

R. C. Geary and the ESRI¹

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The Economic and Social Research Institute

“Humour makes the absurdity of life endurable”²

R. C. Geary's association with The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) was a long and fruitful one. He was the first Director of the Institute which began in 1960 as The Economic Research Institute (ERI), but by the time he retired as Director in 1966 had added a social research wing to make it the ESRI. Although at the latter date he was 70 years old, he continued as an active member of the research staff right up to his death in 1983. As Spencer (1983) has pointed out, more than half of his 112 publications were produced during his career at the Institute. This article outlines his contribution to the formation of the Institute, especially in the critical early years.

The Origins of the Institute

In order to pin-point Geary's particular role, it is necessary first to give a brief general account of how the Institute came into being. The process began in April 1959 when a message was relayed to Ireland from F.H. Boland, Ireland's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, that Joseph McDaniel, then Secretary of the Ford Foundation, planned to

1. The primary sources used here are the records and files kept at the ESRI. I am especially grateful to the following for commenting on an earlier draft: Donal Nevin and Ken Whitaker (the only two persons still serving on the Council of the Institute from its inception); Paddy Lynch (a Council member since 1966); Maura Dempsey (the Secretary of the Institute from 1 December 1960, who retired as Assistant Director, Administration in 1981); and Terry Baker and Bob O'Connor (members of the research staff since 1964 and 1967, respectively). None of the foregoing is responsible for the facts or opinions expressed here.

2. Roy Geary in a letter of 22 November 1975 to Sir Maurice Kendall.

visit Ireland later in the year and that the Foundation seemed disposed to do something which would be of economic benefit to Ireland. Consultations quickly took place among the Secretaries of the relevant Government departments on how best to translate this expression of goodwill into tangible action.

The decisive influence was T.K. Whitaker, the young and dynamic Secretary of the Department of Finance. Less than six months earlier the Government had published his major study, *Economic Development*. In the course of producing that work he had become acutely conscious of the need for research on the Irish economy, and he wanted this research done outside the civil service in a setting free from government or political influence. The situation in the Irish universities at the time was summed up as follows by George O'Brien, then Professor of Political Economy and National Economics of Ireland at University College Dublin and the first Chairman of the Institute:

All the Irish universities are fully occupied in undergraduate and post-graduate teaching and in examination work. They simply do not possess the resources to undertake research on the scale which exists in other countries (O'Brien 1960).

Whitaker was the first to suggest that Ford Foundation assistance should be sought for an economic research centre or institute, and this was readily supported by the other Secretaries. In putting flesh on the concept in close association with Whitaker, the other critical person was M. D. McCarthy, Geary's successor as Director of the Central Statistics Office and a highly capable administrator. In devising a constitutional framework for the new organisation, McCarthy made extensive use of the model provided by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR) in Britain, so that like NIESR the ERI was established under the Companies Acts as a company limited by guarantee.

While the story of the negotiations with the Ford Foundation is an interesting one, this is not the place to describe it in detail. Suffice it to say that Whitaker's persuasive powers were crucial.³ He took advantage of the annual meeting of the IMF/World Bank in the autumn of 1959 to bring along with him, among others, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Frank Aiken, and the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, J.J. McElligott, to a meeting with Ford Foundation officials at their headquarters in New York. He persuaded the Government to provide suitable accommodation, which the

3. Whitaker's aide in the Department of Finance in handling his extensive correspondence in the matter was Thomas Kinsella who was then on the threshold of the international acclaim as a poet which he has since acquired.

Foundation would not fund, and he secured a Government commitment to financial assistance for the Institute when the Foundation funding would cease. Since the Ford Foundation preferred to deal formally with a non-government organisation, arrangements were made that the formal proposal submitted on 20 August 1959 would be signed by the President (W.A. Honohan) of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, of which Whitaker was then a joint Honorary Secretary. The Society is a learned body established in 1847 and operating both North and South — a factor which made it natural that the governing body⁴ of the ERI should also have representation from both parts of Ireland.

Geary, who was at this time in New York as Head of the National Accounts Division of the UN Statistical Office, was kept closely informed of these developments, and played a significant, if relatively inactive, role in the success of the negotiations. From the start, he was slated to be the first Director, and in recommending his appointment at the first meeting of the Council of the Institute on 15 July 1960, Whitaker stated that “negotiations with the Ford Foundation had been facilitated by the fact that a suitable director, namely Dr R.C. Geary, would be available”. Geary was tremendously excited by the prospect and was not a man to remain passive for long. In October 1959, Whitaker while in New York asked him to prepare a detailed budget and he promptly set about the task with gusto. He also helped to draw up the programme of work. Through his friendship with Solomon Fabricant, he was invited to attend a board meeting of the US National Bureau for Economic Research (NBER) to see at first hand how their system worked. Fabricant’s desire that the NBER play a strong role “in vitalising research in the hinterlands” prompted Geary to suggest in a letter to McCarthy on 2 November 1959 that the Council of the new institute should include representation from the University Colleges of Cork, Galway and Maynooth, noting in the case of the last mentioned:

There are hazards about Maynooth, of course, but representation might have an influence in forcing the clergy to face the facts of economic life and lessen the impact of ukases at Confirmation ceremonies.

