

Meet the Staff

17,000 BILLS EVERY DAY

Accounting Machine Group, Dept. of Chief Accountant

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Entering the machine room on the ground floor of the junction block between East James's Street and Fitzwilliam Street, is like stepping into a scene from a science fiction film. The machines hum and click (and go 'ding' occasionally); girls sit on high chairs; men move silently among the machines. At the far end of the room, the lights on the consoles of the twin I.B.M. 1401 computers blink rapidly through the glass doors of the air-conditioned room . . .

All this is under the control of Mr. Martin Dolphin, Head of Accounting Machine Group, who filled in some of the background information for this article, and guided us as to the best time to visit Machine Group without getting under people's feet. We then descended to the ground floor where Frank Malin took us in charge and went to a lot of trouble to show us the procedures used and how the various electronic machines are operated.

It is quite difficult to appreciate, in a brief visit like ours, the scale of the activities undertaken in such a comparatively small space. An average day's work in Machine Group involves the issue of 17,000 Consumers Accounts, the recording of up to 15,000 payments, and the passing of over 400,000 punched cards through various machine operations. So smoothly is all this work carried out that we just could not relate

quiet spot in Card Control Section. Here, something in the region of four million punched cards—about the size of ordinary postcards—containing the information on the account of every consumer in the country, are housed in tiers of boxes running clockwise round the room. Basically, a consumer has a separate card for each meter installed on his premises. This card records, in addition to various coding details, the relevant Fixed Charge or Meter Rent and particulars of meter readings and units consumed. Other cards for a consumer record name and address, the total of his last bill, payments made, hire purchase transactions, service repair charges etc. All these cards act as the medium through which the various machines carry out their functions.

Card Control Section also holds the records of every item of stock in every stores location in the Board. The processing of the stock position is carried out every week, and the new balance for every item of stock that moved is recorded.

Dan McLaughlin from Carndonagh on the Inishowen Peninsula, who is in charge of Card Control Section, put it in a nutshell when he explained:



Anne McDonald, Anne Donlon, and Frances Martin

these statistics to what we saw around us. Frank pointed out also that these figures did not include weekly or monthly activities in connection with Stores Accounting, Cost and Trade, Statistical Returns, Capital Assets, etc.

As we talked, we were standing in a relatively



Michael Rochford, Michael Kelly and W. H. Byrne

"We supply the ammunition for the machines, and they shoot it back at us".

Dan has been in the Board since 1937. After five years in Galway, first in Operation Department, then as Cashier and then as salesman he was transferred to Accounting Machine Group during the Emergency, and has been there ever since.

Michael Kelly and Harry Byrne are engaged in preparing the cards for the machines, relating them to the meter books as they arrive in Card Control Section. They handle the cards for about 100,000 consumers between them every day. Michael, who joined the Board in 1946, was on



A corner of punching and verifying section. Top row (l.-r.): Sheila Pendergast, Helen Dunne and Margaret Wheatley. Front row: Marian O'Connell, Margaret Hughes, and (in the distance) Marie Hurley.

the switchboard in Rathmines before coming to Head Office. He lives out in Kimmage, and as a member of the local Tenants' Association he campaigns for improvements in the amenities for the area. Harry was on the petrol pumps in Pembroke before coming to Head Office. He paints in oils and watercolours, mainly for pleasure, but his pictures have been bought by discerning collectors, and several members of the staff will recall his work as a feature of the Staff Association Exhibition of some five years ago.

Noreen Byrne, Maura Kavanagh, Lilian O'Sullivan, Frances Martin and Anne McDonald are engaged in keeping this vast file of consumers' accounts from going to seed, so to speak.

