989 and a key supporter and strategist in the campaign for recognition.

Beamish, Sylvia
Arts student 1980/81 – a feminist who was one of the founders of the GaySoc in 1980 and appeared in the 1981 Sunday Tribune photo.

Buckley, Sandra
SU Rights Officer 1988/89 – continued the work of her predecessor in actively supporting those organising the recognition campaign.

Calnan, John
Cork gay activist – spoke at the public meeting organised by the Lesbian & Gay Supporters Group 13 April 1988

Daly, Dominick
Science student 1980/81 and gay activist - was one of the founders of the GaySoc in 1980 and appeared in the 1981 Sunday Tribune photo.

Flynn, Emmet
Social Science student 1988/89 – one of the organisers of the recognition campaign.

Godfrey, Dónal
Law student 1980/81 – Auditor of the Philosophical Society who organised and chaired the debate on 29 November 1980.

Hannigan, Mick
General Secretary UCCSU 1981/82 – a socialist who continued the Students’ Union’s strong support of the fledgling GaySoc.

Kelleher, John
President UCCSU 1988/89 – actively supported the recognition campaign and played a key role in lobbying his fellow governors on the Governing body.

Kerrigan, Cathal [aka Charles Kerrigan / Cathal Ó’Clarragáin]
General Secretary UCCSU 1980/81 – a socialist republican and gay activist who proposed founding the GaySoc and led the unsuccessful effort to gain its recognition.

Leahy, Arthur
Cork gay activist – involved centrally in much of Cork gay political and social life since 1979 – was a key supporter of any efforts by lesbian & gay students to organise.
Mac an Ghoill, Mairtin
Political activist and socialist republican – attended the 1930 Grad Ball as partner of Cathal Kerrigan and was supportive of all attempts to organise a GaySoc.

Maguire, Dr. John
Lecturer in Sociology in 1988/89 – played a key role in lobbying his fellow academics on the Academic Council to vote in favour of recognition.

McCarthy, Donnacha
Medical student 1980/81 - one of the founders of the GaySoc in 1980 and appeared in the 1981 Sunday Tribune photo. As an openly gay Chairperson gave leadership and visibility to the GaySoc’s fight to exist and be recognised.

McCarthy, Geraldine
Cork lesbian activist and member of Cork Lesbian Line – spoke at the public meeting organised by the Lesbian & Gay Supporters Group 13 April 1988
[Archive item 2.5b; 2.6d]

Mortell, Prof. Michael
As College Registrar in 1980/81 chaired the Joint Board meeting which voted down recognition of the GaySoc. As President 1988/89 chaired Academic Council and Governing Body meetings which recognised the society.

Mortell, Deirdre
Rights Officer UCSSU 1987/88 – helped set up the Lesbian & Gay Supporters Group in November 1987 and organise the public meeting 13 April 1988.

Murphy, Prof. John A.
History lecturer and member Seannad Éireann 1988/89 – his speeches at Academic Council and on Governing Body were vital in swaying his fellow academics to support recognition.

Norris, David
Gay activist & lecturer in English in TCD 1980/81 – was keynote speaker at Philosoph debate 29 Nov 1988 who’s eloquence ensured a large majority in favour of founding a GaySoc.

O’Callaghan, Frank
Arts student 1980/81 - was one of the founders of the GaySoc in 1980 and appeared in the 1981 Sunday Tribune photo. [Archive items 1.1; 1.4c; 1.4d]

O’Connor, William
Social Science student 1988/89 - one of the organisers of the recognition campaign.
UCC LGBT Archives

O'Donnell, Anne
Student 1988/89 - helped set up the Lesbian & Gay Supporters Group in November 1987 and organise the public meeting 13 April 1988.

O'Donoghue, Denis

O'Halloran, Josephine
Law student 1988/89 – as PRO of Lesbian / Gay Society was leading figure in the fight for recognition.

O'Meara, Louise

Quinlan, Mick

Rose, Kieran

Shanahan, Cyril

Sheehan, Dónal
Cork gay activist 1988/89 – provided vital tactical advice for recognition campaign

Staunton, Denis
Actor and debater 1980 – was one of the two speakers against founding of GaySoc in Philosoph debate 29 November 1980.

Steele, Laurie
Gay activist and socialist – mid-1980’s was student in UCC – attempted to keep GaySoc alive through the dark years.

Walsh, Deirdre
Cork lesbian activist – spoke at the public meeting organised by the Lesbian & Gay Supporters Group 13 April 1988
Mick Hannigan succeeded me as SU Gen Sec in July 1981 and was very supportive of the GaySoc. But several of the members from the previous year had moved on. Donnacha had dropped out of college to pursue his dream of being a ballet dancer and became a member of the Irish National Ballet troupe then based in Cork. I’d moved to Dublin. Those still involved found there was a backlash of reaction in tune with the social conservatism gaining hold nationally.

Some time in the mid-80’s there was a referendum on the SU support for the GaySoc. Kieran Rose came to speak at a Philosophy debate in support of the GaySoc. When he was subjected to virulent anti-gay abuse he appealed to the Auditor to prevent the debate being used as a platform for homophobia. When the Auditor refused Kieran led a walkout.

By 1987/88 a new resurgence of student progressives was taking place nationally in the struggle against SPUC / Family Solidarity imposed censorship. In UCC Deirdre Mortell was elected as SU Rights Officer and began immediately to organise across a wide range of issues – including lesbian & gay rights.

In November 1987 she helped revive the GaySoc by starting the UCC Lesbian & Gay Support Group – "formed with the aim of combating the isolation that most people feel gay or lesbian in UCC.”

In an article reviewing the position of college gaysocs in 1988 it stated: "This year’s Rights Officer, Deirdre Mortell, decided to form a gay group without even attempting to seek recognition from the authorities. ‘I decided there was a need for a gay group in UCC, which is quite an antigay college. I felt there was a lot of people out there feeling very isolated.’ Five people now attend the weekly meetings.

Two of the members, including Deirdre and a friend, are straight. The other three want anonymity and are not prepared to even put up a poster in college. ‘This kind of fear reflects on the rest of the student population’ says Deirdre who claims that Cork is ‘the most backward of universities.’"

[Hot Press March 1988] [Archive item 2.12]

On 13 April 1988 the UCC Lesbian & Gay Support Group organised a public meeting. It was addressed by Geraldine McCarthy (Cork Lesbian Line), Deirdre Walsh and John Calnan. The report on the meeting goes on: “Since first meeting last December we have grown steadily in number, strengthened our links with the lesbian and gay groups in the city and in other colleges, and generally attracted a lot of support within college. Next year we hope to be even more active with the help of the new Rights Officer, Sandra Buckley, and the new President, who was himself Rights Officer last year, John Kelleher.

