

Chapter 12

Hibernia: voices of dissent, 1968–80

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For at least the last decade of its existence, spanning the 1970s, *Hibernia* had a strong presence in Irish media as an independent, frequently dissenting voice. It provided a platform for a wider range of opinion than was represented in daily and weekly newspapers and in broadcasting. It was a springboard for young graduates into significant careers in journalism. It is often fondly remembered in anecdote but it has not been the subject of extended analysis or even of a personal memoir that offers a broader appraisal or account of its place in Irish media and society.¹ In his history of Irish media, John Horgan offers a packed paragraph that recounts:

[John] Mulcahy ... turned it into a lively, irreverent and often well-informed magazine which specialised in an eclectic but highly marketable mix of political gossip and features, book reviews, and authoritative business and financial journalism. Its tone was crusading and investigative: by 1973 it was already carrying articles alleging conflicts of interest and possible corruption in relation to the activities of local politicians in the Greater Dublin area – an issue which resurfaced with dramatic effect, at the end of the 1990s.²

There are passing references in other works of history and reference, such as MacRedmond's *Modern Irish Lives*, which refers to its 'searching liberal critique of Irish society' and Morash's history of media, which describes *Hibernia* as 'robustly critical ... [and] ... in some respects [setting] the agenda for the magazines that would follow it in the 1980s'.³

Journalists' books covering the 1960s and 1970s, including those by Tim Pat Coogan, T. Ryle Dwyer, and Emily O'Reilly referenced *Hibernia* for a detail or an assessment.⁴ But in his account of the 'destruction of Dublin', journalist Frank McDonald leaned heavily on *Hibernia's* coverage of planning and development, frequently taking the magazine's reporting as fully factual or confirming its judgements as valid; he repeatedly uses phrases

¹ The programme for the Ranelagh Arts Festival, introducing an event featuring John Mulcahy, referred to him as the former editor of the 'much loved' *Hibernia*.

² J. Horgan, *Irish media: a critical history since 1922* (London, 2001), p. 96.

³ L. MacRedmond, *Modern Irish Lives* (Dublin, 1996), p. 220; C. Morash, *A history of the media in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 190.

⁴ T.P. Coogan, *Disillusioned decades: Ireland 1966–87* (Dublin, 1987); T. Ryle Dwyer, *Charlie – the political biography of Charles J. Haughey* (Dublin, 1987); E. O'Reilly, *Masterminds of the right* (Dublin, 1992).

like ‘as *Hibernia* reported’, and ‘as *Hibernia* noted’ in introducing the magazine’s comments.⁵ Journalists of more recent times have largely forgotten *Hibernia*; it was conspicuously absent, for example, in a TV3 series on investigative journalism, ‘Print and Be Damned’, presented in July 2013 by Donal McIntyre.

Historian Diarmuid Ferriter was the first to give *Hibernia* a central role as a historical source when he drew heavily on the magazine for factual information and comment in his analysis of the 1970s. Ferriter makes extensive use of government archives and personal papers of key figures but, in assessing events and trends, he relies heavily on *Hibernia* for which he expresses strong admiration as ‘high-quality’, ‘crusading’, and providing ‘in-depth coverage’, and ‘asking new and difficult questions, providing a platform for talented journalists and critics, interrogating culture and tradition’. The citations in the text are presented in terms of ‘*Hibernia* reported’, ‘*Hibernia* argued’, but also ‘it was suggested in *Hibernia*’ and ‘a contributor to *Hibernia* suggested’. Thus, what appeared in the publication’s pages is taken as indication of significant information and ideas circulating in Irish society at the time.⁶

What Ferriter seems to appreciate particularly in *Hibernia* is the way it confronted public figures and institutions with their stated aims. In his view, a history of the publication deserves to be written. It has not been the subject of a full thesis or other academic analysis, nor is this chapter a fulfilment of Ferriter’s wish.⁷ Having previously written very brief accounts of the magazine the present author draws on his own and several former colleagues’ memories of working in *Hibernia* and on archival research to present a view of this publication’s distinctive contribution to the history of Irish twentieth century periodicals.⁸

Compared with its standing in the 1970s, *Hibernia* had a relatively low-profile, though much longer, existence as a Catholic publication, established in 1937 with the support of the Catholic lay order, the Knights of St Columbanus, which ‘subsidised *Hibernia* through its special Magazine Committee’.⁹ It was based for some time in an office beside the Knights’ headquarters in Ely Place, Dublin. *Hibernia* ‘had become the official publication of the Order by 1938 when the *Columban* magazine was discontinued’.¹⁰ It reported supportively in 1946 on the Knights’ efforts to promote a school of journalism that ‘in addition to giving a first-

⁵ F. McDonald, *The destruction of Dublin* (Dublin, 1985).

⁶ D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous republic – Ireland in the 1970s* (London, 2012).

⁷ There is one taught MA dissertation, R. Gageby, ‘*Hibernia: 1968–80*’ (MA, UCD, 1998).

⁸ B. Trench, ‘The Little Mag’, *Fortnight* (Sept. 2000); ‘*Hibernia*, Ireland under investigation’, *Village* (Apr.–May, 2013).

