

The Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited

Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual General Meeting of the Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited held on Saturday 28 November 2009 in the Alley Arts & Conference Centre, Strabane at 10.30am.

A list of those in attendance is in Appendix 1

Apologies received from:

Antrim Historical Society

Mourne Studies Group

Straid Historical Group

Finny O'Sullivan – Killultagh Historical Society

Doreen McBride – Banbridge Historical Society

Malcolm Duffey – Aughnacloy and Truagh Historical Society

Dr Neil McGleenon – Cumann Seanchais Ard Mhacha

Larry Breen – Chairman of the Federation of Local History Societies

Welcome

Mr Johnny Dooher welcomed all Members to the meeting especially Council chairman, Kieran McGuire and Guest Speaker Mr. Joe Mahon from the television programme Lesser Spotted Ulster

Councillor Maguire welcomed Members to the meeting and wished all present a memorable time in Strabane. He said that that the population of Strabane held heritage and history in high regard and that Strabane District Council were keen to promote it for both its own sake and as part of the growing business of heritage tourism. He also said that local heritage groups in various parts of the district help to research and publicise their own local histories and that this helps their communities to support the need for preservation and education. He said that to have knowledge of our past helps us all to better understand the present.

He acknowledged that the Federation had been going for over thirty years and had been a major force in popularising local studies and making local history available to the wider public through publications, conferences and shared visits.

He said that this had played a vital role in teaching communities to recognise shared as well as diverse aspects of historical experiences and to accept that differences can be both challenging and enriching. He further added that the Federation had done much to encourage co-operation not only within but also between communities from different traditions and backgrounds. He acknowledged a joint visit with their Southern counterparts to Stormont. He concluded with congratulating Members on their work and that he hoped it would continue to provide a service for local groups in the heritage and history field. He said that local government could play a role in this area as well and that

there could be opportunities to use the expertise of the Federation and the local history groups.

Joe Mahon thanked Johnny Dooher for his kind welcome and welcomed all historians to the meeting. He said that he was not a historian himself but was delighted to be here in Strabane and especially in the Alley Arts & Conference Centre. He said that it was a beautiful facility. He continued to speak of his experiences and travels while filming *Lesser Spotted Ulster* and the beautiful areas of Northern Ireland. He gave a special mention to the Inishowen area, which was of special interest to him and informed members that a programme had been filmed in this area and would be produced on television soon.

Mr Dooher thanked Mr Mahon and Councillor Maguire for their kind words and made a presentation to them on behalf of the Federation.

Minutes of AGM 2007

The above minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr Liam Devlin, seconded by Ms Jennifer Cunningham.

Secretary's Report

The secretary's report was read by vice chairman, Bridgeen Rutherford:

Once again we can present a picture of a healthy Federation and this summary of its activities throughout the year since last November should confirm a period of success and endeavor. Much of this dealt with the future role of the Federation and many hours deliberation were spent on redrafting the Strategic Plan and providing a route plan for the future. There will be an opportunity later in the programme to look at this planning and perhaps make some suggestions.

Much of the work of the Federation proceeds unseen and membership climbed to 96 affiliated groups with eight individual members. Corporate membership is something that has dwindled in recent years and something that the executive committee saw as needing attention in the years ahead. There is scope too for more individual members and this will be part of the strategy for the future.

The committee structure of the Federation has remained static for a number of years and the review of the Federation questioned whether there should be a better use of resources. A large burden of work fell on the treasurer and this was made more onerous by the fact that we did not have an elected secretary for the second year running. Once again the nomination papers have failed to elicit a candidate for the position and it is something that has to be resolved as soon as possible. Liam Devlin acted as minute secretary and also as company secretary and this helped relieve some of the burden on our overworked treasurer. But we cannot continue to act indefinitely without a secretary and must find one from somewhere. The strategy review examined the workings of the Federation and has suggested that active sub committees should be part of the way forward. These will share some of the burdens of planning and administration and provide for closer

involvement of all elected members as well as opening opportunities for the co-option of non-elected members.

There were regular meetings of the executive committee, generally in the O'Fiaich Library, Armagh and we are very thankful to the trustees and management for providing these facilities for our meetings. In addition there were a number of planning meetings by sub groups for such events as the Traditional Buildings seminar in Cushendall in April and for the Stormont visit in September. There were a number of meetings with the Federation of Local History Societies group in the Republic and these helped to progress joint events and activities.