(I asked Frank Malin a lot of questions about the possibility of a consumer being charged with the bill for another consumers' account, but after many years as a cricketer with Pembroke C.C. he knew how to play a straight bat to them all. It appears that even with four million cards to handle, there is seldom a mix-up, and when there

is there are ready ways of picking up the error.) Noreen was on leave during our visit; Maura is an inveterate "whodunit" reader; Lilian devotes a large share of her spare time to child welfare—as a former member of Sandycove S.C. she has three gold medals for swimming to her credit, and held the club championship over 100 yards. Frances, from Hospital, Co. Limerick, is also a swimmer, and a good cook to boot. Anne, from Shercock in Co. Cavan is interested in the theatre.

Punching and Verifying Section occupies the ground floor on the L.D.O. side of the East James' Street block. Here, the cards are punched for feeding to the other machines. Each of the thirty girls operating the punching and verifying machines handles several thousand cards a day.

The Supervisor in charge of the Punch Room is Miss Ryan. She and assistant supervisor, Eileen Hurley are also responsible for training newcomers in the operation of the machines and ensuring that they reach a satisfactory standard. Gina Murphy, for instance, who came up from Lismore in Waterford just six weeks ago, is still developing her operating speed. The Hollerith machines were operated with just one finger of the right hand; the new machines require all five of one hand for numerals, and both hands are used on the keyboard—similar to a typewriter's—for what is termed 'Alphameric' operations. So the new machines require more time for training. Again, naturally enough, there is a high staff turnover in the Section, so training takes up much of Eileen's time.

Grace Corway, who has recently moved from the centre of the city to Beaumont, has adapted herself very well to her new surroundings, having brought there her two abiding interests, gardening and the piano. Roses are her special interest, and when the weather is unkind Grace plays Chopin and all the favourites on the piano. And with these pursuits—graceful, like her own name—to occupy her, she is "never lonely".

Mrs. Veronica O'Neill has three children to look after—"the three of them like steps of stairs, the eldest, fifteen, just left school". Mrs. O'Neill returned to the Machine Room staff when her husband died, and she now performs the dual role of breadwinner and housewife.

Margaret Hughes and Maeve Pendergast are



Left row, from the top: Terry Comerford, Gina Murphy, Elizabeth Mongey, Maire Goggin, Sheila Kelly, Mary Bourke and Mary Costello. Centre row: Veronica Farrell, Dorothy McCarthy, Carolyn O'Moore, Brenda McNiff, Geraldine Traynor and Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoich. Third row: Mrs. Vera O'Neill, Mary O'Brien (the 2nd!) Kathleen McNamara, Freda Mannion and Patricia Kelly.

entrusted with the punching of cards for the more intricate and non-routine jobs. Nora Hartney, operating one of the new machines, finds that they are giving excellent results for speed and accuracy.

Most of the girls in this Section are from Dublin, though lately there have been new recruits from further afield, like Marian O'Connell from Castleisland in Kerry, agus (we promised to air our rusty Gaelic as a special gesture) Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoich as an Dingle Peninsula, ar thaobh Mount Brandon. Sí Seosaimhín cailín as trí cailíní agus sé buachaillí sa gclann. Táid gach ceann acu níos fearr ag caint i nGaeilge ná i mBéarla, agus má's maith ag éine dul go Ciarraigh chun blás maith a fháil ar a chuid Gaeilg, beidh clann Sheosaimhín réidh an fáilte geal a thabhairt dó.

Whew! I'm sure Doris McCarthy, who works

for the revival of Irish as one of her spare-time pursuits, would make a better fist of that lot.

How many of the Dublin staff travel in every day to work from as far away as Kilcoole, as Peggy Wheatley does? She sets off at 7.30 a.m. and usually doesn't see home until close on 7.30 p.m. Sensibly enough she uses the bus service, but I daresay if Carolyn O'Moore was put to it she could cover the journey by bicycle with no bother. She sports a little badge which was awarded to her for completing the 50-mile cycle through the Wicklow mountains, sponsored by Carling Beer and the Evening Herald at the Whit weekend. She covered the stiff course in less than six hours. Last year she participated in the 20-mile walk to Bray. Mary Costello prefers to go on cycling tours—it's a more leisurely way of getting around; while Helen Dunne likes walking in the hinterland of Ballymun, where she

resides. Maura Burke, as a Captain in the Girl Guides, gets around quite a lot in like manner. I asked her how you acquire all those wonderful badges and emblems on the Guide's uniform; you undergo certain tests—cooking, camping, initiative, first aid, etc. Maura made it sound easy, but . . .