⁹ E. Bolster, *The Knights of St Columbanus* (Dublin, 1979), p. 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

class training in the practice of journalism, would also give students a grounding in Catholic doctrine'.¹¹ This project resurfaced in various forms over the next fifteen years, promoted particularly by *Hibernia* editor Basil Clancy. But facing opposition from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Newspaper Managers' Committee, the Knights withdrew it at about the same time as they divested themselves of direct shareholdings in *Hibernia*.

The magazine had been sold in 1949 to Clancy, but the Order rescued it a decade later when his company went into liquidation. Another decade later, the Knights sold their shares and Clancy faced a further decade of continuing struggle to maintain the publication. He was supported by businessmen with strong church affiliations, notably the very influential and well-connected Con Smith and Patrick Kilroy, who were close friends and associates of each other in the Smith Group, importers of Renault vehicles, and who both sat on the board (Kilroy as chairman) of the company publishing *Hibernia* from 1959. In a later phase of fund-raising, Clancy sold shares to Irish-Americans, most of them priests or otherwise strongly associated with the Catholic church.¹²

As a Catholic editor and publisher, Clancy was in contact frequently with the archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, seeking, for example, in 1943 support for his plans for a Catholic school of journalism and in 1963 'a brief interview and His Grace's blessing on my work'.¹³ *Hibernia* reflected to some extent the evolution in Catholic thinking prompted by the Vatican Council of 1962 onwards, opening its pages to discussion of strains in the church and of ecumenism. Clancy himself was active in an organisation promoting Christian unity and commissioned in 1962 a review by a Protestant of a book on Catholic thought. A letter from the archbishop's office inquired 'on what principle your paper has given facilities to a Protestant theologian to expose his errors in doctrine while reviewing a Catholic work'. Clancy replied that he thought this appropriate 'in the interests of the ecumenical movement' but he acknowledged McQuaid's 'kindness in writing to indicate the dangers in such matters'.¹⁴

Correspondence with the archbishop includes references at several dates to *Hibernia's* financial difficulties, including details of how Clancy staked personal assets on the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹² Smith died in June 1972, aged 43, in the Staines air crash along with eleven other senior business figures, en route to Brussels for talks on Ireland's entry to the EEC. Among those who became shareholders in the 1960s was G.H.C. Crampton, head of one of the largest building firms in Dublin. Although he remained a shareholder until 1975, this fact was never made known to journalists in *Hibernia* writing critically on property development, with which Crampton might have been associated.

¹³ Letters from Clancy to McQuaid dated 24 Sept. 1943 & 10 Sept. 1963, McQuaid Papers, Dublin Diocesan Archive (hereafter DDA).

¹⁴ C. Cullen & M. Ó hÓgartaigh (eds), *His Grace is displeased* (Dublin, 2013), pp 217–8

publication that was targeted to achieve sales of 10,000 copies ('the economically minimal figure') in 1964.¹⁵ With sales at that time of 9,000 copies, *Hibernia* was operating in a crowded field of 'approved' Catholic publications that included Irish-published titles such as *The Irish Catholic*, *The Standard*, *The Leader* (with which *Hibernia* for a time shared an address in Pearse Street, Dublin, though it occupied separate rooms) and imports from Britain such as *The Universe* and *The Tablet*.

Part of *Hibernia*'s distinction from the mid-1960s was its attention to a broad agenda covering economy, business, literature and political and ideological debate. It provided a platform for dissenters from the increasingly dominant path to an open, free-market economy such as nationalists Raymond Crotty, Desmond Fennell, Ernest Blythe and Proinsias MacAonghusa, along with well-established commentators in other spheres, including Desmond Fisher, Anthony Clare, Angela McNamara, Terry Keane, Bruce Arnold, Ulick O'Connor and Maurice Manning. The emerging and late-blooming talent, Maeve Binchy, wrote regularly on travel. Political commentary was provided by, among others, 'Francis Croce', a *nom de plume* for Bruce Arnold, later a political commentator and literary editor with the *Irish Independent*, who was neither Catholic nor nationalist.

By the late 1960s, the struggle to maintain *Hibernia* had become too much for Clancy and his supporters. He sold it in 1968 to John Mulcahy who from the early 1960s was a contributor to the publication on business and economy, taking a sceptical view of many prevailing orthodoxies and dominant business personalities and groups. Born into a family with a strong background in medicine, he had worked in Canada for some time and later as an executive in the Smith Group. Mulcahy was to develop from an occasional contributor to *Hibernia* to editor and publisher of *Hibernia*, later editor of the *Sunday Tribune*, editor and publisher of *The Phoenix* and (to the time of writing) publisher of *Irish Arts Review*. He also wrote and published a historical novel, *Union*, published in 2009.

From the time Mulcahy took over as editor of *Hibernia* (May 1968), his name appeared on the cover, attaching the publication strongly to his journalist and public persona. Five months later, the first issue of *Hibernia* as a fortnightly appeared just as the civil rights movement emerged to full strength and the Northern Ireland state, in its reaction, wrote the first lines of the bloody drama to unfold. Mulcahy's twelve years as editor were marked by political and physical conflicts and economic crises, specifically the intensification of the Northern conflict, including the emergence of the Provisional IRA and its bombing

¹⁵ Undated letter from Clancy to McQuaid, McQuaid papers, DDA.

campaign, internment, ‘anti-terror’ legislation north and south, and the loyalist strikes. There were also major industrial disputes, the oil crisis, Ireland’s accession to the EEC, Charles Haughey’s rise, fall and rise, recurrent crises in the Labour Party, the emergence of the women’s movement, and the first moves for the legalisation of contraception. Ireland’s history in that period wrote the agenda for a publication of the kind to which Mulcahy was particularly suited as an editor.