His other suggestions for Council membership in an earlier letter to McCarthy on 19 October 1959 included “a representative of the Plain People of Ireland (perhaps a woman ...)”. While this might strike us nowadays as condescending, it was at the time revolutionary — to judge from McCarthy’s

4. This body was known as the “Executive Board” until 1966, when it was renamed the “Council”. Somewhat anachronistically I shall use the latter term throughout to avoid confusion with the smaller body, the Executive Committee, appointed by the Council and to which all powers of the Council are delegated.

withering reply: "Personally, I do not know of any woman who would be a desirable member of the Council". It was 25 years later, in 1984, before the first woman became a member of the Council.

To cut a long story short, all of this activity culminated in a decision by the Board of Trustees of the Ford Foundation on 24 June 1960 to approve a five-year grant of \$280,000 to fund the new institute, which was formally incorporated on the same day. The amount involved (£20,000 a year at the going exchange rate) may seem small in our eyes, but it should be recalled that, for instance, a clerk-typist could be recruited then at £235 a year, or much less than the average annual *increment* now applying in a similar grade. Geary took up duty on 23 July 1960, but the formal opening ceremony was delayed until 9 June 1961 pending the refurbishment of the premises at 73, Lower Baggot Street which was only completed in March 1961 (up to 7 March 1961 the staff were housed at the Institute of Public Administration in Lansdowne Road). The opening ceremony took place in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Dublin and other dignitaries — "everyone who matters in the country" was how an ebullient Geary described them in a letter to a prospective staff recruit in Australia. The ceremony was performed by the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, who was accompanied by the Ministers for Finance, External Affairs, Education, and Industry and Commerce (Ministers had less to do in those days!). In the course of his speech at this ceremony, Geary remarked:

As an awesome statistical thought, if our researches result in an increase of one-tenth of one per cent in the national income beyond what it otherwise would be, we shall be worth half-a-million a year to the nation.

His irrepressible humour and dislike of cant could not long rest easy with such a remark, however, and he hastened to add:

If I or my successors are ever tempted to make such a claim, it is comforting to reflect that it cannot be disproved.

Research Policy

In a letter of 6 March 1961 to an incoming research staff member, Geary gave a detailed account of his approach to research policy. At the beginning, at least, all research papers "must be redolent of Ireland and must address themselves to problems which, rightly or wrongly, the people consider urgent and important". On the other hand, "the popularity or otherwise of the researchers' findings is not a consideration, provided that these findings are soundly based and cogently argued". The personal responsibility of an author for his own work would be absolute, though he would be expected to seek criticism from colleagues in the Institute and from experts abroad "to ensure

that the work reaches the highest standard”.

He did not think that the focus on Ireland would be any hindrance to producing scientific work of the highest quality. Researchers could use as much theory as they wished provided it was applied to Irish data. It was his view that economics suffered from “too much theory and too little application”. Ireland provided “as good a guinea-pig as you would want for useful practical research”. Indeed he would not have accepted the post of Director “if, as a former UN man, I were not convinced of the likelihood that our work had far-reaching implications for other undeveloped countries”. Moreover, once the Irish studies were well under way,

.... an occasional pure theory paper (mathematical or other) would be welcome for prestige reasons and because it may be the kind of paper the researcher wants to write From long experience I know that the paper which must be written will be written anyhow!

To implement this policy his immediate priority was to recruit staff. His first senior appointment — that of Maura Dempsey as Secretary of the Institute, who took up duty on 1 December 1960 — was an inspired choice, which relieved him from administrative duties and enabled him to concentrate almost exclusively on research policy and research staff, as well as on his own personal research work.

Research Staff

Geary was clear from the start that recruiting suitable research staff would be not only the most important task, but also the most difficult one. Given the situation in the Irish universities as described above by O'Brien (1960), there was no hope of securing senior staff at home. Geary, therefore, made use of his extensive network of contacts with eminent economists and statisticians abroad to probe the international market. He began writing to friends as early as May 1960, even before he was appointed Director. He undertook an Oxbridge tour in October 1960 when he visited, among others, Richard Stone at Cambridge, Colin Clark at Oxford, Roy Allen and James Durbin at LSE, Sir Harry Campion at the British CSO, and E.A.G. Robinson, Donald MacDougall and other members of the Board at NIESR. Through his contacts with INSEE and the OEEC in Paris and the International Association for Research on Income and Wealth, he explored European and other possibilities. Everywhere he turned the story was the same: “acute shortage of good men” (sexist language was not exclusive to Ireland!). This was the time when the new universities were opening in the UK and, as well, demand for economists from developing countries and from industry was rising rapidly.