Many of the girls, like Sheila Kelly, Betty Mongey and Geraldine Traynor, divide their time between various pursuits—dancing, swimming, reading, dressmaking—and like Anne Norton, who says she's the lazy type, they might even do a bit of house decorating on the side. Betty Mongey says she does a "horrible lot of reading—the usual trash—romance and that". She said it, I didn't. Patsy Kelly goes dancing a lot too—under the supervision of her older sisters. She's the "baby" of the family and has three to keep an eye on her. Brenda McNiff does a fair share of reading; her tastes are all-embracing—as she put it, she reads everything from Steinbeck to Maurice Walsh—"the Journal even". Well, I like that!

Freda Mannion has recently announced her engagement to Mr. T. Gavin. Marie Hurley is spending more time than ever at her "House and Garden" pursuits. Máire Goggin frequently travels to Tramore at weekends (for the sea fishing!)

There are two Mary O'Briens: Mary O'Brien the First works in Machine Section; Mary O'Brien the Second may be found in Punching Section. She and Terry Comerford are Pitch and Putt enthusiasts.

Kay McNamara, who sells the Journal for us there, is one of those typical Dubliners whose main occupation is the enjoyment of life. She follows the nags, and the doggies—at a safe distance, more to mingle with the crowds than to "make a killing", as they say. She likes a good meal, a little wine perhaps, an evening at the theatre . . . Ah, Omar Khayyam had some of the right ideas!

Anne Murphy, whose family has a newsagency in Cork Street, where she helps out in the evenings, had this to say about her job:

"The week just flies. See? Tomorrow is Friday already—pay-day, I can't believe it!" All in one breath, she said it.

And so to Machine Section, this fascinating place, whirring with the sounds of machinery all of which is enclosed in demure-looking

cabinets, with little visible signs of the speed of their activities.

Most fascinating of the many different types of accounting machines in this Section are, of course, the two IBM 1401 computers, in their specially designed, air-conditioned area. All calculations, printing, compilation of statistical information, balancing of control totals, etc., in connection with consumers accounts, is done in one passage of the various cards through a computer.

There are several other types of machines—Interpreters, Collators, Tabulators, Sorters and Reproducers. The interpreting machine, for instance, "translates" the punches on the cards into typed names and addresses and other relevant information, which it prints on the appropriate section of the card. The work of the sorter is more or less self-explanatory: the Collators bring together the various cards used in the computing of each account; the tabulators are in fact high-speed calculating machines and can be used for various accounting purposes, ancillary to that for which the computer is geared. Reproducers are used to convert the mark-sensed cards used in Stores Accounting into punched cards. They have a variety of other uses, either on their own or linked with the tabulators.

The machines are set to do their different tasks by inserting a specially-wired control panel (or "plug-board"). These control panels are wired in such a way that a multitude of electric circuits are completed in the order appropriate to producing the desired results. These boards are wired up by Paddy Price and Bertie Dowling, who are right-hand men to Machine Room Supervisor John Kirby—his job, in a nutshell, being that of organising the production of 17,000 E.S.B. bills a day. I watched Paddy and Bertie at work on these panels; the trick, apparently, is to know which circuits to complete to get the right job done. The ambitious young man who called on their help one afternoon, in the hope of learning all about it in one hour flat, was still asking questions, as I was, when it was time to go.

Dorothy Mulholland, the **Journal** Representative in Machine Group, is Lady Captain of St. Anne's G.C. this year. On the interpreters are Liz Byrne and Loretto McDermott, two new members of the swimming club.