Thanks are due to many people for their help and encouragement throughout the year especially those who attended the open meeting. I would like to add a personal note of thanks to the individuals who make up the group, all of whom join me in paying tribute to Deirdre Mortell, this year’s Rights Officer. She went beyond the call of duty in offering her help, precious time, a willing ear and good humour to make this a very successful year for UCC’s Lesbian & Gay Support Group.

The campaign for recognition – GCN Article Feb 1990

“Cork Pulls It Off!” – was the headline on an article published in Gay Community News in February 1990 (and written by Josephine O’Halloran & Dónal Sheehan?). The article
describes the campaign for recognition from the inside......

When in April 1989 the Governing Body of UCC voted by thirteen to seven to recognise the College’s “Lesbian and gay Support Group”, it became the first constituent college of the National University of Ireland to accept a lesbian and gay group as a legitimate student society. It ought to be incredible that a University would deny freedom of association and discussion to its lesbian and gay students, but the fact is that the first meeting of the group (in October ’88) agreed that there would be no point in even applying for recognition from UCC!

It had been eight years since the last application for recognition had been rejected and, although lesbian and gay groups had existed since then in various forms, none had sought official recognition. During the academic year ‘87/88 a lesbian and gay group had met regularly but its existence was not widely known in the college; a public meeting in April ’88 attended by about twenty people was the high point of its activities. The group did however develop links with lesbian and gay groups in Cork and in Dublin and had a good working relationship with the Students’ Union, particularly with the Welfare [sic] Officer, Deirdre Mortell, who had a serious commitment to the USI policy supporting Lesbian and Gay Student organizations.

In October 1988 a number of new members generated a much more assertive approach when the group re-convened after the summer break. It was decided to take a higher profile, advertise meetings widely and even (it seemed a radical step at the time) hold social events! The group’s meetings were advertised – omitting the venue from the poster. This meant that students had to enquire at the Students’ Union to find out where the meetings would be held. The danger that people would be harassed going into or leaving the meeting had to be balanced against the ordeal of asking a total stranger at the Students’ Union for the venue. Hundreds of flyers advertising the meetings were distributed in October and November but new members were slow to appear.

In early December an information stall was run outside the College Restaurant and on the 15th [December] a public meeting was held. The idea of looking for official recognition took shape around this time. Two prominent liberal academics took the initiative of approaching the group to offer their support for a recognition campaign. Both felt that there was a realistic prospect of success and appreciated the importance of the fundamental issues at stake for the College.

In an historic decision today University College official recognition to the College’s Lesbian and Gay Support Group. This made UCC the first constituent college of the National University of Ireland to officially recognise a lesbian and gay society.

Jubilant at the success of their long campaign for recognition, members of the group today called on other NUI colleges to follow the example of UCC. They were particularly critical of the recent vote by the Academic Council of UCD to refuse recognition to that
The group responded enthusiastically to the prospect of a recognition campaign. An application with the requisite 50 names and fee of £50 was lodged with the clubs and Societies Officer in early February. A representative of the group was allowed to address the Clubs and Societies Guild meeting which voted 9 – 1 in favour of the application with abstentions. The staff representatives played safe by either voting against or abstaining.

Their arguments were along the lines: 'of course we sympathise with the plight of lesbian and gay students, admire your courage in making this application and support what you are trying to do but...the proposed society would only make matters worse. Young people could find their lives ruined by a rash involvement with the group. The interests of students will be best served by leaving this problem to be handled by the college’s existing welfare services.' Contemptible as this sort of behaviour was it was also encouraging since it showed up the intellectual incoherence of the opposition.

In early March the Student Union executive voted unanimously to support the application. This was not a part of the formal process but was an important step in mobilising support for the campaign.

The next step in the process was the “Joint Board”. This has four student and four staff representatives (one of the staff places was vacant) and it was at this stage that the last application was defeated in 1981. A written submission arguing the case for the society was drafted by Josephine O’Halloran and edited by Professor Garrett Barden (a prominent college figure who actively supported the campaign) into a form he thought would be most effective. This was sent with a covering letter seeking their support to all the existing Clubs and Societies.

Josephine also sought a personal meeting with each of the staff representatives and sent them the submission. One was in favour of the application, one refused to see her and the third, Michael Kelleher, the Finance Officer, was against. He was worried about AIDS, of the danger that naive students might be induced to join the society, that the campaign was just ‘attention seeking’; he felt that problems like homosexuality (he compared it to deafness!) were best handled by the college chaplains and the welfare service; besides, think of the effect on the good name of the college! The vote went 4 – 2 in favour. Two staff voted against and one student rep. was absent.

During this period notices were posted and fliers distributed around college to keep people abreast of how the campaign was developing. A “Lesbian and Gay awareness Week” was held in April. The reaction of people around the college was generally supportive and tolerant. Minor incidents of abuse did occur but no serious opposition emerged. [Archive items 3.6.1]
The next step in the recognition process was a vote of the Academic Council, a 70 member body. If the proposal got the support of the AC the group felt they would have won the argument within college. The final vote, at the Governing Body, would include Bishops, County Councillors and other representatives outside College. It seemed unlikely that such a group would support the proposal.

All 70 members of Academic Council were sent a submission and also received a letter from Garrett Barden, who could not attend the meeting himself, arguing the case for recognition. Thirty potential supporters were lobbied personally by him, Prof. John Maguire and John Kelleher, President of the SU.

In 1981 the argument that it could be illegal for the College to support a gay society because male homosexual acts were illegal had been persuasive for many of those who voted against the proposal. To diffuse this argument Garrett Barden got legal opinion on the existing state of the law in the wake of the Norris Verdict. Josephine also spoke to John O'Connor, the influential Dean of the Law faculty, who did not feel the legal situation was altogether clear but supported the recognition proposal.

The discussion of the proposal occupied over an hour of the AC meeting. Of the speakers not previously committed to supporting the group, the greatest impact was made by John A. Murphy’s speech in favour of the motion. The vote was 27 – 7 in favour. The President abstained the Vice-President voted in favour. John A. Murphy made a useful tactical contribution by asking that the members voting on each side be recorded, rather than just the outcome of the vote.

At this stage the group felt that a major victory had been won. The final step to full recognition, the vote of the Governing body, would be the most difficult.

Again the submission was sent to all members and lobbying was concentrated

**THE LESBIAN AND GAY SUPPORT GROUP**

has reached the final stage in its campaign for official recognition as a Society in UCC.