Many of the named contributors inside, such as Proinsias MacAonghusa (later a back-page columnist for two years), columnist Hugh Munro and northern correspondent Michael McKeown had been with the magazine for several years before Mulcahy became editor. Books and arts reviewers, in particular, represented the continuity with *Hibernia* before Mulcahy’s editorship. Teacher Conor Sweeney was writing on cinema from the mid-1960s and continued to do so until the late 1970s. John Jordan and Monk Gibbon were regular reviewers of books and Fanny Feehan was the magazine’s music critic from before Mulcahy’s editorship to the end. Mulcahy increased the number of pages devoted to reviews and expanded the number and diversity of book reviewers. In the early Mulcahy years book reviews and reviewers were often promoted on the front-page as an important selling-point for the magazine. The roll-call of reviewers for *Hibernia* through the 1970s is like a directory of the established and emerging cultural elite; regular contributors included Francis Stuart, Seamus Heaney, John Banville, Claud Cockburn, Michel Hartnett, James Plunkett, Anthony Cronin and Colm Toibin.

Hibernia in late 1968 as a ‘fortnightly review’ looked not very different from *Hibernia* earlier as ‘nation’s review’, but there were some key differences that marked its intention to ‘develop into a more regular review of current and cultural affairs’.¹⁶ There were short news and comment pieces in the first four pages and the layout was made sharper with more use of photographs and white-on-black title and by-line blocks. It was in the gradually expanding news and current affairs section and in the further improvements of the layout, particularly the covers, that *Hibernia* as a fortnightly distanced itself from its heritage. *Catholic Herald* columnist Gabriel Fallon noted at the time that Mulcahy seemed ‘intent on raising questions customarily ignored or quietly swept under the carpet’.¹⁷

Alongside the increasing attention to social movements, protests, campaigns and the radical left, Mulcahy’s approach to business journalism was a further mark of distinction. Terry Kelleher (*Hibernia* journalist, 1970–75) recalled:

¹⁶ *Hibernia*, Oct. 1968.

¹⁷ *Catholic Herald*, 25 Dec. 1970.

[Mulcahy's] buccaneering approach to finance and business was one of the most distinctive traits of *Hibernia* and he single-handedly introduced an – unknown in those times – rigorous questioning of companies' performances ... Mulcahy was not in any way *anti-business* he was *anti-bad* business, and he could analyse and fillet a company report and ruthlessly pillory its CEO if he felt their performance was below par. He had a questioning approach to everything and everyone, but especially towards those in a position of authority. Every institution, whether it be a political party or financial grouping, artistic clique or academic ivory tower, all must be challenged, their continued existence questioned: what was their function and how did their present performance measure up to their professed *raison d'être*?¹⁸

Mulcahy exercised strong authority over *Hibernia* in all its facets, enjoying the loyalty of the tightly-knit commercial and financial staff, and the (sometimes grudging) respect of the editorial staff. The pay was modest, though Mulcahy occasionally gave bonuses, for example, when sales passed 25,000 copies, and he supported staff in securing loans. Neither salary nor conditions were governed by formal agreement and Mulcahy complained about the involvement of a 'third party' when the journalists – all NUJ members – sought at one stage to have the union directly involved in negotiations.

The increasing confidence and prominence of *Hibernia*'s current affairs coverage in the 1970s was reflected in the cover pages. The listing of six or more stories, including book reviews, gave way to covers on a single topic, almost always political. Sometimes these were linked to multi-page investigations or other types of extended feature, or editorials, or both. Early examples are: 'Des O'Malley: Towards Coercion'; 'Joe Brennan's Blunder' [on the minister for labour's cut in unemployment benefits]; and 'EEC – Hillery's Arrogance'.¹⁹ This targeting of individual government ministers continued unabated under the Fine Gael-Labour coalition from spring 1973.

The use of terms like 'blunder', 'fiasco' or 'scandal' was often matched with editorials in a similar vein, generally written with vigour by Mulcahy (though also entrusted to his young assistants when he was absent). On the introduction of internment in Northern Ireland in August 1971, *Hibernia* declared in a full-page editorial that it was 'the greatest blunder perpetrated by any British government since the Suez invasion of 1956 – and its

¹⁸ Personal communication, 25 Sept. 2012.

¹⁹ *Hibernia*, 5 Feb. 1971, 16 Apr. 1971 & 11 June 1971.

ultimate effects may be even more far-reaching than that fiasco'.²⁰ When an anti-internment march was gunned down in Derry five months later, the response was similarly phrased, but also similarly prescient: 'Sunday's tragedy will be seen as one of those incredibly stupid blunders of the established authority which appear to change the course of history'.²¹ The 'blunder' was defined in terms of the exercise of authority in general rather than in those of oppression of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, as was the case, for example, in the daily newspapers.