Collators on your left, sorters on the right, with (l.-r.): Margaret Nally, Margaret Keane, Josephine Griffin, Nuala Merriman and Sadie Walsh.

Clare O'Donoghue and Sadie Walsh both find walking the ideal relaxation after the tensions of attending the high-speed sorting machines through which cards pass at the rate of 2,000 per minute. Not so long ago 800 per minute was regarded as very fast. Sadie enjoys the sights and sounds of the city; Clare prefers

is thinking of learning judo—so watch out, pedestrians—if she runs over you, don't argue—she might either give out to you in German or throw you in Judo!

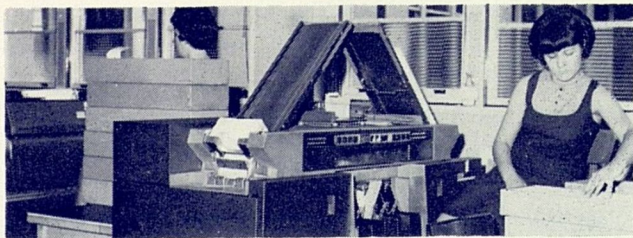


In action on the Tabulators (Bertie Dowling on left) are Brigid Delaney, Loretto McDermott and Eileen Trapp.

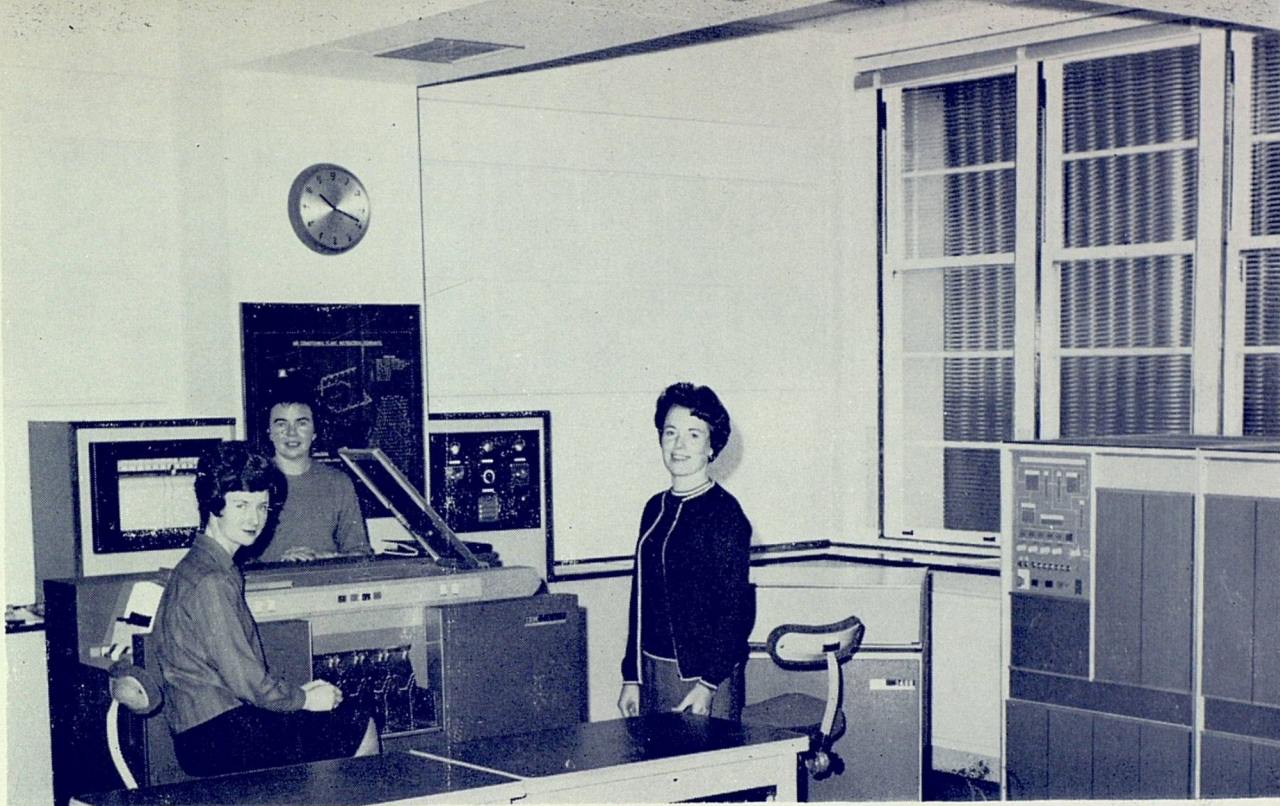
to go further afield, and has hiked to remote parts of the country. Josephine Griffin, coming from Shanagolden, naturally takes an interest in horses. She is also a keen gardener, and collects records of the classics. A different kind of collector is Nuala Merriman, who has a collection of dolls in their native costumes from 20 countries including Holland, Switzerland and Japan. Nuala, like most of the girls in Machine Section, has been trained to operate many of the different machines. Besides collecting dolls she is learning to drive, learning German, and