Every representative body in UCC has supported us.

The Students Union Executive 9 - 1 in favour.
The Clubs and Societies Guild 9 - 2 in favour.
Joint Board 4 - 2 in favour.
Academic Council 27 - 7 in favour.

The Governing Body will finally decide the issue on Tuesday 25th April.

The message to Governing Body is clear, the majority of Staff and students in UCC recognise our right to exist as a Society. We hope they will respect this when they vote on Tuesday.

With the exception of Trinity College, Dublin, no other University has recognised Lesbian and Gay Society. Recognition has been consistently refused. We hope that UCC will be the first College to recognise the Rights of Lesbian and Gay Students.

on academic staff and the accessible councillors. John Kelleher of the Students’ Union was the main advocate of recognition at the meeting strongly supported by John A. Murphy.

The discussion was prolonged occupying most of the meeting. Many worries and questions were raised about the proposal but the only fixed opposition came from one councillor whose bizarre contributions served only to discredit the opposition case. The vote went 13 – 7 in favour. Eight members of the Governing Body were absent and the President voted in favour.

The jubilation that followed the vote is understandable. No publicity had been sought for the campaign outside College because it might have served only to stimulate opposition. Now it was finally possible to blow
the trumpet for an important step forward for lesbian and gay students and for personal freedom generally in our universities.

Why the campaign in UCC should have succeeded where others have failed requires some analysis. Getting the issue on the agenda in the first place reflects the energy that went into the group during the first term when the idea of seeking official recognition had not yet arisen. Mick Quinlan’s arrival as a mature student certainly sparked off much of this activity.

The support group began to take a vigorous public profile within college, forcing people to think seriously about the issues and demonstrating to potential supporters within the college that a politically aware group did exist on which a recognition campaign could be based.

The work that had been done in previous years by the Students’ Union and USI provided the groundwork for this mini-explosion of action. Building close links with experienced college politicians like Garrett Barden was the next key step. The campaign could not have succeeded without the tactical skill to identify and lobby effectively the potential support that existed within the College.

The absence of any coherent opposition was the least predictable element in the mix. The fact that several of the main college offices were vacant at the time may have contributed to this. Nothing comparable to the current high profile campaign against the Students’ Union policy on abortion information happened in reaction to the Support Group’s campaign. Even the clerics and other conservatives entrenched in the College’s administrative and academic staff did not lobby against recognition; if they did, they were entirely ineffective.
The auditor is in charge of the general running of the society, chairs committee meetings and acts as the face of the society. They make sure the members of the committee are carrying out their various roles while also liaising with the Societies Guild and the Students Union. They also attend Students Union welfare working group meetings.

Throughout the years, various auditors have pushed the society from strength to strength. They are essentially the beating heart of the society, an overseer to all events and committee work and their accounts of their year are therefore vital to the history of the UCC LGBT. Indeed, there were years when no official auditor was present as the society underwent several temporary collapses. However, for the most part, the previous auditors of the UCC LGBT society have demonstrated characteristics of strength and courage in leading a society that not everyone agrees with, particularly during the early days of the LGBT.

This is a collection of summaries from the previous 21 years of UCC LGBT auditors – their experiences, obstacles, failures and triumphs. Nothing is edited or left unaddressed.
One of the Key People who Sought and Attained Official Recognition

I studied Law in UCC, initially on a BCL which I completed in 1988. During my degree I was worked very hard, spending most of my time in the Boole and prioritising study over having a social life. Sometime towards the end of the academic year in 1988, March or April, I saw a poster advertising a meeting for students interested in setting up a Lesbian and Gay Society. The meeting was actually organised by the Students Union as at the time there was no Lesbian and Gay Society of any kind, official or otherwise, in UCC.

After much thought and several sleepless nights I decided I would attend the meeting. Easier said then done! There was another meeting on that night, not sure what is was but all my friends were attending it and could not understand why I was refusing to go, knowing I didn’t have a lot on at the time they were immediately suspicious. Anyway I managed to lose the friends and found my self sneaking down the corridor terrified that I would encounter someone from my class or my home town.

The meeting was organised by the then Union President, Deirdre Mortell and the Rights Officer. The speakers included John Calnan and Deirdre Walsh, both at the time involved in support groups in the Quay Co-op. There were about 20 to 30 people in attendance and at the end it was proposed that an attempt be made to form a Lesbian and Gay Society in the next academic year.

In September I returned to do a Masters in Law but really my main objective was to get involved in this new society. The Students Union organised the first meeting in October and in a very small room in the Union building we met for the first time.

The group consisted of Mick, William, Emmet, Mary and me. There was another person in attendance, he came to warn us that if we proceeded with the society our lives would be ruined, we would never find employment and our families would disown us. I don’t remember his name and he never came to another meeting. The Rights Officer, Sandra, also attended and offered her support, which proved to be invaluable throughout the campaign.

At that point we agreed set up a society and to campaign for formal recognition. We didn’t really have any idea what that entailed and I think our strategy at the time was to ask for recognition and if it was refused, scream!

The initial stages involved getting the support of a majority of the Clubs and Societies. We wrote to everyone and this proved surprisingly easy and the vote at the Clubs and Societies Guild was overwhelmingly in our favour. We were contacted soon after the first meeting by Professor Garrett Barden, the Dean of Arts. I went to see him and he explained that he felt very strongly about the issue and wanted to help in whatever way he could. At that point he had already sought legal opinion to counter any possible argument from that the University might face legal action if it granted recognition to the society.

He also explained the process which would be involved in gaining recognition and advised on how best to negotiate it. His help was invaluable not only because of his knowledge of the process but also because of his insight into the attitudes of the decision makers. In relation to the Academic Council, we went through the list of members and sought meetings with individuals who were likely to vote either way. I then met with as many of those Academics as possi-
UCC LGBT Archives

ble and presented our case to them. That basically meant that we didn’t waste our limited resources on lobbying individuals who were either on our side anyway or would not be swayed by our argument.

The 27 – 7 vote at Academic Council was a huge victory for us and due mainly to the support we received from Garrett Barden. At that stage however we knew the most difficult stage was still to come. The Governing Body was much more difficult to predict. Again Garrett Barden was able to give us some guidance on where to focus our efforts. We wrote to every member of the Governing Body but not many were willing to meet with us so the vote this time was much more difficult to predict and was likely to go very close.

The Governing Body meeting was held in April. The five members of the group and various friends and supporters met in the Student union Office and waited for the phone to ring. Eventually the call came informing us that the Governing Body had voted 13 to 7 in favour of recognition. We got maximum coverage for the decision by sending out press releases and going on local radio. We had a huge party that night in Loafers. A great night was had by all!