Nevertheless, although progress was much slower than he would have wished, Geary was able to issue a press release in March 1961 announcing the arrival during the course of the next six months of four senior research staff: Edward Nevin (from Wales), Alfred Kuehn (from Germany), David Walker (from Uganda but originally from England) and Conrad Leser (from Australia but originally from Germany). Geary's recruitment efforts were helped by his ability, regrettably transient, to offer substantially higher salaries than those prevailing in Irish universities at the time. He had already initiated arrangements to train young research workers at the Institute, through bursaries for junior university staff and scholarships for new graduates: these arrangements led to the subsequent establishment of the research assistant grade at the Institute. Later, when the scholarship holders had completed their term at the Institute, some of them were awarded Institute fellowships for postgraduate studies abroad. No doubt his own early experience as a postgraduate student at the Sorbonne had impressed on him the value of training in a world-class graduate department. Among the first beneficiaries of some or all of these arrangements were Dermot McAleese (now Whately Professor of Political Economy at Trinity College Dublin),⁵ Dara McCormack (later alternate Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund and now Manager, Credit Institutions Supervision at the Central Bank of Ireland), and Jim McGilvray (now Professor of Economics at the University of Strathclyde).

The effort to attract and retain senior staff remained, however, a constant struggle. Kuehn stayed for little more than a year, Walker for 18 months, Nevin for 2½ years and Leser eventually left in 1967. Geary adopted other expedients, such as attracting visiting scholars for short periods, which he did with some success. He also succeeded in making one key lasting appointment, Terry Baker, who took up duty on 1 September 1964 and was later to establish such an important role for the Institute's *Quarterly Economic Commentary*. But from time to time Geary's frustrations manifested themselves. Reacting to the departure of a new senior staff member recruited a short time earlier, the minutes of the Executive Committee of 21 January 1964 record him as saying:

He always considered that the main duty of the Director was to obtain and to retain research staff. From this point of view he had failed. Accordingly he placed himself in the hands of the Committee which

5. The present Professor of Political Economy at University College Dublin, Peter Neary, was also a product of the ESRI research assistant and fellowship schemes, but at a later stage. A comprehensive list of those who spent their formative research years at the Institute, or who benefited from fellowships for postgraduate study abroad, would now come close to a *Who's Who* of the Irish economics profession.

might wish to find a Director who would be more successful in this regard.

Of course the Executive Committee refused to consider any such action, and he was reassured by the Chairman, George O'Brien, speaking on behalf of the entire Committee, that "no one could have done more for the Institute than the present Director".

His frustrations surfaced in public through the following paragraph in the address he drafted for the President of the Institute, J.J. McElligott, for delivery at the sixth Annual General Meeting on 14 December 1965:

It is a melancholy fact that, after five years' existence, there is no member of the research staff of Irish birth. The Dublin universities have shown little overt interest in our affairs. No doubt this is due to other preoccupations of the economic staffs; perhaps it is an aspect of the acute shortage of economists everywhere. In contrast is our experience with University College, Cork which, in circumstances of extreme difficulty, made available to us the services of Dr David O'Mahony Dr O'Mahony is the fourth member of our small research staff who, during the last three years, has been appointed to a chair of economics in an Irish or British university. Clearly sojourn at our Institute is an avenue to academic preferment.

This section of the President's address was reported prominently next day in *The Irish Times*. Neither of the two Dublin university professors who were members of both the Institute's Council and Executive Committee — George Duncan at Trinity and James Meenan at UCD — was present at the AGM, but Meenan responded vigorously in a letter to *The Irish Times* on 20 December 1965, in the course of which he said:

I am sorry that the real, if uneasy, improvement in the relations between the universities and the institute has been interrupted in this way. In the early days of the institute we in the universities had the impression that members of its staff were discouraged from making contact with us.

In more recent years, things have been much better...

I do not, therefore, understand what Dr McElligott had in mind; especially because no suggestion of any lack of interest by the universities was made by him or by anyone else at the last meeting of the executive committee, which was held only ten days ago.

The fact is that the demand for trained economists greatly exceeds the supply. This is especially true in the universities, whose needs for staff should receive priority, because it is from them that the future

supply must come... .

If the institute cannot obtain staff, it is only in the same boat as everybody else; though its failure to do so, in spite of being able to offer terms of remuneration which are fantastically above academic levels, should induce some searching of conscience.

I believe that the best immediate method of tackling this shortage is by permitting a greater sharing of staff, between one university and another and between the universities and the institute. I am afraid that will not be possible until the institute is able to conduct its affairs in a more neighbourly spirit. In this problem, as in others which face our country, it is a pity to use recrimination when co-operation alone can provide a solution.

Thankfully, honour was satisfied by this spirited response, the imminent season of peace allowed time for harmony to be restored, and Meenan later became an outstanding Chairman of the Institute. Geary in his impetuosity did not have the patience to await calmly the solution that would come, but only in time, through the measures he himself had already initiated — the schemes for research assistant training and fellowships for postgraduate study abroad, which eventually transformed the state of economics, and indeed the other social sciences, not only in the Institute, but throughout Ireland.

Publication Output

Notwithstanding the small number of research staff, Geary quickly secured and maintained an extraordinarily high level of output. The first Institute research paper (by Edward Nevin) appeared in October 1961, little more than six months after his arrival; by the end of the next year, eleven research papers had been published; and when Geary ceased as Director in October 1966, no less than 35 research papers had been published, with several others in the pipeline. Nevin and Leser, with seven research papers each, were the most prolific authors. In addition, there were four books and a sizeable batch of reprints of articles by Institute staff in prestigious academic journals.