Anne Donlon hails from Lanesboro'. She shares her Dublin flat with her pal Veronica Farrell who is from the same part of the world and works in Punching Section. Like Margaret Keane from Castleisland, who lives with her two sisters in Dublin, she finds the city can be a lonely place, even if you're "dance mad", as they say Margaret Nally from Gort has the run of her uncle's dark-room for developing her photographs. As Eustace Malcolm would say, "the answer is in the negative".

Tina Murphy and Joan Lynch were working at the 1401 computers. Both of them were still as fascinated by the speed and versatility of the machines as I was, for in spite of Eamonn Halpin's very clear explanations I was still a little bemused by the complexities of programming. "The com-



Behind that stack of card boxes is Joan Lynch. On the collator is Pauline Delaney.



Anne Cassidy, Tina Murphy and Mary O'Brien (the First!) with one of the 1401 computers.

puter's method of working is logical, absolutely logical. The problem is to ensure that what you tell the computer to do is also logical. It's not as easy as it sounds." I believe him. Tom Bolton is also engaged in this business of talking turkey to the computer, a new language which is called "programming".

Vital links in the whole, non-stop chain of activities are the "three Musketeers", Tom Flynn ("Thomas Ashe Patrick Flynn", to you), Jim Larkin and John Young.

John Young was in the Polefield from 1948 until five years ago when he came to Head Office. He was born "within the walls" of Dublin. I bet there are quite a few Dubliners who don't even know where that is. Here's another clue: he served Mass as a boy in St. Audeon's, one of the oldest churches in the country. That should give the game away. John still turns out for the E.S.B. XI in the Leinster League Division II, and as captain last year, he has some hard things to say about the present state of the E.S.B. Soccer Club.

"There was a time when we had a good club and the team was doing well in the League—The

Athletic Union as it was then. But the facilities were bad, no decent club rooms and so on, and the good players went off and joined other clubs where there were hot showers, a bar, and maybe facilities for table-tennis or billiards as well. So now we're barely able to field a full team, let alone have we got any sideline supporters. We used to have a ground out at Santry but now we're renting a pitch from the Corporation in St. Anne's Estate, and there is no pavilion or club rooms of any kind."

John would like to see more support from the Staff, which would enable them to seek help from the Board in acquiring a permanent ground and in building a pavilion with up-to-date facilities.

Tom Flynn is another soccer fan, a "Rovers" follower too, and Jim Larkin, who is a "Shels" fan, will never forgive him, because Tom Flynn played for Shelbourne in 1938-39, when they won the F.A.I. Cup for the first time. Tom learned his football as a young professional with the English club, Grimsby Town, then returned to play for Shels, and later Limerick. In the Army during the Emergency, he won basketball and cross-country medals with his O/C from the