The following year we got funding, had our own posters printed, acquired lots of new members, organised a series of activities for Gay Pride, were presented to President Mary Robinson when she visited the University and generally had a fantastic time. I never did finish my Masters!

It’s hard to believe it was 21 years ago. It was an amazing experience. The five of us worked well together as a team and we were fortunate to be helped by so many wonderful supporters. Not just classmates and friends in other clubs and societies but also the Students Union, in particular the Rights Officer Sandra and the President John Kelleher.

In the wider community, Arthur Leahy in the Quay Co-op and the late Donal Sheehan provided a lot of practical support.

We had a lot of support amongst the academic staff. Professor Garrett Barden proved to be our most significant ally and throughout the process he gave freely of his time and expertise. I am sure that without his input it would have taken several years to secure recognition. Reflecting on the experience now, I have no regrets. I left UCC without a Masters in Law but much better equipped to engage with the world. I’m really proud of what we did in 1989 and of what the subsequent membership has achieved in the last 21 years.

Kathrine O’Donnell 1990-91

I was active from 91-95 and organised a series of lunchtime talks in conjunction with other student societies such as the Irish-speaking society and the Film soc. We informally called ourselves the Queer Soc. and Fan Club -this is how we advertised ourselves on our posters and for our meetings.

We were asked to write up our year’s activities annually and we did this in a notebook which was held by the Societies Guild and passed on to the following year’s group.

Unfortunately we were unable to locate this notebook - which means we could not include many summaries which were written at the time in this edition- future committees will continue to search for it!
- Michelle McCarthy March 2010
1991/2 Grainne Coughlan - from Mallow - did a masters degree in computers. Later lived in Dublin
1992/3 Colm O'Callaghan - composer and works in Musical Theatre in Dublin
1993/4 John (Crowley?)

After years of a break the Society was re-established in 2001 by Aisling O'Loughlin (RIP) it went under the name of LGB Society - details of her work are included below.

Anna Mac Carthy 2002-2003

Life on the U.C.C. campus was a very different prospect for gay students only a few short years ago. The active nature of the society came in cycles: good years followed inactive or non-existent periods—any momentum achieved was never sustained. There was a palpable sense of isolation among gay students.

When I started college in 2000 I was a seventeen-year-old lesbian to whom 'coming out' was never an option. There was no visible gay presence in U.C.C. official or unofficial. There was a listing for a 'Gay and Lesbian Support Society' however a sentence in a Students' Union booklet was the extent of it. A couple of students led by the determined and inspiring Aisling O'Loughlin attempted to get things changed. Aisling forged ahead with her 'never accepting the limitations' attitude. She succeeded in establishing an Internet message board for the society, one of the first societies to have such a resource in fact. This facility helped many new and very apprehensive students to get in touch with the society and become involved while still retaining their anonymity.

In spite of the passion and dedication of Aisling and others after her, the society never seemed to reach anything near its potential. This was possibly due to a lack of direction but also, like many young gay people at the time unaware of the services and support available to them in the wider community and on campus, they had little or no knowledge of the history of achievement and activities that existed before them. The students had no experience of a gay society let alone running one and were given little support as the society was viewed with suspicion, unease and good old fashioned prejudice from some quarters.

By the end of my second year at college the Society had fallen apart and meetings had stopped. Mary Nugent and I feared L.G.B. students were to lose an invaluable resource. I was determined that the following year would be the L.G.B.'s year. Projects were planned throughout the summer and come the new academic year the first meeting attracted a record number of new members. Amongst them were people who were to pitch-in and help during the year and beyond. Things were to change and permanence was finally realised. However students were still terrified of being seen with or even near openly gay students, of which there were only a handful. Ironically, I myself was not out at the time either!

With the aim of raising funds and society spirit, I decided that a play would be staged at the Granary Theatre. Apart from 'Dramat' and 'An Chulacht' the idea of another society staging a play was pretty unheard of. Initially I was unsure whether it would be permitted let alone
possible! Yet J.P. Quinn, Societies Guild President gave us tremendous support and encouragement throughout that year. With the help of the remarkable Jo McNamara, and the wholehearted support of the Grany and Guild, 'Juliet' was performed in early November just four weeks after starting production. Jo and I dedicated ourselves to the time consuming project. It was not a great piece of theatre by any stretch of the imagination but the very fact it ran at all was nothing short of a miracle. Among our many problems was being unable to get anyone to act! Most of our small number of gay students were not out, or could not be out to such an extent publicly. With time running out but blind determination still intact we roped in our straight classmates who were aghast at our shortage of willing actors. Over half our cast comprised of friends, some of whom attracted disapproval from family for ‘associating with such a production’. Hearing Cathal Kerrigan speak about the founding of the Society with the help of straight Students’ Union friends reminded me of the selflessness of my friends at the time. To those wonderful people I remain eternally grateful.

Despite being without a leading actor two weeks before opening night we somehow managed to stage the show! As the week of the run approached the idea of a ‘gay play’ captured the interest and imagination of many people. Posters were stolen from the notice boards, not in homophobic incidents but for keepsakes! The Gerry Ryan Show sought an interview (which unfortunately had to be declined as there was no one ‘out’ to be able to give it!) The Mirror Newspaper also found the subject of a lesbian ‘Romeo and Juliet’ of great interest for their readers. The theatre was full almost every night and the finances of the Society were plentiful for the year ahead. While all of this was important I believe the real impact of 'Juliet' can be summed up by this anecdote. The week after the show one of the actors was given a card for the cast by a young girl in the audience who thanked them for making her feel proud to be gay.

The next big event that year was the securing of U.C.C. as host institution of the Union of Students in Ireland L.G.B. Standing Conference 2003. At this event we liaised with other societies from across the country and learned more about the issues facing gay students on a national level. The conference formed the focal point of 'Pride Week', the first to be held in U.C.C. in many years. Some gay students went ‘underground’ for that week: anxious at the attention it may have indirectly drawn upon them. Numbers at events were very small: people were comfortable at going to weekly meetings unnoticed but were afraid of being publicly gay, so much so that the Society came under criticism for being ‘too out and proud’. This attitude, I am glad to say no longer seems to exist.

The Society certainly made its presence felt on campus that year. Over half of the U.C.C. Students' Union delegation to National Congress in Killarney was made up of L.G.B. Society representatives. The position of National L.G.B. Rights Officer was under threat at Congress yet again. The strong position of the Society on campus ensured such numbers could attend and consequently vote in our best interests at National Congress.