Geary must be given the main credit for stimulating the rate and quality of publication. He acted like a man driven. Writing to James Meenan on 15 May 1961, he stated:

What mind I have is crammed with the Institute's specific programme, to the exclusion of everything else — except thrillers and Jane Austen!

In a letter of 16 September 1963 to Maura Dempsey from the Hotel Albana on Lake Lucerne, where he was on holiday with his wife, he wrote:

Will you please ask Margaret to type the enclosed Appendix B for the Linear Programming monograph. The 1 + 4 can be retained in the office until my return. I hope to have an Appendix A of perhaps equal length which I may send in a few days. I would like to have all this typing ready for me on my return. Perhaps Margaret would leave it on my desk the Friday before.

Geary's relations with research staff were not unaffected by the fact that he had spent most of the formative years of his working life in the Irish civil service in a more authoritarian era. When he returned to Dublin in 1923 at age 26, following completion of his academic studies at the Sorbonne and a short period lecturing in mathematics at University College, Southampton, he joined the Statistics Branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce.⁶ It was not until 1949 that this Branch became the Central Statistics Office, with Geary as its first Director — a post he held until 1957 when he moved to the UN. Staff relations in the Irish civil service were characterised by a curious dualism: easy, collegial relations prevailed most of the time at the informal level but coexisted with a rigid, legalistic and impersonal approach to formal personnel matters — or “establishment” matters as they were then known. Geary's formal communications with research staff at the Institute occasionally betray the influence of the latter approach. Certainly, it is unlikely that anyone not moulded in a civil service environment would contemplate drafting a reprimand for delayed delivery of a paper in the following terms:

You have not conformed with the last sentence in the first paragraph of my minute of 12 December 1961 nor with the third sentence of the second paragraph of my minute of 19 December 1961, all the contents of which you should again study.

But this was not the essential Geary, whose chief method of winning high productivity from the research staff was inspiration, not admonition. He met each member weekly for a progress report, during which his comments and suggestions frequently improved, as well as speeded up, the ensuing publication. In addition to these individual meetings, there was a spontaneous group

6. It was here that Geary completed the first official set of national accounts estimates for Ireland, his collaborator in the Department of Finance in regard to the income and expenditure of public authorities being none other than T.K. Whitaker. The data were published in 1946 as a Government White Paper, *National Income and Expenditure 1938-1944* (P. No. 7,356). Despite the official nature of the publication, it retains many examples of Geary's vigorous prose, e.g. referring to the importance of assessing the dependability of the estimates of different components, the White Paper states: “Compilers of national income estimates have been prone to strain at theoretical gnats and to swallow statistical camels.”

meeting most Fridays after work in a nearby pub, "The Crookit Bawbee", at which Geary's charm and unlimited store of anecdotes did much to cement the *esprit de corps* of the developing Institute.

Publication Procedures

Geary's achievement in regard to the pace of publication is all the more remarkable given the procedures applying at the time. He himself instituted external refereeing of papers, and the practice has prevailed ever since. In addition, however, the Executive Committee insisted on approving all publications, a process which inevitably led to friction and delay. The Executive members were a highly dedicated group and the assumption of this duty made each of them feel a personal responsibility for every paper. The Executive Committee included, for instance, J.J. McElligott who had spent the best part of his life, both as Secretary of the Department of Finance and Governor of the Central Bank, fighting such "evils" as national debt and balance of payments deficits. He was not the kind of man to remain silent when confronted by statements such as Nevin (1962) that "an increasing public debt may be a *prerequisite* for the proper contribution of a government to the growth of its economy — evidence of a responsible, not irresponsible, administration", or Leser (1965) that "a moderate balance of payments deficit ... may be a natural and to some extent desirable feature". McElligott conveyed his views to Geary in protracted telephone conversations, followed up by lengthy memoranda. It is a tribute to McElligott and the other members of the Executive Committee that, although they sometimes held diametrically opposite views to those expounded in Institute papers, no paper that was passed by the referee was suppressed — though there were often extended delays.

While Geary generally sided with the authors, he accepted the system as such: he was not one to go to the stake for an abstract principle of unconstrained academic freedom. *His* overriding concern was with standards, and he had complete confidence that if a paper were of satisfactory quality, then no matter how unpalatable the findings he would be able to get it through the Executive Committee — as indeed he always did. Recording an oral censure to a senior staff member for publishing an article in a reputable, though non-technical, journal without prior permission, as was then required, Geary noted that he told the officer concerned that:

... my objection to publication on this occasion was based on my opinion that, from the scientific point of view, the article was "bad": if it were likely to redound to the credit of the Institute, the irregularity of non-intimation to publish would have been overlooked as trifling.

Nevertheless, the position was unsatisfactory, as was seen at an early stage by at least one Council member, Donal Nevin (a trade unionist and no relation of Edward Nevin), who wrote forcefully to Geary on 13 November 1961 stressing the importance of staff freedom not only for the staff itself “but also for the Institute’s standing and reputation”.

