

**THE SOCIETY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO IRELAND: PAST, PRESENT  
AND FUTURE**

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The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland is a time to take stock, to remember the Society's past. The venues chosen for the various meetings during this session recall some of the institutional links that were important in the past history of the Society. The third meeting of the Dublin Statistical Society — the original name of the Society — was held, early in 1848, in the premises of the Royal Dublin Society, which was then located in Leinster House. From 1848 until 1862 the RDS was the venue for all meetings of the Statistical Society. Indeed, as Professor R.D.C. Black, author of the centenary history of the Society noted, 'the Statistical .... came very near to being absorbed into the RDS (Black 1947). In April 1848, a sub-committee drawn from both organisations was established, to consider terms for a merger. Although negotiations broke down over the matter of subscription charges, the two organisations continued a sometimes uneasy co-existence for a number of years. In 1858 the RDS attempted to bring all scientific organisations in the Dublin area under its control, and for a brief period it seemed to have succeeded, at least with the Statistical Society.

In 1862 however the Statistical Society broke its links with the RDS; changed its name to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, and drafted a new constitution. One of the clauses in this constitution provided that ladies should be admitted as associate members. Professor Black suggests that the parting of the ways between the Statistical Society and the RDS came over such critical matters as the Statistical Society's insistence on holding a *Conversazione* with refreshments after each meeting, and the problems posed by admitting women as associate members.

I suspect however that the matter was more complex, because in many respects the RDS and the Statistical Society shared common aims. Both the Dublin Statistical Society and the Royal Dublin Society can be described as voluntary organisations that were established with the objective of improving economic and social conditions in Ireland. The Dublin Statistical Society sought to improve Ireland by 'promoting the study of Statistics and Economical Science', which was a fashionable approach throughout Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although the RDS predated the Statistical Society by over a century, and, unlike the Statistical Society

it was in receipt of government grants, the two societies had many things in common (Meenan and Clarke 1981). When the word statistics was first used around 1770, it did not carry a numerical connotation, as it does today. It meant ‘the science that “teaches us what is the political arrangement of all the modern states of the known world”’. The word was derived from the term ‘statist’, i.e. a politician or statesman’ (Cullen 1975). The statistical studies of each Irish county, which were commissioned by the RDS at the very end of the eighteenth century rank among the earliest statistical inquiries to be carried out in Ireland; twenty-three county surveys were published between the years 1801 and 1832. Sir Robert Kane, a founding vice-president of the Dublin Statistical Society, was the author of *The Industrial Resources of Ireland* (Kane 1844), a book which was based on a series of lectures given at the RDS, where Kane held a professorship. During the 1850s, the 1860s and the 1870s both organisations competed to host visiting meetings by groups such as the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

My detailed attention to these links is not done with the intention of re-opening old wounds, but simply to suggest that the foundation and the early years of the Statistical Society should be seen in the context of Irish learned and scientific societies and as an Irish variant of an international phenomenon. The Royal Irish Academy, another learned institution that comes to mind, displayed a brief interest in economic questions in the early nineteenth century, but turned its mind elsewhere. In the 1840s statistics appeared to offer objective and scientific answers to many of the problems which modern society was experiencing. For the Manchester Statistical Society, founded in 1834, these were the factors responsible for the appallingly high death rate in the new industrial city; the relationship between crime and ignorance, and the importance of education in bringing about moral reform (Cullen 1975). In Ireland in 1847, naturally the major social question concerned the great famine and its cause.