Apart from the Northern Ireland conflict and the spill-over into the Republic, with consequent perceived threats to civil liberties, *Hibernia's* chosen topics for in-depth attention in the early 1970s are reflected in headlines such as: 'The student travel controversy' [on USIT]; 'Clondalkin Caravans' [on travellers]; 'Benburb Street Scandal' [on slum housing]; 'Patronage – the Coalition's 12-month record'; 'Tara [Mines] – the inside story'; 'Perks for the Profs' [on directorships and consultancies held by salaried academics]; 'Judicial Patronage and How to Avoid It'; 'Linguistics Institute: a wasted four years?'; and 'Littlejohns – Were They Let Out?' [on two brothers jailed in connection with a bank robbery who claimed to be acting for British intelligence].

The suggestive question mark was often used, as in the last two examples. As well as denouncing 'scandal' or exposing conflict of interest or 'the inside story', or laying bare 'controversy', *Hibernia* published reports on current topics that indicated that all was not as it seemed, but without necessarily presenting the relevant facts comprehensively or offering a complete remedy. This reflected the magazine's severe limitation of resources; staff journalists would typically work on two, three or more major stories per issue, as well as editing other contributions and adding to the columns of short items.

Despite these constraints, the letters page – multiple pages from the mid-1970s – indicates that *Hibernia's* reporting and analysis were taken seriously in at least some high places. But, in a strange circle, some of those who were the objects of sometimes critical coverage in *Hibernia* or who were critics of *Hibernia* were also, at other times (both before and after), contributors to *Hibernia*. Despite a common conception of *Hibernia* as 'anti-establishment', it is clear that it mattered to some elements of the establishment to be represented as well as possible in it. Conor Cruise O'Brien's comment on the Labour Party as being 'dominated for years by dismal poltroons' was recalled when he joined the party two

²⁰ *Hibernia*, 27 Aug. 1971.

²¹ *Hibernia*, 5 Feb. 1972.

years after making those remarks,²² but as a member of the Dáil opposition he contributed an article on the ‘erosion of democracy’ contained in measures taken by the Fianna Fáil government.²³ He was also the target in the same year of a critical piece by Seamus O Tuathail, former editor of the Official Sinn Féin paper *United Irishman*.²⁴ Later, as a member of government, O’Brien refused to share a public platform with Mulcahy on the grounds that *Hibernia* was providing succour to the Provisional republican movement. Mulcahy challenged O’Brien strongly in a full-page editorial, written as an open letter, and trailed on the cover. Despite his criticism of *Hibernia*, O’Brien felt compelled to answer in *Hibernia*’s pages – Mulcahy gave him the space to do so, but also added his own last word.²⁵

The strains in the Labour Party as it moved from declaring the seventies to be socialist – in the words of the then leader, Brendan Corish – to being a subordinate member of a coalition government with Fine Gael (1973–77) provided much material for *Hibernia*’s critical attention. But Labour’s leading lights, including government ministers, did not let such critique pass uncommented. While official Labour and Labour Left were debating in the letters page of *Hibernia*, Noel Browne wrote a withering piece about the party in a three-page feature ‘The Left in Ireland’. David Thornley – also the object of critical coverage at other times, as well as an occasional book reviewer for *Hibernia* – was given a right of reply.²⁶ Browne responded in the letters pages and Labour minister Barry Desmond replied further to that.²⁷

Noel Browne, who wrote on the ‘Rise and Fall of the Third Coalition’ just six months after that coalition came to power, had earlier been the subject of *Hibernia*’s sceptical attention. A profile was published under the headline ‘Will Noel Browne Rise Again?’. The accompanying graphic depicted Browne on a crucifix.²⁸ Later, Browne was an invited, and predictably sceptical, contributor to *Hibernia* on Charles Haughey, of whom Browne wrote that he had ‘at least two personae – the brash, wealthy merchant adventurer with the cultured veneer ... [and] attractive, impressively gentle and hard-working’.²⁹

Apart from O’Brien and Browne, other leading figures in Irish politics and public affairs were at various times the object of *Hibernia*’s attention (sometimes sympathetic,

²² *Hibernia*, 31 Jan. 1969. O’Brien’s remarks are in his essay ‘The embers of Easter’ in O. Dudley Edwards & F. Pyle (eds), *1916: the Easter rising* (London, 1968), pp 225–40 at p. 235.

²³ *Hibernia*, 19 Feb. 1971.

²⁴ *Hibernia*, 19 Nov. 1971.

²⁵ *Hibernia*, 25 May 1973 & 8 June 1973.

²⁶ *Hibernia*, 31 Oct. 1975 & 14 Nov. 1975.

²⁷ *Hibernia*, 28 Nov. 1975 & 12 Dec. 1975.

²⁸ *Hibernia*, 7 Sept. 1973 & Sept. 1968.

²⁹ *Hibernia*, 16 Feb. 1978.

sometimes sceptical) as well as contributors to its pages. These included Declan Costello, Brendan Halligan, Mary Robinson, Bernadette Devlin/McAliskey, Justin Keating, Garret FitzGerald, Roy Johnston (Official Sinn Féin ideologue), Louis MacRedmond, Tim Pat Coogan and Mary Kenny (writer of a ‘London Letter’ after her departure from the *Irish Press*).