It is rather ironic, given his willingness to adhere to the same restrictions on his own published work as applied to the rest of the research staff, that it was a paper by Geary himself which created the greatest storm in the early years of the Institute — a storm “so vigorous as nearly to wreck the ERI” was how Geary (1983) later characterised it. The paper appeared as a chapter in the volume, *Europe’s Future in Figures*, which included contributions by such luminaries as Richard Stone and Ragnar Frisch and was edited by Geary (Geary 1962). The objective of economics, Geary argued in his paper, was “to improve the material welfare of mankind”. For this purpose it must become an experimental science, and “the essence of science is observation, measurement and inference from measurement”. He launched a many-sided attack on the contemporaneous practice of economics, especially in European universities:

Literary economics is outmoded; its gimcrack edifice would have collapsed long ago if it were not kept up by the wallpaper of style; let’s have done with it. Because of its survival, economics, regarded as a science, is at the phlogiston stage of chemistry before the advent of Lavoisier and Priestley. The litterateurs don’t seem to know this; we could, in Charity, forgive them anything but their complacency.

The use of mathematics, however, was not a sufficient safeguard if it led merely to theory without measurement: “theoretical economists seem sometimes to find perverse satisfaction in the fact that the entities with which they deal are not statistically measurable at all”. Even much of the practice of econometrics came under his lash because:

The development of econometrics is itself hampered by that discipline’s almost slavish deference to classical and neo-classical economic ideas: one would sometimes think that the main object of econometrics was to prove or disprove these ideas.

The sharpest darts, however, were aimed at “literary economics” and were all the more likely to reach their target because of Geary’s own excellent literary style:

At least it can be said for Mathematica that she has charm and elegance and can beget healthy children. In comparison literary economics seems

a dull frump with a monstrously high net reproduction rate. Her most important spawning was Karl Marx in whom she found no fault ("Perhaps he is a little obstreperous but he is so like his Daddy, Ricardo").

Not all the Institute economists then (or now) shared every aspect of Geary's methodological perspective, but they did not feel threatened by it and regarded his denunciations as good fun. Geary had duly circulated his paper in draft form to the Executive Committee well in advance of publication, and it is doubtful if his remarks were directed mainly at the position of economics in Ireland: as the quotations above show, he had other fish to fry. To some extent, however, he may have been giving vent to long-suppressed frustrations arising from his confinement for many years in an unconsidered section of the Department of Industry and Commerce. Having had no formal grounding in economics, his training as a mathematician/statistician inclined him towards measurement and empiricism rather than theory about the behaviour of the "economic man". No doubt, from his viewpoint the advisory scene had been too long under the influence of doctrinaire literary economists and a few verbal bombs were necessary to clear away this encumbrance! Moreover, though he was utterly devoid of malice, he retained all his life an impish penchant for mischief.

Whatever Geary's intent, the Irish university economists saw themselves as being attacked, and some were outraged.⁷ George Duncan resigned forthwith from the Council and Executive Committee, and his letter of 23 July 1962 to Geary reveals the strength of his indignation:

I repeat today on the coolness of paper what I said to you in the heat of anger on the telephone.

I do not wish to remain associated any longer with an institution the head of which permits himself, and gives such deliberate publicity to, such a mean and untruthful denigration of his friends and colleagues. The hurt of your insults cut very deep.

It is true that I saw your first draft, and was shocked by it. If I had really thought you were going to be daft enough to publish it like that, I should have cut through all the obstructions that prevented my attending recent meetings in order to block if possible the offensive portions.

As it is, I have no option but to resign, and do my best to dissuade my

7. A notable exception was R.D.C. Black who had just been appointed to the Chair of Economics at Queen's University Belfast and co-opted as a member of the ERI Council. Black wrote to Geary on 26 July 1962 to congratulate him "warmly" on the paper: "It says many things which badly need saying ...". In his reply of 30 July 1962, Geary stated: "Though the paper was lightly written I hope that my very deep sense of concern about economics in all its aspects will be evident."

University from supporting in any way the Institute. I am very, very sorry.

P.S. I wish I could give this letter the same publicity as your offence.

James Meenan at UCD took a more relaxed view: while making a formal protest, he explained in a separate personal letter to Geary that he had done so out of a sense of solidarity:

We University professors must hang together, lest we hang individually and I feel I must make noises of support. You will remember the circumstances in which that great and good man King Edward VII (whom in some respects you so closely resemble) declared that *Mon metier à moi, est d'être roi*. So *mon metier à moi est d'être professeur*, and there is a trade union of professors as there was of kings. (Not so successful.)

Happily, in response to a unanimous appeal from the Executive Committee, Duncan⁸ withdrew his resignation and continued to serve co-operatively on the Council and Executive Committee until he retired from the chair at Trinity in 1967.

The reform of the publication procedure was accomplished, not by Geary but, by his successor, McCarthy, who was more worldly-wise in these matters. Before accepting appointment as Director in 1966, McCarthy persuaded the Executive Committee to vest in the Director the final responsibility to determine whether, and in what form, Institute research should be published. Furthermore, this authority was made part of the Director's Conditions of Appointment, so that it could not be recalled by a future Executive Committee other than by the drastic expedient of firing the Director. The arrangement has prevailed ever since and, on the whole, has given general satisfaction. There are few reforms, however, no matter how desirable and even necessary, that do not still involve some loss. Released from the duty to approve publications, the members of the Executive Committee inevitably felt under less compulsion to vet papers so thoroughly as in the early years. The Executive included, and continues to include, persons of outstanding ability and vast experience and their criticisms, however exasperating at times for staff to have to take account of them, unquestionably contributed to the prestige so quickly established by Institute papers. And of course, a school of economic thought has come to the fore since then which would hold, for instance, that McElligott was the one who was right anyway!