At the second meeting of the Society in December 1847, for example, James Anthony Lawson argued that the theory that population tended to outstrip subsistence (the so-called Malthusian trap) had been shown to be ‘contrary to experience’, a courageous and probably a controversial conclusion at that time (680). At the same meeting (the early members did not limit themselves to a mere one paper per session) William Neilson Hancock read a paper on the *Use of the Doctrine of Laissez Faire in investigating the Economic Resources of Ireland* (488). Hancock described the question of Ireland’s natural resources as ‘a favourite topic for the indulgence of national vanity’. This comment might be taken as an oblique attack on the work of Sir Robert Kane, though it is more probable that it was directed at the unrealistic hyping of Kane’s book by John Mitchel the Young Ireland leader, who was the author of a recently-published collection of essays with the title, *Irish Political Economy* (Mitchel 1847). Most of Hancock’s paper was devoted to presenting the case for free trade in food, in the light of the ‘calamities of the past year [1846]’. This paper also presented an early variant of the entitlements argument,

which has been developed in recent times by Amartya Sen: i.e. that people died, less from lack of food, than from an inability to buy food (Sen 1981).

Papers such as those by Lawson and Hancock would seem to confirm the views of Boylan and Foley (Boylan and Foley 1992) that the Society provided a defence of existing socio-economic relations. I would suggest that the reality was more complex. In the first place, the attitudes of many key members of the British establishment towards Ireland at this time were strongly influenced by racial stereotypes, such as the belief held by Sir Charles Trevelyan and by others that potato-eating automatically reflected inferior intelligence, laziness and debased tastes. In *'Notice of the Theory that there is no hope for a Nation that lives on Potatoes'*, a paper read to the Society in April 1848, Hancock refuted this argument, referring to Trevelyan by name. According to Hancock, Irish people ate potatoes because they were poor; they were not poor because they ate potatoes; he concluded that higher wages would automatically result in a more varied diet (461). More importantly, several papers read against the backdrop of the famine were extremely critical of Irish landlordism for its absenteeism (a common target for the RDS during the eighteenth century), its tolerance of subdivision, and the failure to invest in land improvements. In general during these early years the Society advocated a series of reforms of the Irish economy that would improve the supply-side, by increasing the mobility of capital, land and labour. It also showed considerable interest in company law, with papers that examined partnerships, limited liability and joint stock companies.

It is important to note the changes that have taken place within the Society over the past 150 years and the elements of continuity. There is a continuing emphasis on practical matters, as opposed to subjects which are of primarily theoretical interest. Indeed the Society's activities could be summarised in one brief phrase: The Condition of Ireland. As Roy Geary noted in his introduction to the centenary history, 'it is fascinating to observe how in each generation the studies under Society auspices reflected the public interests of the time'. Anybody who seeks a time capsule of the major social and economic topics during a particular decade should consult the Journal. If they do so they will discover that some topics recur repeatedly, most significantly demography. However it is also important to recognise the changes that have taken place. The most obvious contrast relates to the academic standard of the papers presented in recent years. They are more professional, very often referring to recent articles in international scholarly journals, and perhaps for that reason they are less eccentric. Future meetings of the Society are unlikely to hear papers such as the two given by David Edgar Flinn in 1888-89 and 1919-20, on Irish intellect and its geographical distribution; these can be regarded as an abuse of statistics, or perhaps an example of the frivolous treatment of statistics, by a man who otherwise produced useful research on public health (Flinn 1906). Based on entries in a dictionary of biography Flinn showed that in Ulster and Connacht there was 1 notable person per 45,000 people; in Leinster and in Munster the figure was one in 16,000; in Dublin city 1 in 7,300 (327, 328). In 1860 members were treated

to a paper by W. Neilson Hancock on a '*Plan for obviating the identification of luggage at Kingstown and Holyhead, and so accelerating the through traffic between London and Dublin*' (467). Hancock read a total of 88 papers to the Society, so perhaps it is not surprising that he may have run out of topics! Several nineteenth-century papers would also merit inclusion in a collection of temperance tracts. My favourites are those by James Haughton who addressed the Society on such uplifting topics as the *Harmony on the Temperance Reformation with the Objects of the Social Science Association* (515).

The present constitution of the Society is largely unchanged from that drawn up in 1862, when the Society acquired its present name. At that time its activities were classified into four sections: Jurisprudence and the Amendment of the Law including the subject of Punishment and the Reformation of Criminals; Social Science, including Education; Political Economy, including the principles of Trade and Commerce; Public Health and Sanitary Reform.