From 1973 *Hibernia* gave particular attention to stories of bad planning, illegal property development, councillors’ conflicts of interests, and related issues. Mulcahy’s guidance to his staff in using the resources in the planning departments of Dublin city and county councils and in the Companies Records Office was crucial to *Hibernia* unearthing many stories that, with the exception of a single but famous report in the *Sunday Independent*, the big press turned away from.³⁰ Some major pieces give the flavour of this coverage: ‘Planning – Widening the Loopholes’ (30 November 1973); ‘Making a Fortune in Tallaght – was Bribery Involved?’ (21 June 1974, two days before the much more frequently recalled investigation by Joe MacAnthony in the *Sunday Independent*); ‘The Councillors’ Interests’ (5 July 1974); ‘Illegal Little Boxes’ (21 February 1975); and ‘Reduced to Rubble’ (2 May 1975). On foot of the June 1974 story about possible bribery in relation to planning and development in Tallaght, Garda detectives interviewed *Hibernia* journalists at Criminal Investigation Department headquarters in Dublin Castle as part of an investigation of claimed corruption in the Dublin local authorities. That investigation led to no prosecutions. It was two decades later that formal investigation by the Moriarty Tribunal eventually turned up irrefutable evidence of illegal payments by property developers to councillors and council officials.

Hibernia continued its interest in unauthorised demolitions, developments without planning permission, destruction of heritage buildings and weak or absent planning controls to the end of its life in 1980. The emerging high-roller property developers were named. Patrick Gallagher was one of the ‘midnight cowboys’ associated with ‘the destruction of Dublin’; he was a close friend of Charles Haughey and later served a prison sentence in Northern Ireland for misappropriation of funds.³¹ John Ronan was identified as a serial purchaser of properties in Dublin’s south city centre (‘The Pig Farmer Comes To Town’) long before he became a highly visible poster playboy of the Celtic Tiger.³² In the coverage of links between politicians and developers, North Dublin county councillor, later TD and

³⁰ *Sunday Independent*, 23 June 1974.

³¹ *Hibernia*, 13 Apr. 1978.

³² *Hibernia*, 13 Jan. 1978.

minister Ray Burke was the object of particular attention from *Hibernia*, which reported frequently (e.g. ‘The Councillors’ Interests’, 5 July 1974) on his role as an estate agent representing builders who were dealing frequently with the planning authority of which Burke was a member.

In relation to Northern Ireland, *Hibernia* repeatedly went where other media would not. A notable example was the front-page feature with a powerful graphic and the headline, ‘The Strasbourg Report – the men behind the torture’. Inside, on two facing pages, there appeared nothing but the repeated short statement that the magazine’s printer, the *Irish Times*, had advised that it would not print the material for those pages because they considered it defamatory.³³ Reporter Jack Holland had access to affidavits of prisoners mistreated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and named individual police officers in his article that appeared in an amended version in the following issue of *Hibernia*. The thrust of Holland’s piece was supported by a subsequent judgement of the European Court of Human Rights. This episode was later recalled by Peter Taylor, the BBC journalist who undertook many pioneering investigations in Northern Ireland, as a moment of special achievement by *Hibernia*, when he commended ‘the brave and subsequently expensive ... positions it took on many of the issues which most British authorities would prefer to forget’.³⁴ Precisely because it was better-informed in this regard than the daily and Sunday newspapers, *Hibernia* also published critical accounts of republican movement activities, notably in the factional wars and in the efforts of republicans to develop coherent political strategies.

As a weekly publication from October 1977, *Hibernia* had more factual reporting and a less pervasively critical tone. But even in this guise, it drew attention to matters that other media neglected – and sometimes with significant consequences. In February 1978, at the trial of four men charged with serious offences arising from a train robbery and killing in 1975 (the object of a forensic piece at the time by John Mulcahy very different from the kind of coverage elsewhere), reporters noticed that one of the three judges in the juryless Special Criminal Court appeared to be falling asleep regularly at the bench after lunch. Despite cautions from journalist colleagues to Niall Kiely that reporting the observable facts would be risky, *Hibernia* gave precise times on a particular day when the judge was seen to nod off.³⁵ In May, lawyers for the defence challenged the conduct of the trial but were unsuccessful. In

³³ *Hibernia*, 24 Sept. 1976.

³⁴ *Hibernia*, 16 Oct. 1980.

³⁵ *Hibernia*, Feb. 1978.

June, on day sixty-five of the trial, Justice John William O'Connor died and a re-trial was ordered.

Irish Times journalists Peter Murtagh and Joe Joyce later dealt with this incident and with Niall Kiely's role at some length, though they omitted to mention that their own newspaper – like the other dailies – chose not to refer to what was happening in front of them.³⁶ This episode was much later recalled in her memoir by Mary Robinson, who, as an advocate for civil rights and, indeed, critic of the Special Criminal Court in the 1970s, had enjoyed strong support from *Hibernia*. She had 'devilled' with J.W. O'Connor on the western circuit early in her career as a barrister and wrote that he was 'unfairly criticised by the media for appearing to go to sleep during a lengthy trial in the Central Criminal Court [*sic*] ... it turned out to have been caused by an illness that ended his life shortly afterwards'. The reference to 'the media' can only be to *Hibernia*; the unfairness charge seems strange given that members of Robinson's own profession raised the issue of O'Connor's sleeping in open court.³⁷

Despite having no training, Mulcahy became by default an important journalism trainer, very different in approach from those operating the newly established journalism school in Rathmines or overseeing apprenticeships on provincial newspapers. He employed starting or early-career journalists, all recent graduates in their twenties. In the period of fortnightly publication, these journalists were designated 'assistant editors'; one in 1968, increasing to two or three through the early and mid-1970s. They were quickly given significant responsibility, e.g. editing the books or arts sections. Mulcahy guided their work with a strong personal hand, collaborated with individuals on longer pieces, but also gave them the space to work independently on sometimes difficult assignments.