Our labours were rewarded at the Clubs and Societies Ball at the end of the year. A table of gay students representing the Society at such a formal social event was significant but winning the awards ensured the entire room knew just which society we were! The Society was honoured in winning 'Most Improved Society'. I was awarded the 'Bene Merenti-Society Person of the Year Award' and 'Juliet' was nominated in the 'Best Event' category.
It may seem trite to say that the simple matter of visibility and the exposure of a wider audience to so many gay characters in public life and the media (both positive and negative) has had a huge impact on people’s attitudes. Students then, existed in a virtual ‘gay desert’ both on campus and in the wider world. Things are different now; students are coming out in second level, have gay friends before coming to college and most important of all, have the confidence to be ‘out’ without giving it a second thought. While circumstances may not have changed to that extent for all, the Society is there to help everyone be proud of who they are. Visibility and ‘strength in numbers’ plays a vital part in this.

Gay rights have come in leaps and bounds over recent years-long may it continue. Some may suggest that the raison d’etre of the Society no longer exists with changing times, but I believe that a representative body on campus, a resource service, a rights watchdog and a social space are all necessities on a modern University campus for its L.G.B.T. students. My time at U.C.C was life altering and thoroughly enjoyable. The wonderful friends I made through the Society have become my ‘gay family’ and I hope many years from now that will remain so.

Tony Murphy 2003-2004

The LGBT Society, if stripped of every other function and role, of which there are many, performs the crucial and unique purpose of being a doorway. This may sound odd, but bear with me. For anyone, like myself, who came to college closeted, feeling nervous and alone, the first and most daunting step in joining the LGBT was that doorway, on the other side of which lay the wondrous and unknown world of the gays. Entering meant, maybe, finally admitting to yourself the reason you were there, it probably meant entering a room full of generally loud people you didn’t even know, and it meant outing yourself to strangers, both within the room and you were sure whoever happened to be wandering past as well. So the first time many go to an LGBT meeting the doorway tends to take on the appearance of some unfathomable dread portal; entry into which is usually coupled with some combination of extreme nervousness, heavy sweating or lots of furtive glances, if not all three together.

Several weeks, however, and the nervousness begins to fade, gradually the glances become less furtive, and eventually, probably without realising it, the doorway becomes just another doorway. The LGBT, for many of us, was the first place we met other people who we connected to and who understood a large part of our lives that had only ever been a source of isolation before, the place that many of us felt comfortable for the first time about that part of our lives, and for many of us it was the first place that we felt genuinely proud of being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. For me, the transformation of that doorway is the best symbol of this, and that is why I say it. I’m also conscious however, that I would like to start this article off with something positive.

My involvement in the LGB, as it was then called, began at the start of first year. I came to UCC feeling isolated and nervous, but determined to join the soc. My first year was shaped immensely by Anna and the tremendous work she did, and I became increasingly involved throughout the year, helping out during Rainbow Week and the Standing Confer-
ence. By the end of the year I decided that I wanted to become a member of the following year's committee. For a number of reasons, I eventually decided to run for vice-auditor, which I was elected to.

Problems began to emerge fairly quickly. Our newly elected auditor, who was one of my, then, close friends, failed to work well the rest of the committee; refusing to discuss plans or delegate work, becoming increasingly dismissive and even becoming verbally abusive towards the rest of us.

This continued until around November, when it eventually came to a head and, coupled with some other pretty serious reasons, they were asked to leave the committee. I filled the gap and, under some pretty crappy circumstances, became auditor. This entire incident was the source of much controversy, ended several friendships and the version of events changes depending on who tells it, some versions still pointing to me as a Machiavellian bastard who manufactured lies to discredit and remove the above person. All I can say is that this is not true, the above is a simplified version of events, but it is honest. My biggest regret from that time was that I didn’t talk to the above person sooner, as a fellow committee member and as, admittedly decreasingly, a friend. My failure to do so is, I believe, my main responsibility for what happened. The entire experience left me feeling bitter and angry. In the second term I, and several other committee members, used the society to officially discredit the above person. It was petty and stupid and I still regret it immensely. I offered my resignation, once I realised what a mistake we had made, but was asked to stay on by the society, with a level of support that I greatly appreciated. However, the rest of the year was, unsurprisingly, somewhat subdued.

I imagine the year continues to be remembered mostly as a result of these reasons, but it was certainly not all negative. We had quite a few good meetings and a large membership, who I hope gained benefit from the society that year. I was most happy when, at the end of the year, we had a healthily contested AGM. In fact, some of our new members that year are still heavily involved in the society. It was also the first year that the soc ran its blood ban protest, garnering attention from the media on a national level. Personally, it marked the end of my active involvement in the soc, but it also led to several deeper friendships.

It is, however, the year that I suppose should best be remembered more for things not to do, though I wish this wasn’t the case. Among others, for me it showed that committees and friendships should be separate and that personal is rarely, if ever, the same as important. I regret both are lessons that I did not learn sooner.
Michael Waldron 2004-2005

It was with mixed feelings that I took on the role of Auditor of UCC LGBT way back in distant 2004. The society had just weathered a ‘slightly’ turbulent year and I faced a committee that I didn’t really know, but it was a society that meant a lot to me and which formed a large part of my college experience! As such I had visions of moving the society in a new direction but I had no idea then what the year could possibly have in store.

My year in charge of the society began shortly after election and during the summer of 2004 a former auditor and I attempted to put on a play, The Laramie Project, at The Granary Theatre. The project had all the hallmarks of being a great venture for the society: the funding was in place, the date (August Bank Holiday) was locked in with the theatre and it was garnering great interest from the Cork Pride 2004 committee (of which I was a member). Alas the timing was wrong for casting the piece and it fell through. Yet it was an important formative event for me as it was my first taste of what could be achieved by the society firsthand, and also how difficult it would be to keep things moving. Partly because of my inexperience, and partly due to poor timing, my desire to produce a play during my term as Auditor never materialised.

Standout events for the society’s year were our trip to Fota On Ice, the hosting of USI LGBT Pink Training by UCC, and the hugely successful UCC Rainbow Week which was admirably pulled off by all who worked on it and demonstrated again what the society was capable of. My memories here, however, focus on the unusual or unremembered moments, like the above play.