8. As a pioneer in preparing Irish national income estimates — still not superseded — before any official estimates were available, Duncan had less cause than most to regard himself as the target of Geary's attack.

Other Initiatives

Geary initiated many other developments in support of a research climate at the Institute and indeed in Ireland generally. Richard Stone was brought over for a week in April 1961, while John and Ursula Hicks came for consultations and to lecture in March 1963. The first public conference Geary organised (jointly with the Institute of Public Administration) was a meeting from 4-6 April 1962 about French Planning, to which a high level deputation came from the Commissariat Général du Plan. At the request of the Government, the Institute in 1965 organised a symposium, promoted by the OECD, on Operational Research in the Public Domain, with a view to demonstrating how such techniques might be employed in Ireland. The Association d'Instituts Européens de Conjoncture Economique met in the Institute in October 1966. As President of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, Geary arranged in 1966 for the Institute to host the 1967 conference of the Association which was held in Maynooth College from 20-26 August.

The most notable conference hosted by the Institute, however, was the Joint European Conference of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, the Institute of Management Sciences, and the Econometric Society, with participation of Fellows of the Royal Statistical Society, which was held at University College Dublin from 3-7 September 1962.⁹ This Conference assembled in Dublin at one time a larger galaxy of eminent economists and statisticians than was ever seen there before — or, dare one say it, since — and included such illustrious names as Allen, Bartlett, Cox, Durbin, Frisch, Gorman, Griliches, Kendall, Malinvaud, Metzler, Sargan, Solow and Theil. Perhaps even more remarkable was the fact that the attendance list included a fair sprinkling of prominent persons from business and the public sector in Ireland. To judge by the subjects addressed, they must have found the papers heavy going, but their presence was testimony to Geary's crusading efforts to have the best academic knowledge applied to practical affairs.

Indeed Geary was quite missionary in his endeavours to put economics and statistics at the disposal of business and the public service. As he stated in the Institute's Annual Report 1963-64:

Though the Institute is, strictly speaking, an academic body, it has always been mindful of its philosophy that research economics, if words mean anything, should be useful to the public who, as farmers, businessmen and administrators, have to make decisions, necessarily with imperfect understanding of the techniques of economics and statistics.

9. During the Conference, Geary had the melancholy duty of announcing the death in Australia of his mentor, R.A. Fisher, describing him as "the greatest statistician who ever lived or is likely to live" (Geary, 1983).

He arranged various series of lectures by Institute staff, some of them aimed directly at practical businessmen, and the weekly seminars were open to all. Told by some earnest participants that they wanted to attend in order to enable them to understand the publications of the Institute, Geary commented: "After a little reflection we have decided to take this as a compliment". He himself produced a statistical schema for use in business called *Do-it-yourself Economics of the Firm*, and he tried to interest even small firms in basic management accounting. In 1962 he instituted a sample survey of Irish firms to assess the current position and future prospects of industry: this was extended to a quarterly survey the following year and is now carried out monthly. He was greatly chuffed to receive a joint letter in October 1962 from the Director-General of the Federated Union of Employers and the Joint Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, requesting the Institute to continue its programme of economic forecasting, which both sides considered invaluable to the National Employer/Labour Conference. He was highly flattered when Whitaker wrote in February 1962 requesting the Institute to advise on the preparation of the Second Programme for Economic Expansion. An account of the Institute's contribution to the methodology of the Second Programme can be found in Geary (1964) and Ryan (1964).

The Addition of Social Research

The story of how the ERI became the ESRI in 1966 goes back to early 1963 when a Social Research Committee (SRC) was set up under the auspices of the Institute of Public Administration, the Director of which, Tom Barrington, was the prime mover in getting the Committee started. The object of the SRC was to initiate a programme of social research in Ireland and to prepare for setting-up a Social Research Council. The SRC was chaired by Paddy Lynch of UCD, who was later, among many other roles, to become a distinguished Chairman of the ESRI. The membership comprised the Secretaries of several government departments, the Heads of a number of university departments, the Directors of relevant research institutes and the Director of the CSO. Geary was a member of the SRC but did not play a particularly prominent role. He was not a member of the Sub-Committee set up by the SRC on 11 February 1963 to develop a plan of action. McCarthy *was*, and played an influential part in formulating the Sub-Committee's report, which was approved by the SRC on 19 April 1963. The report envisaged that the SRC would be concerned with priorities for social research, funding such research engaged in by other bodies, and providing fellowships and scholarships.