The subsequent careers of these assistants indicate that Mulcahy recruited and 'trained' well. The journalists employed in *Hibernia* fortnightly include: Donal Mooney (1968–70), later editor, *Catholic Standard*, *Irish Post* and *Irish World*; Terry Kelleher (1970–75), later current affairs producer, London Weekend Television, and independent documentary-maker; Maurice Sweeney (1970–72), later sub-editor, *Irish Press* and *Sunday Business Post* and freelance designer and journalism lecturer; John O'Reilly (1972–73), later business journalist, *Irish Times* and *Irish Farmers' Journal*, and stock analyst with Davy Research; Andy Pollak (1972–74), later editor of *Fortnight*, *Irish Times* education correspondent and religion correspondent, and director of the Centre for Cross-Border

³⁶ P. Murtagh & J. Joyce, *Blind Justice* (Dublin, 1984).

³⁷ M. Robinson, *Everybody matters: a memoir* (London, 2012), p.57, n. 1.

Studies; Brian Trench (1973–78), later news editor, *Sunday Tribune*, editor, *Magill* and lecturer at Dublin City University; Jack Holland (1975–76), later researcher with BBC, columnist with *Irish Echo*, New York, author of eleven books, including factual and fictional work on Northern Ireland themes; Deirdre Younge (1976–78), later senior current affairs TV producer with RTÉ; and Darach MacDonald (1976–80), later agricultural correspondent, *Irish Press*, regional newspaper editor in Canada and Co. Tyrone, author of three books on Northern Ireland and border themes.

Recalling the guidance he received from John Mulcahy, Pollak commended him for going beyond the usual constraints of editing a publication when he initiated an anti-internment campaign in 1974.³⁸ The central activity of the campaign was a petition that gathered over 100,000 signatures that were delivered to the British government personally by Mulcahy. Deirdre Younge noted that journalists following their own instincts often risked bringing them into collision with acquaintances or associates of Mulcahy: ‘I remember doing a story about the Georgian Society and pouring scorn on Dublin bourgeois society ... Considering many of them were John’s friends it was to his credit that he never tried to tone it down. To be fair he also didn’t hire “yes” people and liked to make sure that there was plenty of grit in the mix of personalities’.³⁹ MacDonald credited Mulcahy with allowing ‘journalists to follow their own instincts and delve into areas that mainstream media were neglecting’ but he characterised Mulcahy’s editorial direction as ‘idiosyncratic’, adding that this ‘seemed to suit fortnightly publication but showed up as weak on a more pressing publication schedule’.⁴⁰

Recruitment to *Hibernia* weekly (1977–80) was necessarily different in character: most of those brought in came from backgrounds in daily or weekly newspapers. They included: Niall Kiely (*Irish Times*), Joe Joyce (*Irish Times*), John Boland (*Irish Press*), Andy Barclay (*Northern Echo*, *Belfast Newsletter*), Liam Collins (*Longford Leader*), Des Crowley (*Evening Standard*) and David Brazil (*Irish Post*). These experienced journalists were employed for their skills in producing and editing material on a rapid turn-around. They also had expectations of formal editorial guidance. Kiely commented that ‘[Mulcahy] was a poor manager of staff; had no real journalism training, and it showed at times; and such leadership skills as he had did not always translate well into clear direction setting at editorial meetings.

³⁸ Personal communication, 19 Oct. 2012.

³⁹ Personal communication, 3 Nov. 2012.

⁴⁰ Personal communication, 25 Oct. 2012.

Thus in terms of “editorial direction”, we pretty well muddled through with a consensus-by-osmosis that was as likely to be set in the pub amongst ourselves as in Beresford Place’.⁴¹

There were also some radical recruits in this phase. Máirin de Burca joined the paper at this time after a spell as Official Sinn Féin general secretary. Paddy Prendiville came with a record of ‘troops out’ campaigning in Britain and remains over thirty years later in Mulcahy’s stable of publications as editor of *The Phoenix*. Ed Moloney came also with strongly held views on Northern Ireland. For radically-minded journalists it remained a strong ambition to work with *Hibernia*. In a comment on the closure of the *Sunday Tribune*, Ed Moloney recalled that editor Vincent Browne commissioned him to write for *Magill* and ‘with those [Magill] pieces in my portfolio I was able to persuade John Mulcahy to give me employment (landing a job with *Hibernia* was the equivalent then of waking up in Heaven)’.⁴² For Moloney, author of several important books on the Northern Ireland conflict, the key test was the media’s attention to the North. He has described the ‘diffusion of a censorship culture’, in which print media, not formally restrained as broadcasting was, excluded stories that required talking to ‘IRA people or types very close to them’. But, Moloney noted, ‘there were some brave editors and journalists who ignored these pressures’.⁴³

Hibernia’s resistance to these pressures came at a price, as noted by Peter Taylor above. Announcing the forthcoming closure of *Hibernia*, John Mulcahy wrote in an editorial, ‘Exit *Hibernia*’, that ‘recent and pending actions in Dublin and Belfast have taxed the company’s meagre resources to the limit’.⁴⁴ Three months earlier, *Hibernia* had successfully defended a libel action taken by a businessman in the Dublin courts, but in July of that year Fr Michael Egan was awarded £17,000 in a libel action against the magazine. In a lengthy case before the High Court, Mulcahy apologised for the publication’s error and for the offence caused. He also declared that he did not believe he was liable as he had not been on duty as editor at the time the offending piece went to print. *Hibernia* had earlier apologised to another claimant, District Justice Seán Delap, and made a financial settlement with him in connection with the same item.⁴⁵ Some of the Belfast cases were part of the continuing fall-

⁴¹ Personal communication, 3 July 2012.