A special night during Rainbow Week, for instance, involved me, three former Auditors and a yet-to-be-elected Auditor all gathered together for the first time. The small things like running up to the Accommodations Office to print posters. A Pub Crawl that seemed sure to fail when less than ten people turned up ended up being one of my favourite nights with the society! It was just me and a few of the society members enjoying ourselves during a night on the town and it really worked much better than if we had had a larger crowd. Another standout moment for me was our Games Night, in which we (oddly enough) played games! Our New Members Rep pulled off a fun night that successfully, and necessarily, broke the ice and allowed everyone to let their hair down, and in my case allowed me to embarrass myself as per usual!

The 2004-2005 college year turned out to be a great one for UCC LGBT. The committee began as a ragtag bunch of people pulled together (some by proxy!) by the powers of democracy (with just a pinch of popularity contest). Early on we lost two committee members from our ranks but the society still grew and changed over the year, most notably with a change of name to include Transgender in its’ mission. We certainly had our ups and downs, our differences of opinion, but for the most part we managed to keep afloat. I personally set out to create a more relaxed and fun tone for the society and in so doing to make it the best year for the society. Whether that was achieved or not I leave to others to decide. I obviously have my regrets for what was not achieved but mostly I look fondly, if exhaustedly, at the year and I am glad that the society continued to grow and to change into
The year 2005-2006 of the LGBT Soc for me was one of warm memories, high drama, stress, awards and getting the chance to work with some of the nicest people you could imagine. Being elected Auditor was a great privilege, but having Sonya, Ger and Maeve on the team made me realise we were going to have a great year. Thanks to the four of us carrying on from the previous year (Mike’s: the first in a while that ran a full term) we could really hit the ground running. We also wanted to win a few awards at the end of the year, particularly the PR award.

The first thing we knew was that it was the 25th year since the founding of ‘GaySoc’ we wanted to do something to mark the anniversary.

Maeve, having a dramatic flair, was gun-hoe on producing/directing a play (Caryl Churchill’s Cloud 9). A huge amount of soc members and friends got involved in all capacities - acting, making costumes, working back stage, rigging lighting and other vital jobs too numerous to mention. The show was a great success, drawing in a full-house on several nights.

Sonya as Vice-Auditor was to lead the two big special projects for the year, the Jubilee and Rainbow Week.

Over the summer we started our events plan for the year, bought the rights for the play ‘Cloud 9’, and tried to decide on what direction we wanted the Soc to go in.

We organised a joint debate with the Philosoph with the same theme that spurred members of that society to start the LGBT back in 1981. We met up with Cathal Kerrigan (Founder of Gay Soc) who had a huge amount of the history of the society written up which we put online.

We organised a Mystery Weekend away that Ger and Maeve somehow managed to keep out of the papers! During the weekend we had a classy cocktail evening, a barbecue and a Pirate extravaganza, which were thoroughly enjoyed (if not remembered...) by all.

We tried to organise at least two meetings a week with a mix of socials and educational events.

The year was a good one for getting to know other societies and we tried to get involved with inter-society events as much as we could.

That year we also got Peter elected Communications Officer, Sonya elected Welfare of the SU, and myself elected Vice-President of the Guild.

Towards the end of the year we decided to apply for some of the Guild awards. We were short listed for four awards, best society, best website, best PR, and best event. We ended up winning a Bene for Sonya, Society person of the year for myself, Best PR for the Soc/Maeve, Best Society (Large), and Best Event for Rainbow Week. At the end of the year Sonya and myself got HLM's from the society.

That year was definitely a great one for the society we increased the number of members, had great fun, raised the profile of the society and got a bit of recognition for the society. Overall I think we did well; obviously there were things in hindsight we would have done differently but I think everyone who was involved that year is glad they were.

Diarmuid, Sonya, Maeve and Ger Committee 05/06
I became auditor of UCC LGBT society in November 2006. Becoming auditor of a society midway through the year is a tough task to take on, but it was one I relished. In hindsight, I was too young, and too inexperienced to be the best auditor the society could have, but I did my best to be the best I could be at the time, and I'm immensely proud of what I and the rest of the committee achieved that year. When I became auditor, because of the situation the society found itself in, it felt like there was little choice but to step up. So I found myself auditor of a very active and busy society in my first year, with an enthusiastic committee to help me do so.

The committee that year comprised of

Ciaran Evans – Recording Secretary
Sarah Byrne – Social Secretary
Sam Whelan-Curtain
Jill O’ Donovan – Campaigns Officer
James O’ Regan – Membership Development Officer
David Clarke – First Year Rep

With Ifa O’ Riordan and Stephen Spillane sitting on the committee at the start of the year as Auditor and Finance Officer respectively.

Each committee member gave of themselves what they could – all can be proud to have called themselves officers of the LGBT society.

We created an ex officio position on the committee to help preserve continuity from year to year for the society. We found that the lack of committee experience amongst us worked against us to a degree.

On top of having events every week which included table quizzes, guest speakers, parties, card nights etc we also attended and organised a number of big events:

That year we sent a delegation of 24 to USI Pink training which was the biggest ever at the time.

We collected over 1000 signatures for our Blood Ban campaign.

We collected over 500 signatures in support of the KAL case which was going through the High Court at the time.
UCC LGBT Archives

We held a massive Rainbow Week celebration featuring speakers from all over the UK and Ireland. For this we also organised the first transgender information session featuring a then-fledgling organisation called TENI – Transgender Equality Network Ireland. We held a mystery weekend in a house in the middle of Kerry – I didn’t go myself but a great time was had by all accounts.

We had a presence at National events like the blood ban sleep-out outside the Department of Health, USI LGBT Standing Conference, We also marched in Cork’s first ever gay pride parade, a tradition that has continued every year. The LGBT library was repopulated and catalogued. We held the first (and so far, only) LGBT Ball in the Oriel House

Nothing really major happened while I was auditor for the short time I was. We hosted USI Pink Training, which was probably the biggest event. I think it was the first time we had a straight committee member Shirley Sommers as campaigns officer.

This may be the case in recent years but it appears many of the people involved in the 80s and 90s didn’t identify as L, G, B or T

Michelle McCarthy 2010

We had a mixed programme of events throughout the year, aiming for a balance between lighthearted social events and more serious events such as workshops, awareness campaigns etc.

- Social events included the likes of table quizzes, cartoon nights and socials.
- We had guest speakers such as Dave Roche of the SGMHP to raise awareness of LGBT mental health issues, etc. We also had a workshop by Corina Buckley of TENI during rainbow week.
- Pink training was held in Cork in November of this year, so the LGBT was very involved in helping USI with this.
- Our campaigns officer ensured many staple LGBT campaigns continued this year, such as the MSM blood ban and World Aids Day. We also initiated a Civil Partnership campaign, complete with simulated ceremony in the amphitheatre
- Rainbow week took place in Jan/Feb, with the Civil Partnership campaign as well as many social events, including the annual Goscars.