During the nineteenth century many leading lawyers were members of the Statistical Society, and several presidents were drawn from the ranks of the country's highest law officers. Jurisprudence and legal reform were frequent subjects for debate; such papers dealt not only with commercial law, they also included topics such as the treatment of criminals and the punishment of young offenders. This aspect of the Society's work remained important until the 1920s; it then faded away. While the Society was extremely successful after 1922 in retaining the influence that it had possessed when Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, and in rapidly establishing important contacts with the administrative elite of the Irish Free State, it somehow failed to build similar connections to the new legal establishment.

The second heading, Social Science, including Education remains relevant to this day: indeed education has been a much more important subject in recent times than in the past, probably because the Society's rules precluded papers relating to religion or party politics, (a rule which remains in force to the present), and during the nineteenth century it was almost impossible to discuss educational policy or proposed reforms without reference to religion. However the Society can claim an honourable place in the origins of Irish social work and social administration. In 1875 it established a Charitable Organisation Committee to collect information about the major causes of pauperism in Dublin and the working of charities in the city. The Committee was expected to make recommendations for improvements in the organisation of charitable services and to inform itself about the activities of similar bodies in London, New York and elsewhere. This initiative was a response to a paper read by the Society's president, John Kells Ingram, on *The Organisation of Charity, and the Education of the Children of the State* (592). Ingram — an extremely humane and enlightened man — was seeking a more professional, a more orderly response to the administration of charities and to provisions for the poor. Although this Committee never fully lived up to expectations, largely due to lack of resources, it highlighted the changes that were taking place in charitable organisation

in other countries, particularly the importance of taking case histories. During the second-half of the nineteenth century the Society offered an important platform for advocates of various forms of social reform, such as the need to establish industrial schools similar to those in Britain, that would educate and train poor and deprived children; the merits of removing children from workhouses and placing them with foster parents — a reform that was carried out successfully and so quietly that it has escaped the attention of historians (O'Mahony 1997). The Society also highlighted late-nineteenth century scandals of child neglect — publicity which led to the formation in the late 1880s of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Thomas W. Grimshaw, the first president of the NSPCC was also president of the Statistical Society. During the 1890s Rosa Barrett, a pioneering figure in Irish social work, used the Society to present the case for legal adoption (34, 35), as indeed did the Adoption Society of Ireland in 1949 (758).

During the nineteenth century several papers relating to social policy were read by women: child-care and philanthropy were regarded as suitable matters for the attention of nineteenth-century ladies. The Society was unique in that it enabled women who were brave enough to read papers (Ingram read a paper on behalf of one woman) to gain the attention of some of the most powerful figures of the time, because the membership included leading members of the judiciary, senior civil servants in the Dublin Castle administration and some politicians; the viceroy often attended the opening lecture of each session.

If we compare the subject areas listed in 1862 with the titles of papers that have been presented in recent years, we will see that social policy remains a matter of concern, sanitary reform and public health less so at present. In the past the Society played an important role in promoting an awareness of public health issues and in presenting the case for reform. The Journal published many of the landmark papers on public health and housing, such as the 1864 paper by Edward Mapother, the first Irish registrar-general, on the sanitary state of Dublin (838); the 1889 paper on child mortality in Dublin by Thomas Grimshaw (392), who was also registrar-general, and David Chart's paper on unskilled labour in Dublin, which was read in 1914 and provided detailed data on household incomes and rent (146). After independence the Society presented a number of very important statistical papers relating to the incidence of tuberculosis (Geary, 361). Comparative data on mortality and morbidity trends in Ireland and in other countries showed that by 1940 the reduction in the incidence of tuberculosis in Ireland lagged behind other countries (Counihan and Dillon, 191). Other papers dealt with child mortality; the relationship between diet and income and poverty and ill-health. Many of these papers were presented by prominent members of the medical profession, such as James Deeny (221-23), Theodore Dillon (191) and William Kidney (656) — another component in the past membership that has largely disappeared. Such papers tackled topics of immense concern at the time; the evidence that they presented fed into public debate and into departmental files, and they often exerted an influence on subsequent policy.