⁴² In a post to his blog, ‘Broken Elbow’, Jan. 2011; views Nov. 2012.

⁴³ E. Moloney, ‘Censorship and ‘The Troubles’’ in M. Corcoran & M. O’Brien (eds), *Political censorship and the democratic state: the Irish broadcasting ban* (Dublin, 2005), pp 99–110 at 103–4.

⁴⁴ *Hibernia*, 11 Sept. 1980.

⁴⁵ Journalist Breandán Ó hÉithir interceded on *Hibernia*’s behalf with the judge; in a conversation in Irish, the judge said he was not prepared to drop the case or forego the possibility of raising “luach bungalow” (the price of a bungalow).

out from the exposé of RUC mistreatment of republican prisoners, and in 1979 *Hibernia* also had damages awarded against it in a case taken by Bishop William Philbin and other clergy in connection with a story about the Catholic church's property interests. In an interview with the *Irish Times*, Mulcahy noted that no one case had brought about *Hibernia*'s closure and that the costs of weekly publication were proving 'difficult to maintain'.⁴⁶ Despite this, the idea that the Fr Egan case closed *Hibernia* gained wide currency; in his memoir Eamon Dunphy states as fact that '*Hibernia*, the respected political weekly magazine, ceased publication as a result of an expensive libel action'.⁴⁷

When *Hibernia* closed, Vincent Browne offered in the *Sunday Independent* an assessment of the magazine:

[*Hibernia*] acquired a liberal and sometimes radical aura. The paper maintained a consistently liberal line on the North, repression, prisons, women's liberation and industrial relations ... While maintaining a courageous line as editor [Mulcahy's] concept of journalism as an intelligent summation of the known facts, mingled with informed opinion, and usually conducted almost entirely by phone from the office, results in a style that may lack the investigative edge required by a serious paper.⁴⁸

As editor and publisher of *Magill*, Browne placed an advertisement in the final issue of *Hibernia* giving it 'congratulations on your coverage'. His commentary reflected ambivalent perceptions of *Hibernia* even among its admirers. In that farewell issue, Kader Asmal saluted *Hibernia* for being 'fearless when confronted by obscurantism' but remarked on the schizophrenia of its simultaneous attention to poverty and high finance. On the other hand, Michael Killeen, managing director of the Industrial Development Authority, wrote in the same issue that 'we will miss your probing analysis of Irish business affairs and your frequently creative writing between the lines of our and others' press releases'.⁴⁹

Among the more mainstream media, *Hibernia* was simultaneously disparaged and grudgingly admired. On the publication's closure, Pat Smyllie wrote in the *Irish Times* that 'whether you liked it some weeks or not, it was brave, searching, cheeky, outrageous but ... essential to many of us'. He noted that it sometimes had to pay the price in court for

⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 13 Sept. 1980.

⁴⁷ E. Dunphy, *The Rocky road* (Dublin, 2013), p. 253.

⁴⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 31 Oct. 1980. Browne also commented critically on Mulcahy's inability to hold key staff; the subsequent turnover of editors and journalists in *Magill* under Browne's leadership was more dramatic.

⁴⁹ *Hibernia*, 16 Oct. 1980.

uncovering ‘double-dealing’ and ‘sometimes journalists jeered, cheered but all the same respected it’.⁵⁰ Many of those journalists who appreciated *Hibernia*’s reporting and analysis felt unable to emulate it by reason of the greater restrictions under which they operated. Niall Kiely recalled from his experience of working in the *Irish Times* both before and after he was on the *Hibernia* staff that the magazine was a ‘must-read’ for journalists in the mainstream media; it was a source of information and perspective not found elsewhere.⁵¹ *Hibernia* was also an important outlet for some journalists in other media who had stories they could not publish or broadcast in those media: these could be disseminated through *Hibernia* as tip-offs or as anonymous contributions. Darach MacDonald observed that ‘there was always the condescension of those in privileged positions of having knowledge they chose not to use, about a maverick that carried on regardless of the proprieties. Further down the food chain, many journalists would have delighted in *Hibernia*’s apparent freedom to tell it like it was’.⁵²

Hibernia’s visible impact on other media was rather different: reports of claims made against the publication, including through the courts, were more common than examples of *Hibernia* stories followed up. This may be taken, at least in part, as representing the satisfaction some media undoubtedly felt at *Hibernia*’s discomfort. In 1972 the refusal by members of the printers’ union at the *Irish Times* to handle a satirical piece referring to the Virgin Mary as it was deemed ‘offensive to good taste’ was reported in other media. Also in 1972, following a well-reported case that had gone on since 1970, *Hibernia* was fined for contempt of court in coverage of the case of Frank Keane, a Saor Éire member facing a murder charge following a botched bank raid in Dublin. In 1976 *Hibernia* was charged with contempt of the Special Criminal Court arising from the publication of a letter from a student civil rights activist that referred to the court as a ‘kangaroo court’, even though applying the quotation marks to the phrase. In a case that went at one stage to the Supreme Court, *Hibernia* was required to purge its contempt of the court through a formal apology from the present author as the assistant editor responsible for the relevant issue and a fine of £150 was also imposed. This episode was later recalled in an account of censorship and self-censorship as demonstrating ‘how overly sensitive the institutions of the state were to scrutiny and criticism during the 1970s’.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 1980.