Kevin Molloy 08-09

We started our tenure with the LGBT society at a low point. The past year had seen much infighting within the society committee leading to the resignation of the auditor. Society membership was at a very low point.

What the committee of 2008/09 wanted to achieve was a rebirth of the society. The election didn’t see a full committee elected but we were able to achieve that at our first EGM. For our redesigning efforts I was blessed with a committee of incredibly hard working and dedicated individuals. We changed the logo, restarted the buddy system and came up with fun and imaginative weekly events. I do not have time to talk about all the events that we held but two that particularly stick in my mind are Rainbow Week and the LGBT Human Rights Award.

Rainbow week was a great success. The opening ceremony with David Norris, to the talk with Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan were great hits. Participation at events was quite high and we offered a wide number event to suit different people. The other event that I loved and the first of its kind in UCC was the LGBT Human Rights Award. Our first attempt at securing Judy Sheppard failed due to events outside our control but the speaker who took her place, Ailbhe Smyth proved a hit. I hope that this event will continue on for years to come.
I believe that the society had a very successful year 2008/09. We were able to rebuild our membership and restore our reputation. For me it was a very rewarding year. I made a lot of friends and the committee that I worked with were really talented and devoted people. I and the society owe them a thanks for all of there work. As I have said the aim for the society was to rebuild and I hope that is what we achieved. From what I hear this year has been even more successful than the last.

Tony Rodgers 09-Jan 10 Replaced by Michelle McCarthy

While I was auditor we had the first UCC’s Got Talent with International Development and raised over 2,000 euro!!!

We held 2 Marriage equality fundraisers in loafers and raised over 1000. Members of the committee also initiated a archives project.*ta-da*

We held Trans events with TENI which I really wanted to do but include the “T” element more

Unfortunately I had to leave the society before Mr Gay UCC could be planned

and what not...

Pink training had around 26 participants which was almost twice as much as the prior year.

We flyeried all first years packs with over 3,000 leaflets at the start of the year.

Our MDO got very involved in getting more members which lead to one of the most vibrant buddy systems we’ve had in a while.

As soon as I was elected we were straight into Rainbow Week-which Padraig had responsibility for. We had 3 events a day, collecting 600 signatures for full marriage rights, had celebrity Anna Nolan down to launch the week, a talk by trans activist Dr Lydia Foy a play “Death & Dancing” with Dramat, the first ever UV party in conjunction with Freakscene as well as an Anne Summers Party, Face Painting, a gladiator dual (which I still have scars from!) a talk for straight friends and family on how to support someone coming out

and we managed to get our stickers all over campus.

R&G week saw us running a “Rainbow Treasure Hunt” which was a roaring success. We launched a survey to discover how better to facilitate our members. We had two events almost every week, mixing social with educational and presented our second annual Human Rights Award to Amnesty International Ireland’s Colm O’Gorman. We helped out Atheist ASociety and Labour in running secular Educateon weekend highlighting that LGBandT teachers in religious schools currently have no protection under the Equal Status Act.

We sent a delegation to USI Equality Standing Conference which resulted in 3 of out motions raised being passed as USI LGBT mandates.

We developed a higher profile than previously and have maintained good relations with other societies which was an aim of ours this year. At the end of the year both myself and Padraig received society achievement awards and Padraig was elected SU Welfare Officer. We were also nominated for several awards including best religious & social society, best campaign (buddy system), Best collaborative event (UCCs Got Talent) and Best Event (UCCs Got Talent).

Most of all it was a year where we all pulled together and the results were amazing with more than one person comming that involvement changed their lives-I know it did mine (I know-cheesy!)
A Huge thanks to everyone past and present who made this venture possible!

This is a project we intend to continue so if anyone has any more material or information please email in to lgbt@uccsocieties.ie

The full archive can be viewed in the special collections in the basement of the Boole library

and will be online in portions soon on www.ucclgbt.com
UCC LGBT [GaySoc] – 21st Anniversary of Recognition
C Kerrigan speech – 24 March 2010

UCC LGBT Society
21st Anniversary of recognition

Speech by Cathal Kerrigan

President Murphy, Auditor, current & past officers and members of the society, colleagues & friends -

It is a great honour for me to speak to you as we celebrate the 21st anniversary of the recognition of the society and also the 30th anniversary of its founding.

It is a great pleasure for me to see the society putting so much time and energy into looking at its history. It is easy to take things for granted and requires an act of imagination to appreciate that - as William Blake put it in one of his ‘proverbs of Hell’ – “what is now proved was only once imagined”. When we founded the society thirty years ago we only dreamed of a possible future – and you today embody that dream.

I was born in Cork in 1955 and thinking about how to convey to you what being a young gay man was like here in the ‘70s and early ‘80s – it is indeed like visiting a foreign country: things were done so differently!

Growing up in Cork in the 50s and 60s was joyful for me – a safe, secure though controlling society. All that changed in 1971 when at the age of sixteen I put a name on the growing awareness that I was different to my (school) friends: homosexual.

The only association the word had for me was as a bad taste joke in a TV comedy of the time called “Are You Being Served?” Luckily for me 1974 witnessed the founding of the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) in Dublin. By this time I still had not met another gay person and this news electrified me! I immediately made contact and through them was put in touch with local gays.

As my confidence grew I decided to tell my family about being gay. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm ran away with me and when the whole family – my parents, myself as eldest together with my two sisters and brother - sat down to dinner one evening I literally said: “I have something to tell you – I’m gay”. Needless to say this caused consternation and tension.

In 1975 we set up a branch of IGRM in Cork; after some fitful stops and starts we were able to open a disco/club at 4 McCurtain Street. We invited the Garda in from the station across the road to reassure them there were no drugs or fornication on the premises! But once word spread that the place wouldn’t be raided by the guards or burned down by an angry mob, it was a roaring success and began the transformation of gay life in Cork.

In 1977, I came to UCC to study Arts. In July 1979 we formed a social gay group in UCC. At our third meeting we were joined by a couple who had recently moved to Cork - Laurie Steele & Arthur Leahy - They shook us up by declaring Cork gays deserved more from college than a knitting circle! A fortnight later I joined Arthur & Laurie in setting up the Cork Gay Collective which subsequently became the Cork Lesbian & Gay Collective.

In 1980, I was elected President of the Students Union at UCC. I initiated the Graduate’s Ball which was first held that September; I attended with my then lover, Mairtin Mac an
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Ghoill. At the SU executive meeting the following Tuesday I faced a vote of no confidence for “having brought the SU into disrepute”.