I would like to devote some attention to the title: Statistical and Social Inquiry Society. This originated from two separate aspects of the Society's work — meetings where members read papers, much as they do to today, and a separately-funded programme of commissioned research on subjects that were regarded as 'too complicated and difficult' to be examined by an individual member. Most of the commissioned reports dealt with legal matters such as limited liability and land law. By the 1940s however the term 'social inquiry' had acquired a different connotation within the Society — as a euphemism for non-quantitative research — suggesting a polarisation between what R.D.C. Black in his 1985 presidential address referred to as 'qualifiers and quantifiers' (71).

In the early nineteenth century the term statistics had a somewhat different meaning to that which it holds at present, and residues of this earlier meaning can be traced in many of the papers read to the Society. Many papers in the past contained no information that would be described as statistical in the modern meaning of the term. Most of those that used statistics could be categorised under the heading 'descriptive statistics'. This often amounted to little more than a rag-bag of miscellaneous figures relating to crop acreages, livestock numbers, post office savings deposits, railway passengers, and anything else coming to hand. The first papers to make use of modern statistical techniques were given in the 1920s, appropriately by Roy Geary: a paper to the 1924-25 session on methods of sampling applied to Irish statistics (360), and one in 1929-30 on mortality from tuberculosis (361). George Duncan's paper during the 1933-34 session on the determination of demand curves in relation to wheat should also be mentioned, as one of the earliest to use regression techniques (252). The other early exercises in quantification were the estimates for national income presented by T.J. Kiernan (658) and George Duncan (256) during the 1932-33 and 1939-40 sessions respectively. From that point we can chart the increasing sophistication of statistical and econometric techniques, and a growing interest in economic modelling, though the development was by no means rapid or uncontroversial. These developments are discussed in detail in the paper by Fanning and Bradley, which was read during the 1981-82 session (89).

I would like however to talk briefly about the debate within the Society over the relative merits of quantitative research and the battle between statistics and social inquiry. The subject really goes back to the foundation of the Society and to the contrasting intellectual approaches adopted by statistics and political economy. Economics favoured an inductive approach; statistics began with empirical evidence and from this it drew deductions. At the second meeting of the Society in December 1847 James Anthony Lawson attempted to reconcile both disciplines. According to Lawson, one of the functions of statistics was to supply facts that could be used to test economic theories, and to correct the errors that might result from hasty generalisations. While statistics could indicate the existence or coexistence of certain factors, Lawson argued that 'it required a philosophical mind [i.e. the mind of an economist] to determine whether [or not] there be the link of causation' (680). The subject attracted little attention over the next seventy or so years, perhaps because

few papers read to the Society would have qualified as rigorous examples of either science.

By 1943 however, when George O'Brien reopened the debate in a presidential address with the title *Economic Relativity*, the Society had provided a platform for the papers by Geary, Kiernan and Duncan that I have already mentioned. O'Brien suggested, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that he was not qualified to preside over a statistical society: he had managed to 'slip in' under the heading of Social Inquiry — which was apparently non-quantitative in its methods. On the relationship between economics and statistics, O'Brien saw statistics being limited to the subordinate role of arranging data, and verifying the results of deductive reasoning — a role that was somewhat akin to that described by Lawson in 1847. Without the analytical framework provided by economics, O'Brien claimed that statistics was in danger of 'degenerating into mere historicism or a study of comparative institutions'; undue reliance on statistics carried the additional risk that arguments would be oversimplified (947).