For these purposes, however, finance was needed, and an application was made to the Department of Finance. In a letter of 12 September 1963 to

Todd Andrews, the President of the IPA, Whitaker gave a preliminary response, indicating his personal views. Because Exchequer assistance and expert resources were so scarce he thought it "necessary to guard against proliferation of agencies and duplication of functions". He then went on to say:

The ambit of the Economic Research Institute covers social as well as economic research and there is much to be said for having both carried out by one organisation. This was contemplated by the Government — *vide* the Taoiseach's speech when he performed the opening ceremony ...

When he met a delegation from the IPA the following month, Whitaker encouraged the SRC to seek non-Exchequer sources of funding, adding that he had hopes of securing additional Ford Foundation money for the ERI. (In the event, these hopes were not realised, despite Whitaker's best efforts assisted by Geary, but that did not become clear until three years later.)

In pursuit of the uphill task of tapping non-Exchequer funding sources, the SRC approached the Social Affairs Division of the United Nations, which agreed to send an expert to Ireland with the following terms of reference:

To report generally on the extent to which the needs for empirical social research exist in Ireland, and to make broad recommendations on the appropriate methods by which any such needs might be satisfied.

The expert chosen was Henning Friis, then Director of the Danish National Institute for Social Research, who completed his report during a three-month stay in Ireland from February to May 1965. Essentially his report (Friis, 1965) recommended that a Social Research Institute be established but amalgamated with the Economic Research Institute to form an Economic and Social Research Institute with a survey research unit attached. It is no small credit to the members of the SRC that this recommendation was accepted without any territorial battles.

Geary warmly welcomed the Friis report. In his lengthy memorandum of 3 May 1965, responding to the draft of the report as a member of the SRC, he noted that the Memorandum of Association of the ERI already provided for social research in the Institute, and went on to say:

It has been my increasing conviction as the ERI work is developing that there is really no valid distinction between the word "social" and "economic" at all, if the object of social science (encompassing both) is to improve the welfare of mankind. The implementation of any policy designed to this end encompasses very much more than economics and economic statistics (both interpreted in the narrow sense). Human betterment must include prior study of matters to which even the wide

discipline of statistics is inapplicable. It seems highly desirable that research practitioners dedicated to the common end should be in intimate daily contact with one another such as must be bound to happen if they all work in the same organisation.

Both the Government and the Council of the ERI accepted the main recommendations of the Friis Report, and the Council at its November 1965 meeting established a sub-committee to plan the necessary changes. Geary was of course a member, but the decisive influence was McCarthy who was to succeed Geary as Director from 1 November 1966. To McCarthy also fell the task of recruiting the initial team of social researchers for the new ESRI.

"Retirement"

Shortly before Geary reached the end of his period as Director in October 1966, the Executive Committee agreed that his future place in the Institute should be determined in consultation with the new Director when the latter had been installed. Soon after McCarthy took up duty, it was decided that Geary should be engaged as Consultant to the Institute. The term is a nebulous one with many different meanings, but in Geary's case it meant in practice that he functioned in every way as a normal senior member of the research staff. Certainly there was no diminution in his work effort. Shortly after the Institute moved in 1969 to its new address at 4 Burlington Road, he responded to an office memo restricting, for security reasons, access to the premises after 10.30 p.m. on weekdays and 1 p.m. on Saturdays — other than by signing for a temporary key. Geary wanted a permanent key:

The times indicated at 2 are useful as far as they go, but they do not go far enough for me. During our sojourn in 73, I did much useful (for me) work at all kinds of odd hours sometimes after midnight and invariably from 10.00 – 13.00 on Sundays, quite the best period for me during the whole week. In the seven years there was not a single instance of my leaving the hall door open or a light on after me.

Naturally, he got his key! In September 1975, when he was in his 80th year and back once more at the Hotel Albana, he wrote me a long letter in his own hand on the subject of management education, which began as follows:

On a balcony overlooking Lake Lucerne facing a panorama of mountains on a fine morning in a blazing sun, I feel a sense of Revelation which I decide to apply to the IMI pamphlet that I have now read twice.

As Consultant, he served under three Directors. McCarthy remained only a short time before moving to University College Cork as President in

September 1967, though he continued to run the Institute until his successor, Michael Fogarty, took up duty in January 1968. Fogarty, a former Oxford don of Irish parentage and Montague Burton Professor of Industrial Relations at University College Cardiff 1951-1966, stayed until September 1971 when I succeeded him. Geary carried a full research load right up to his death in 1983 and was active in every aspect of the life of the Institute. He published research papers on the major economic issues confronting Ireland, including unemployment, migration, inflation, inequality and much else besides — as well as continued contributions to the development of statistical methods.¹⁰ He enthusiastically welcomed the growing involvement of the Institute in European research following Ireland's accession to the EC in 1973. Indeed he himself carried out one of the earliest EC research contracts undertaken by the Institute in 1975 on the role of non-employee incomes in the inflationary process in Ireland, the report of which was subsequently published by the EC Commission in 1977. When he read his paper on profit-sharing to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland in March 1982, he created two records: in his 86th year he was the oldest person ever to have read a paper to the Society, and the time span since his first paper to the Society was a record 57 years.