When this was debated it appeared that my behaviour at the Grad Ball was the issue. Luckily some of the executive were not phased by the prejudice of the movers of the motion and queried what exactly they were talking about. Was it my orientation? Of course it couldn’t be – didn’t we have a pro-gay policy? Was it my dancing with my lover – was this lascivious? Of course not – it differed from others on the dance floor only in that my partner was another male. Then one of the advocates of the motion exploded: “but he was wearing the chain of office!” At this point we collapsed into laughter and the motion fell.

It was against this background that the Philosoph Debate of 29 November 1980 took place “that this house supports the establishment of a GaySoc by the Students Union” I spoke to move the motion. The opposers were Denis Staunton – who put forward a coherent intellectual argument based on not privileging minority interests – and Pat McCarthy who argued against from the religious perspective. David Norris was the final speaker – a sparkling performer he had the audience eating out of his hand.

The motion was passed overwhelmingly. I immediately stood up to say that anyone interested in acting on the motion and founding a GaySoc there & then, should follow me to my office. About twenty people did so and the GaySoc was set up that night.

During the next three months the GaySoc was active and very visible on campus. As we already had SU support for recognition of the society it was decided that we should put it on the agenda of the Joint Board – but as students had only 3 members to the 4 from university administration, we failed in our efforts get them to approve the proposal to recognise the society.

Despite this I put it on the agenda for the next Governing Body meeting. The then University President – Tadhg Carey - tried not to let the motion before the GB get on the floor - daring anyone to second my motion. I can remember him saying things like “I’m not going to be responsible for spending taxpayers’ money and providing space in College for promoting a criminal element among the students”.

I proposed the motion and there was a long silence. Then Professor Brendan O’Mahony of the Philosophy Department elected as a member by the academic staff, seconded the motion and I saw Carey going apoplectic in the Chair because now “this filthy thing” would have to be discussed by bishops and County Councillors – who proceeded to vote against the motion.

After the Governing Body decision I was contacted by a journalist from the Sunday Tribune who wanted to do a story about it. She came to my office with a photographer and ten members of the GaySoc agreed to be in the picture with me. It was published together with a piece headed Gays accuse UCC on 15 Feb 1981.

The interesting thing is that over half the people in that photo were not themselves lesbian or gay. A year later I was living in Dublin but kept in touch on my visits back to Cork. In spring 1982 I met up with a couple of the women who’d appeared in the photo and they berated me for not warning them of what they were letting themselves in for. They said that the reality of such a photo being seen by their extended family, neighbours, etc. had only hit home over time. No one would believe their declaration of their heterosexuality; even a year later they were being subjected to anti-gay abuse in college and outside.

In 1985 Laurie Steele came to study in UCC and found that the GaySoc had disappeared. So he set it back up but found he got little real support. In February 1988 that changed when the then UCCSU Rights Officer, Deirdre Mortell, initiated a process which ended in the
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recognition of the society in April 1989. Josephine O'Halloran was one of the society team that won recognition and she is here tonight to tell us about that struggle.

Looking back thirty years later, recalling that conversation only serves for me to bring home forcefully how much courage all those involved in founding the GaySoc displayed. It also shows me that while only an excluded group itself can win their rights, it cannot be done without the support of others. And for me this solidarity is a continuing reciprocal obligation – we in the LGBT community today should likewise act in solidarity with others who are fighting for their rights.

A society archive is the communal memory and is a vital resource. It can be used for individual nostalgia but more vitally it gives the group an awareness of where they come from. And it is only by having a perspective on our past - our history - that we can determine where we should be going and how best to get there.

All archives are at their root fragile – often depending on accident and luck for preservation of material – as the story of my own involvement with this archive illustrates. In spring 2005 I spoke at a society event. On that night I brought along the few bits and pieces I had and noted what a pity it was that there seemed to be no trace of further material. However, this was to lead to developments which led to:
- the Philosoph minute book 1979-86 turning up by way of an anonymous donation;
- Josephine having the society files from her time and they formed the bulk of the subsequent donation to the Irish Queer Archive; and
- My tracking down the Sunday Tribune photo mentioned above.

Ultimately, the final and true value of an archive is the use made of it. I believe it should not be just a one-way exchange where you are instructed by your past; but rather a continuing dialogue in which your awareness of our history helps shape the future.

As Blake put it in another of his pithy ‘proverbs of Hell’ - The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction. And I have experienced this directly in the past couple of years. Two years ago in discussion with a then member of the society and same-sex marriage came up. He commented that I didn’t appear to be very supportive. I commented that as I was never a fan of marriage in the first place, I didn’t see the need for same-sex marriage.

He then pointed out that I had earlier talked about the founding of GLEN in 1988 and that I had explained that many thought we in GLEN were being far too ambitious seeking equality given the dire social and political circumstances of the time. But I had gone on to say that we won people over by explaining that one can’t be a little equal. We would be undermining our own case and credibility if we were prepared to accept a reformed but still discriminating law.

I had to concede he was – and still is – totally right. And so I became a supporter of same-sex marriage. Though I do still reserve the right – once same-sex marriage is on the statute book – to advocate the total abolition of marriage itself.

Back in 1981 the Cork Gay Collective organized the first ever National Gay Conference which was held in Connolly Hall; this was an ambitious endeavour. It brought together a wide range of people with many differing and sometimes conflicting views of how progress could be made for LGBT people in Ireland. The papers from the workshops at this conference basically set out the agenda for gay activism for the next two decades.

I think we have reached a point in our history where we need such a conference again. It will not make the disagreements disappear but it may help us resolve some of the conflicts by re-discovering our common ground.
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So tonight I want to take advantage of your kind attention to propose that you should organise a National LGBT Conference. The network of LGBT societies gives you a solid base for doing this. As young LGBT people you bring little of the baggage we older members of the community inevitable do. Most importantly it is your future – carpe diem!

A hundred years ago Emma Goldman famously wrote – “if I can’t dance then I don’t want to be part of your revolution”. In the late ‘80s I realised that my activism was not a sacrifice but the opposite − I had gotten to know most of my friends and lovers through that activism; in fact, it is my way of being gay – of being.

It is my hope that your involvement with the society is likewise a source of joy and fulfilment; and that you too get to dance. I expect great things of you. I look forward if I’m lucky enough to be alive in twenty years time to returning to celebrate your achievements!

I am personally pleased and very honoured to be associated with these events and publication. But much more than that I am reassured by the use you are making of the archive - that it will serve its most valuable function – to inform future activities and inspire further achievements.

Thank you.

ENDS