Roy Geary, replying, stated that he disagreed with 'almost every word' in this section of the paper. He, in turn, accused economists of oversimplification, and suggested that the principal value of texts on economics was 'as repositories of information, historical, descriptive, statistical'. Geary accused O'Brien of not being aware of the analytical potential offered by modern statistical methods. According to Geary the most useful function that an economist could perform was to define the types of statistics to be collected, and to agitate 'loud and long for more, better and fresher statistics'. Round Two of this particular battle took place in 1947, on the occasion of the Society's centenary celebrations. Geary was president and he used the occasion to speak confidently about the potential offered by recent developments in economic statistics, such as national accounts, and time series data for economic forecasting as tools for economic forecasting (363). The centenary events seem to have given rise to tensions between what I might describe as the statistical and social inquiry camps. O'Brien and George Duncan who were originally scheduled to present papers both withdrew. Consequently with papers by Geary and by Corrado Gini (377) — the distinguished and rather controversial Italian statistician (Ipsen, 1996) — the celebrations were marked by a strongly statistical air, with only Joseph Brennan offering a corrective (99). Subsequent sessions, notably a 1952 symposium on national income, saw a further instalment of this debate, with George Duncan — who described himself as an early practitioner in the field of national accounts — siding very firmly with what I may term the social inquiry camp. On this occasion the debate spilled over into a dispute between university-based economists and statisticians in the central statistics office, with Duncan contrasting the frugal resources at his disposal in the economics department of Trinity College Dublin, with the lavish sums available to the Statistical Branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce — 'scarcely less than one-half the gross income of my University'. Geary in turn offered university-based economist 'a place on the statistical band-

wagon (or Juggernaut chariot, if you will)', adding 'but if they continue to sulk in their tents we must travel alone' (1223).

The after shocks of this debate can be traced in later years. It is possible to distinguish the presidency of James Meenan from that of Roy Geary by looking at the type of papers that were read. Related issues come to the fore at a later stage during debates over the methodologies used in macro-economic planning during the 1960s between those, such as Geary who favoured input-output models (365) and others such as Whitaker and the Department of Finance who preferred a more flexible iterative method (Ryan, 1105). In more recent times I would suggest that the heat has gone out of this argument.

The other aspect of the term statistics that I wish to note is the long association between the Society and the official statistical services. One of the founding members of the Society was Thomas Larcom, the man who was largely responsible for the compilation of the 1841 Census — which is generally acknowledged as the first modern census of population (Linehan, 717). Larcom was also involved in the collection of the first agricultural statistics in 1847, some months before the Society was founded. He was also of course under-secretary, i.e. the senior civil servant in the Irish administration. For many years the Society's library contained the Larcom papers; these were transferred to the National Library in 1920. From its foundation the Society has shown an active interest in the question of official statistics. During the 1860s it campaigned for the introduction of civil registration of births, marriages and deaths; from 1881 it would appear that every Census of Population has given rise to a paper to the Society, either in advance of the actual enumeration, or when preliminary data have appeared. A paper read in 1889 contains illustrations of the early mechanical equipment used to compile the returns (Matheson, 842). In 1881, and on several other occasions, most notably 1926 and 1946, the Society has had an input into the questions included on the enumeration forms.

The 1920s can probably be regarded as marking the peak of the Society's involvement in official statistics. During the transition from British rule in Ireland to the Irish Free State, the President was Sir Thomas Molony, the Lord Chief Justice. Molony was not the most appropriate choice at such a sensitive time, because he was a prominent representative of the ancien regime, and moreover one who appears to have adjusted uneasily to the new state. In 1922 he travelled to London, on his own initiative, to discuss the future of the former judiciary with the British authorities; it was only with considerable reluctance that he was persuaded to permit the words, 'Rialtas Sealadach na hÉireann' (Provisional Government of Ireland) to be superimposed at the head of future High Court proceedings (Garvin, 1996; Kostonouris, 1994). William Thompson, the registrar-general or Professor Charles Oldham would have proved more appropriate Presidents during these difficult years. In the event Molony stepped down rather suddenly in July 1924 and Oldham took his place. Oldham's presidency marked the beginnings of an important relationship between the Society and the new state; in many respects statistics provided the