This phase of his life is perhaps still too recent to go into in detail and as an active participant for most of the period, I would not be the most objective person to do so. Instead I will conclude with a few personal reminiscences from this phase. I can say without reservation that our relationship was an unclouded one. Geary made a point of never volunteering advice to me as Director, but when asked would give it with customary vigour. No one could have been more docile in relation to his own research activities. If I showed diffidence in discussing his research programme with him, he would rebuke me with a favourite expression of his: "a Director's duty is to direct". Of course he had his own ways of evading unwanted directorial attention. On more than one occasion he made a great show of dropping in to hear my opinion about his next research project, only to remark coyly going out the door, "I'll have a first draft for you by the end of the week". Clearly these were further instances of "the paper which must be written" having already been "written anyhow".

The annual Geary Lecture was an occasion of special delight to him. The series emanated from a proposal by McCarthy to the December 1966 meeting of the Council that Geary should be honoured in this way, and the first lecture was delivered by his old friend, Sir Roy Allen, on 28 April 1967.

10. An assessment of Geary's major lifetime contributions to statistical theory and methods is given in Spencer (1976), to which is attached the full list of his published works up to 1976. Geary's subsequent published works are listed following Spencer (1983).

Geary's international reputation was such that there was never any difficulty in securing eminent statisticians and social scientists to deliver the lecture (the full list to date is given in Appendix 1). On the day, Geary would seat himself prominently in the front row and, as year followed year, took ever more pleasure in booming out in his sonorous voice "This is not *yet* the Geary Memorial Lecture". At the conclusion of the lecture, he usually got in first with the disconcerting question "What use are we as social scientists?"

Knowing how he longed to be consulted by the young research assistants, I invariably encouraged them to call into him, but he could not understand why they did not come more often. He was quite unconscious of the fact that his renown might inhibit them. It must be added that there was another slight deterrent: since he was a great talker, and could easily get carried away by his own enthusiasm, a call on Geary could take up the best part of a morning or afternoon. He detested academic affectation in any form. I recall vividly one occasion when he presented an Institute seminar giving a straightforward interpretation of some data he had assembled. He was interrupted in full flow by a visiting American scholar who enquired dismissively "But what is your hypothesis?" Geary roared back, "I *hate* hypotheses". He didn't really, but he had made his point.

The older he grew the more urgent became his passion to undertake research with practical uses. Delivering the Busted Memorial Lecture at University College Cork in 1980 on "The Usefulness of the Social Sciences", he confessed that:

... as a matter of conscience with my end not far away, I have been writing voluminously on the problems that affect humanity, not for publication or with any conceit that my thoughts will help to solve these problems but to clear my own mind. One never knows what one knows until one tries to commit one's thoughts to paper. I have written across one page of these notes: "To be published by my shame-faced descendants for cash, only if destitution compels them to do so."

Increasingly he asked me to suggest useful research topics to him, and the week before he died he dropped in to my office with such a request. At that time, with rising tax rates and soaring unemployment, there was growing concern and conjecture about the size of what some believed to be a thriving black economy in Ireland. If anyone could come up with a reliable estimate, I felt it was Geary, and I proposed the topic to him. He was elated and rushed out of my room to begin work. Alas, within a week, on Tuesday, 8 February 1983, he had died. This time, "the paper which must be written" never saw the light, and the Irish black economy is still shrouded in darkness.

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APPENDIX 1

GEARY LECTURES

1967	A Simple Approach to Macro-Economic Dynamics	R.G.D. Allen
1968	Computers, Statistics and Planning — Systems or Chaos?	F.G. Foster
1970	The Dual Career Family	R. & R. Rapoport
1971	The Psychosonomics of Rising Prices	H.A. Turner
1972	An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Measurement of Utility or Welfare	J. Tinbergen
1973	Econometric Forecasting from Lagged Relationships	M.G. Kendall
1974	The Dark Side of the Dialectic: Toward a New Objectivity	A.W. Gouldner
1975	Structural Analysis in Sociology	R. K. Merton

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| 1976 | British Economic Growth 1951-1973: Success or Failure? | R.C.O. Matthews |
| 1977 | Official Statisticians and Econometricians in the Present-Day World | E. Malinvaud |
| 1978 | Political and Institutional Economics | G. Myrdal |
| 1979 | The Dilemmas of a Socialist Economy: The Hungarian Experience | J. Kornai |
| 1980 | The Story of a Social Experiment and Some Reflections | R.M. Solow |
| 1981 | Modernisation and Religion | P.L. Berger |
| 1982 | Poor, Relatively Speaking | A. Sen |
| 1983 | Towards More Rational Decisions on Criminals | D. Glaser |
| 1985 | An Economic Analysis of the Family | G. S. Becker |
| 1986 | Social Theory and Problems of Macroeconomics | A. Giddens |
| 1988 | A Theory of the Rate of Growth of the Demand for Labour in the Long Run | M.FG. Scott |
| 1989 | The Rise and Decline of Nations: Where Does Ireland Fit In? | M. Olson |
| 1990 | Ireland and Europe's New Money | R. Dornbusch |
| 1991 | Technology Transfers and the Market Mechanism | W.J. Baumol |
| 1992 | Welfare State Development in Western Europe: Ireland in a Comparative Perspective | W. Korpi |