

‘Irish girls are the most beautiful in the world.’

American musician Hank Locklin to the Coleraine Chronicle, 14 September 1963.

Beauty contests were very popular at the dance halls, from the post-war **‘Top Ten’** girls at dances, a **‘Festival Girl’** beauty contest at Barry’s Ballroom to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951, to heats of the internationally known **‘Miss World’**. Heats of **‘Miss Ireland’** were also held at the Strand Ballroom, in which the winner would travel to Miami Beach to compete in the **‘Miss Universe’** contest. In 1963 the Strand Ballroom had few entries for **‘Miss Ireland’** until Bobby confirmed with the organisers that entrants did not have to wear a bathing suit on stage. (*Northern Constitution*, 4 May 1963)

‘The response to the competition has been terrific and we have had many contestants from all parts of the Province. It should be quite a night when the final comes along.’ Bobby Platt to the Coleraine Chronicle, 19 September 1964.

Ballrooms also hosted their own beauty contests. The winner of **‘Miss Strand’** 1964 received £20 and a year’s free dancing. Other beauty contests included **‘National Ballroom Queen’**, **‘Miss County Derry’**, **‘Miss Golden Slipper’**, and **‘Miss Portrush’**. **‘Miss Portrush’** was held at the Arcadia, and by 1967 it was considered the norm to wear swimsuits in a beauty contest. In contrast, men’s contests were not as common. There were only a few ‘best dressed man’ contests to accompany women’s competitions.



Winners in the second heat of ‘Miss Strand’ held on 12 September 1964. Left to right: Rosaleen Hutton of Coleraine, Mary McLaughlin of Portstewart, and Ann Logan of Whiteabbey. This heat was judged by Jim McVeigh and Robin Parke, journalists with the East Antrim Times, and Sean Linton, vocalist of the Champs showband from Larne. The Champs were the headline act at the Strand that evening. Courtesy Coleraine Chronicle, 19 September 1964.



Finalists in the Miss Strand Heat of Miss Ireland 1963. Left to right: Margaret McIlreavey of Ballymoney, Helen Murray of Derry, Gladys Yates of Dunboe, Betty Edgar of Portrush, and Patricia Eatough of Portstewart. Courtesy Northern Constitution, 11 May 1963.

Final of ‘Miss Strand 1964’ held on 3 October 1964. Left to right: Patricia Eatough of Portstewart in joint third place; Mr S McKinney of Portstewart judging; Mrs Baldry of Portstewart in second place; Mrs McKinney, judging; Eileen Blair of Ballymoney, winner of ‘Miss Strand’; Dan Bolger, manager of the Columbia showband from Arklow, and competition judge; Edith McQuigg of Portrush in joint third place. Courtesy Coleraine Chronicle, 10 October 1964.



“ I worked in a shirt factory...there was a girl who at break time did her hair with big rollers...in a big beehive...”

Margaret Murphy on hairstyles of the 60s

“ You had to put your pennies in so they counted all the pennies at the end of the month and the money went to charity and whoever got the most pennies got the sash.”

Brian Henry on how beauty contests were judged

Winners in the third heat of ‘Miss Strand’ held on 19 September 1964. Left to right: Pat Dolan of Portstewart, Edith McQuigg of Portrush, Evelyn Ferguson of Coleraine, and Jennifer Dickey. The judges were George Carroll and Sidney Dodsworth of the Recordites, who performed at the Strand that evening, along with Graham McKenzie, journalist with ‘Ireland’s Saturday Night’. Courtesy Coleraine Chronicle, 26 September 1964.