bridge. The years 1924 and 1925 saw a substantial number of new members, many of them civil servants, with the largest contingent drawn from the statistical branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce, the forerunner of the present Central Statistics Office. Statistics was also the dominant topic during the 1924-25 session. Oldham's presidential address discussed the interpretation of Irish statistics (1023). W.T. Cosgrave, President of the Irish Free State was invited to attend; he apologised for his absence owing to illness and wished the Society well. A symposium on the 1924 trade statistics - the first produced by the Irish Free State proved so popular that it had to be extended over two meetings (286, 705, 751, 833, 1028, 1137). For Oldham, and for other members of the Society, official statistics were an important badge of nationhood. In December 1925 Oldham told the Society that 'To-day Irish statisticians are proudly conscious that they are the interpreters to other nations of the social and economic character of an independent Member of the League of Nations' (1025).

The high-minded rhetoric of the 1920s regarding the importance of statistics has not always been realised; resources have proved inadequate and relations between users and producers of statistics have occasionally given rise to heated debates. However until the establishment of the National Statistics Board in 1986 the Society probably offered the only mechanism for informal consultation between economists, statisticians and social scientists and the Central Statistics Office.

The close links over the past 150 years between the Society and the statistical services are evident in the number of registrars-general and directors of the Central Statistics Office or its forerunners who have served on the Council or as president. I do not propose to speak about well-known figures such as Geary (Conniffe, 1997) or McCarthy, but I would like briefly to mention two others, who are perhaps less well-known. The first name in the author index of the Journal is that of W.G.S. Adams (1). An economist, who had been educated at Balliol College Oxford, Adams was head of the statistical service of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction from 1906 to 1910 when he returned to Oxford, having been appointed Gladstone Professor of Political Economy. He was responsible for producing the first official estimates of agricultural output, relating to the year 1908. Adams undoubtedly raised the level of debate within the Society on statistics to a new level; he was very much aware of the deficiencies in the data then available and he argued for the introduction of new methods of collection (Hector, 1971). The second name is that of Stanley Lyon, director of the Department of Industry and Commerce statistical branch, who was president from 1938-42. Lyon's primary interest was in demography; he was an active member of the International Institute of Statistics and kept the Society well informed about developments on that front. In 1936 he became involved in a study of international trends in demography, which was specifically interested in changing fertility. Although this study was abandoned following the outbreak of war in 1939, Lyon continued his own research and presented two papers on the subject to the Society during the war years (745, 749). He also persuaded the Society to apply for the inclusion of questions relating to fertility in the 1946 Census.

Lyon's interest in fertility, and specifically in how fertility differed by occupation and social class actually mirrored the private concern of the government at the time; the subject was discussed by Cabinet during the late 1930s as Ministers tried to grapple with the relationship between economic change and population, or more specifically with the conundrum whether higher living standards would bring about a population increase in Ireland (National Archives 9178 A and B).

This brings me to my final point: the influence of the Society on policy and legislation. On this I intend to firmly pitch my tent among the qualifiers or the social inquiry camp. It is impossible to give any precise estimate as to the Society's impact on policy and legislation. However let me provide some examples. The most obvious cases are those where the Society had an influence on the drafting of legislation, such as land legislation in 1860 and the law providing for the registration of births marriages and deaths. However it is quite common to find copies of papers in the Journal, or references to them, in the files of the Department of an Taoiseach and other government departments. Beddy's paper to the 1943-44 session comparing the economies of Ireland and Denmark crops up on several occasions.

