

# amalgamate into the new CUMH in Wilton



**GREAT EXPECTATIONS:** The state-of-the-art Cork University Maternity Hospital is due to open in March, 2007.

Picture: Richard Mills



**ROBERT O'SHEA**

SKIMMING some newspaper last week I came across the following: "...barring last-minute hitches, UEFA is expected to clear the way for a Gibraltar national team to compete alongside the world's biggest footballing nations."

"Ridiculous," I muttered under my breath, for I was in a confessional box at the time. I'd major reservations about Gibraltar, a British overseas territory on the tip of the Iberian Peninsula, being recognised by the European footballing governing body.

Then I watched Cyprus crush us on Saturday night in the most embarrassing performance ever by an Irish team and I thought what harm could it do to have one more team to beat in the European qualifying rounds, now that we can't beat those ones already outside the top 100 in the FIFA rankings.

But Spain have scuppered the chances of the "Rock" taking part.

They submitted protests at UEFA's Executive Committee meeting in Ljubljana on Friday, prompting the organisation to postpone a decision.

If there is one other reason I might like to see Gibraltar — which has a population of 27,000 people and would, let's face it, probably struggle to beat Avondale's junior team — take on the rest of Europe is because I could then write the headlines 'Dire Straits' and 'Ape-palling' when they inevitably get trounced.

It's difficult to understand why the Spanish, who lost the peninsula to the British in 1704, are still so fussy about Gibraltar's occupation, considering they are more than accommodating over the British take-over of Benidorm each summer.

"Not until the monkeys leave the rock, will we go," the British residents of Gibraltar proudly declare.

Yet the Barbary apes that reside there are not going to leave by themselves anytime soon; I don't see them organising a day trip to the Canaries.

Yep, the British are notoriously difficult to get rid of once they have settled in and stuck up their satellite dishes. They are like a teenage girl in the bathroom in the morning. You're banging on the door but there's no way that it will open until all the shampoo has left that bottle.

We Irish, I'd imagine, would be much easier to

get rid of if we had any overseas territory. All the natives would have to do is flick the lights three times and we'd start drinking up and be gone after two hours and a sing-song.

The "Not until..." policy has been a famous delaying tactic used by governments and rulers down through the years.

"Not until the ravens leave the tower" will the monarchy come to an end is another example. For centuries they have based domestic and foreign policy on the travelling urges of certain creatures.

The earliest example happened here when the King of England told St Patrick if he got rid of all the snakes, Ireland would not be invaded. When the feat was accomplished the king reneged on the technicality that there were a few left in Dublin Zoo.

In Hong Kong, the Chinese chose wisely: a hundred years of British rule instead of having to kill all the dragons in the country. Maybe it should be used in trouble spots elsewhere. In the Falklands they could tell the Argentinians that they can take control if they get rid of all the rhinos.

"But senor, there are no rhinoceroses on islands," they will respond. Then the British Ambassador would give a sort of knowing smile and the Argentinians would start a hopeless hunt and be tied up for ages.

And what about Northern Ireland? "Not until the ants have been removed from the Giant's Causeway," Tony Blair could announce before leaving office. At least you might get a great picture of Martin McGuinness atop it with a vacuum cleaner.

The Giant's Causeway is one of the reasons Ireland hasn't had an empire like Britain, because, instead of building a navy, we tried to build a bridge to Scotland so we could invade it. This, if it had been finished, would probably have failed due to lack of surprise, but unfortunately the project was never finished because the material used to build the bridge was not steel or cement or iron but... basalt. Which isn't really in great supply here and ever since we have been waiting for a volcano to erupt before continuing our expansionist policies.

But before we start searching for colonial gains again perhaps we'd first try to find a cohesive back four.

## Home-birth scheme another option

IF NONE of the birthing choices here are for you, then you're in luck.

For another advantage to living in Cork is the successful home-birth scheme piloted in the region under the Health Service Executive (Southern Region).

It currently employs seven independent midwives full-time, who work exclusively in the community, through

house calls, and who refer their clients to a GP, or consultant if necessary.

The service is free of charge and is open to women in the region who have no history of medical or surgical problems that might affect their pregnancy, and who have had no previous pregnancy complications.

Approximately 150

babies were born at home under the Domiciliary Midwifery Pilot Project in 2005.

"It's about choice and it's a viable option for some women," said Jenna Russell of Birthchoice Cork.

The support group meets every three months for women who have had, or want to have, a home-birth.

"I'd like to see a better

awareness of the scheme because it's not weird or scary, or just for hippies, which people may think. You can still book into a hospital if you want to, and so you'll always have that option.

"I felt very safe knowing I was having my baby under the midwife's care, she became part of the family and her instincts are incred-

ible. I feel very lucky that I came into motherhood in this way," said Jenna, who used a birthing pool for early labour.

However, she admits that a home-birth is not for everyone.

"I was lucky. I had a supportive consultant, who told me I was an excellent candidate for a home-birth. But it's not for everybody and that's fine too," she added.

to pilot a 24-hour consultant on call for the labour wards, which is an important step forward and a first for Ireland and Britain," he says.

Professor Higgins believes having the new Perinatal Epidemiology Unit here, is also another coup for Cork.

"It means that statistics and outcomes can be analysed by practicing clinicians, who can pick up on various trends etc, which is something that came out of the Neary Enquiry," he explains.

This enquiry covered the removal of patients' wombs at Our Lady's Hospital in Drogheda by Dr Michael Neary.

On the question of why many women fear childbirth and increased medical intervention, the obstetrician replies that what most women fear is a bad outcome.

"However, we can reassure women that the outcome is very good, and mostly excellent in labour. There is huge pressure on today's expectant mother to 'perform' during labour. It's as if they have to sit an exam," says Prof Higgins, adding that many women often feel disappointed if they opt for pain relief.

"This can be hugely unfair to many women. We meet a lot of women who want intervention (in-

duction, epidurals) and I think the main emphasis should be on choice, as long as it's within safety boundaries. It's no longer acceptable to say 'this is the way we do it'. When all is said and done, our aim is that every mother will sit in the sun and get to watch her child play and run," the Professor declares.

With the new hospital not due to open until March, possibly later, expectant mums are currently advised to book in with one of the three existing maternity units.

They should book their obstetrician as usual, as they will move to the new hospital with them.

"It may seem a little confusing, but right now, we advise women to book under one of the three hospitals," says Nora Gary.

"We will be communicating with them and their GPs regularly between now and the opening date so that they will be fully aware of what's going on."

It is expected that services at the three hospitals will transfer completely to the new unit over one weekend, as soon as the CUMH opens.

Nothing has been decided, as of yet, about what will happen to the three existing hospital buildings after the transfer takes place.



**LOOKING FORWARD:** Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, John Higgins, and Nora Geary, Commissioning Manager for the Unified Maternity Services