⁵¹ Personal communication, 3 July 2012.

⁵² Personal communication, 25 Oct. 2012.

⁵³ M. O’Brien, ‘Disavowing democracy: the silencing project in the south’ in Corcoran & O’Brien, *Political censorship*, pp 48–58 at 56.

Hibernia's editor and lawyers were, over many years, regularly dealing with correspondence seeking retraction or correction or threatening legal action on behalf of various powerful figures. The least forgiving included the better-endowed distributor (Eason) and printer (*Irish Times*) in proceedings. However, other prominent people who claimed libel took the view that *Hibernia* and its journalists were not worth pursuing on the basis that they had no money. The whiff of danger around *Hibernia* may have deterred journalists from following the magazine's leads. In any case, many of its strongest current affairs stories were outside the big media's field of interest and attention. *Hibernia* journalists did not generally spend much time working alongside other journalists, for instance, at press conferences, briefings and receptions, much less routinely attending the standard 'markings' of council meetings and court cases. Not being much part of the daily 'water-cooler' conversations, *Hibernia* journalists may not have been able to build the relationships that might have facilitated the flow of information from *Hibernia* outwards.

In assessing *Hibernia*, the frameworks of radical media and alternative media apply only very partially.⁵⁴ Downing considers that radical media recognise 'the importance of encouraging contributions from as many interested parties as possible, in order to emphasise the "multiple realities" of social life (oppression, political cultures, economic situations)'.⁵⁵ On such criteria *Hibernia* qualifies, at least as far as its current affairs coverage goes – though not on Downing's criterion of internal organisation, nor on Atton's 'de-professionalisation' of journalism or association with counter-cultures. *Hibernia* should be considered a hybrid of commercial publishing, with conventional distribution and advertising models, strongly centred on an editor-proprietor, with pre-professional and professional forms of journalism, and a mix of liberal and radical content.

Hibernia of 1968–80 created a distinct space in the media landscape in Ireland. It offered more consistently critical perspectives on the conventional media agenda and it extended that agenda to include voices and experiences that were generally excluded. *Hibernia*'s dissenting voice was sometimes one of denunciation but it was also one of caution or interrogation. Its reporting of debates and conflicts in the left and in republicanism was done not just for its value as controversy but also out of recognition of the substantive interest in the various positions.

⁵⁴ C. Atton, *Alternative media* (London, 2002).

⁵⁵ J. Downing, *Radical media: the political experience of alternative communication* (Boston, 1984), cited in Atton, *Alternative media*, p. 20.

Hibernia was perhaps as much a source of hints about possibly publishable information as it was a source of information that could be taken as valid and then expanded. The *Hibernia* method for much current affairs reporting, where major institutions and personalities were involved, was to find oral or documentary sources from which critical perspectives could be drawn. Even in the writing of profiles, *Hibernia* journalists circled around the central subject rather than put questions directly to that person or to the representative of the institution or company at issue. Whereas journalists for daily newspapers and the national broadcaster might have considered they had no story if they did not have direct quotes from the central actors in that story, *Hibernia* reports were often quote-free. They were more background features and analysis than news reports, though that balance shifted over time in the weekly publication. There were also significant numbers of anonymous or pseudonymous pieces in *Hibernia*, though the balance with fully by-lined contributions also shifted over time. The almost universally cynical tone of the anonymous journalism in *The Phoenix* may be considered an unfortunate and partial legacy of *Hibernia*. If journalism can be validly called ‘the first draft of history’, *Hibernia* reports may have appeared from the point of view of mainstream media as a ‘first draft of journalism’ and its marginal position in the media market may be considered as much self-exclusion as exclusion.

Increasingly, from the mid-1970s, parts of the space *Hibernia* had created came to be occupied also by *In Dublin* (from 1976), *Magill* (from 1977), and *Hot Press* (from 1977). The fact that the first two of these magazines no longer exist brings our attention to the life-cycle of ‘small publications’. Not only are these more vulnerable than better-resourced publications to economic and business cycles, to shifts of political culture and to the effects of legal actions, they are also highly vulnerable to competition in the same media space. Typically not having resources for significant marketing, artisan publications like *Hibernia* can be disproportionately affected by the emergence of rivals beside them. *Hibernia* survived for forty-three years in its various guises, largely through adaptation. *Fortnight* was a fairly consistent product over its forty years (also consistently very small-scale), while *Magill* and *In Dublin* went through several re-inventions in their near-thirty years. *Hot Press* defies all the laws by surviving without interruption since 1977 with the same editor. Publisher Breasal O Caollai attempted in the mid-1980s to recreate *Hibernia* as a monthly magazine but *Hibernia* had run its course when it closed in 1980.