Another important aspect of the Society's work relates to what seems to have been a self-imposed obligation to refute some of the more far-fetched popular ideas about the Irish economy. This obligation was assumed from the beginning: Hancock's paper of December 1847, which I have already mentioned was an effort to refute the arguments presented by John Mitchel. Other instances would include the 1924 paper by Francis Leet which pretty thoroughly rubbished the concept of Social Credit as advocated by Major Douglas (704), Roy Geary's 1935 projections for the Irish population over the remainder of the twentieth century (358) and T.K. Whitaker's 1949 paper on Irish external assets, which showed that there was no obvious pot of gold that would transform the Irish economy overnight (1295). In 1971 Geary told the Society that he had been roundly abused for his lack of patriotism because the 1935 paper showed that it was utterly impossible for the population of Ireland to regain anything approaching the pre-famine figure of 8 million by the end of the century (Keane and Knaggs, 636).

Another valuable function has been to provide a forum where major policy questions could be discussed freely, and where civil servants have felt free to express their opinions. Paddy Lynch singled that out as the most important function of the Society and it appears to have proved particularly valuable in the ongoing debate over reshaping Irish economic policy during the 1940s and 1950s, where the contributions of Lynch himself and Whitaker are an important indicator of the discussion that was going on at that time behind closed doors (Eason, 277, 282; Lynch 738; Whitaker, 1296, 1293).

Finally, and here I speak unapologetically as an historian, the Society provides an important barometer of Irish public opinion — or more precisely informed public opinion, or the opinions of an elite, on various subjects. Anybody trying to gain a

concise understanding of the changing nature of the Irish state and wider Irish society would learn a lot from reading the symposia during the 1940s on Irish social services (1221), on the Beveridge report (Collins, 165; Honohan, 563; Lyon, 744; Ó Brolcháin, 968) and on the white paper on social security and comparing the views expressed there with those expressed during the 1986 symposium following the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare (1227).

For anybody seeking to understand Ireland's exchange rate policy since the 1970s I would regard the various sessions of the Society as more valuable than any article or articles in other scholarly journals, because the reporting of the discussions that followed these papers provides an insight into the relative importance of political and economic factors that is vital to a proper understanding of the Irish position (Dowling, 245; Massey, 840, 1208). Indeed the coverage of discussions following papers is one of the Journal's great strengths.

As to the future, it is important to remember that the Statistical Society is almost alone among the statistical societies of the mid-nineteenth century in surviving to celebrate its sesqui-centenary. It survived because it has concentrated on presenting papers on socio-economic topics that are of current relevance. Another major strength comes from its ability to draw membership from a wide cross-section of Irish society, including government service, business, the trade unions and academia and in providing a forum where matters of common interest can be debated in a free and easy manner. Its other key roles are in clarifying current problems, in demolishing popular myths and fantasies about the Irish economy or Irish society, and in adopting a more long-term, and consequently more measured perspective on these issues. Its final role, is in attempting to promote multi-disciplinary discussions and analysis at a time when growing specialisation has made this both more difficult and more essential than ever.

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## DISCUSSION

**Patrick Lynch:** After sixty years as a member of the Society, I am left with some memorable impressions:

1. The importance of the Society as a forum from which civil servants could freely express their personal views even if these were not in line with official thinking. These views were expressed with discretion and party political views were carefully avoided. James Dillon, a brilliant controversialist, was a noted observer of this convention of restraint, and always avoided narrow political controversies.
2. Discussion, especially after the press reporters had left, was often more important (and stimulating) than the papers that preceded it, and historically, very valuable. Unfortunately, records of contributions were sometimes inadequate or non-existent, for example, the exchange in 1947 (I think) between Kenneth Whitaker and John Leydon on the role of public Expenditure.

During my membership of the Society, two papers were particularly memorable. One was George O'Brien's on "Economic Relativity" in the 1943-44 session in which O'Brien defended economic positivism against an array of hostile criticism. With much polemical skill, he argued, among many other propositions, that economic laws were merely statements of tendencies and that as a science, economics could be ethically neutral without being indifferent.

An equally memorable paper was T.K. Whitaker's of 25 May 1956, on "Capital Formation, Saving and Economic Progress". This paper was the culmination of various contributions he had made in the Society towards the formation of the systematic thinking that helped to transform the Irish economy during the later 1950s.