Whilst there was only one seminar this past year, organised in conjunction with the Ulster Architectural Society and the Glens of Antrim Historical Society, the event at Cushendall proved highly successful, with the then Environment Minister, Sammy Wilson, providing the keynote address. The presentations showed how older buildings could be renovated without losing their traditional ethos while the afternoon site visits to clachans and other traditional buildings in everyday use proved fascinating. It is just a pity that more Federation society members did not avail of the chance to see such preservation work at first hand. The Federation also contributed to a Townlands Seminar at Stormont in June and this issue should feature strongly in heritage planning in the coming years, with the Federation reinvigorating its previous strong stance on the issue. There was also a Federation presence at a number of Local History fairs in Armagh, Lisburn and Omagh and this process of co-operating with the library service can only be of benefit to both organisations. And just recently the Federation took part in a Reminiscences NI Network seminar on oral history and reminiscences and again there is ample scope for joint activity in this field.

There will be a separate presentation on the joint project by the two Federations on Hidden Gems and Forgotten People but suffice to say that it has now progressed to the stage where the material is being added to the website and will soon be available for all to see. We continued the programme of a joint visit and the venue in September was Stormont where we used the opportunity to launch our new edition of *Due North* and had the DCAL minister, Nelson McCausland there to help the proceedings. This was followed by a bus tour of Belfast and the participants seemed to feel that it was a very worthwhile venture. Once again we could say that more societies could have been represented and perhaps the timing of the event, so soon after the summer break, may have contributed to this.

Due North was once again available as planned in early September and the sales have been promising so far. A number of societies are regular purchasers of the journal and help to ensure its viability. It is planned to enlarge the number of articles carried and more support will be needed from all societies to access the required material and ensure better distribution. Societies were encouraged to use *Due north* as a means of publicizing their activities and too few use this means of promoting their events or publications.

There were five Newsletters produced during the year, mainly to highlight forthcoming events and key dates in the Federation calendar and feedback suggests that these are duplicated and widely distributed in some societies while in others they never moved from the computer. We believe these newsletters are key to keeping members informed about what is happening and we rely on societies to promote them among their members. There is also the website to keep members informed about the local history scene and to make information available from other heritage providers about forthcoming events and opportunities and it is hoped that these information sources help society members gain wider access to resources and talks.

In conclusion therefore we can be partially satisfied with the progress being made in the Federation programme and believe that it serves a useful role in helping to promote local studies. It is here suggested that there needs to be improved communication and interaction between societies and the executive committee and that opportunities to help in the promotion of local history throughout Ulster are being missed. Societies are the core elements of the Federation and their activities need to be highlighted as widely as possible. The executive have proposed a number of ways in which the issues of communication and interaction can be better promoted and it is vital that these are acted on in the interests of a strengthened local studies programme within Ulster.

The executive committee of the Federation for 2008-2009 was as follows –

Chairman – Johnny Dooher (Strabane)

Vice chairperson – Bridgeen Rutherford (Newbuildings)

Secretary - vacant

Company Secretary – Liam Devlin (Trinity College, Dublin – NI Association)

Treasurer – Pat Devlin (Lecale and Downe Historical Society)

Committee Members

Malcolm Duffey (Aughnacloy and Truagh), John Hulme (Carrickfergus and District), Doreen McBride (Banbridge Society), Roddy Hegarty (North Belfast Society), Finny O’Sullivan (Killultagh Society) Arthur Spears (Donegal Society) Dr Neil McGleenon (Cumann Seanchais Ard Mhacha)

The Secretary’s report was adopted on the proposal of Robert Gutherie, seconded by John Hulme.

Financial Report and Accounts

Pat Devlin presented the Report and Accounts.

He said that 2008-09 had been an uneventful year in terms of the Federation’s finances

Total Income was £12,416 – total Expenditure, £9,951, surplus £2,465

Included in the Income is a figure of £2,429 shown as ‘Other Income’. Most of this is comprised of Fees for the Trip to Tara and the Boyne and the Seminar in PRONI, both in 2008. These events are not intended to raise funds but are designed to break even. The

costs of the Tara/Boyne trip were aided by a £500 grant from the Ireland Fund without which the Fees would have been higher. He thanked the Ireland Fund for their assistance, which they also gave to our partners in the event, the Federation of Local History Societies.

During the year five more Societies joined the Federation, taking the total to 97.

Ballyhegan and Kilmore Historical Society
Carryduff Historical Society
Clough Senior Citizens Association
Donaghadee Historical Society
The Pastel Society of Ireland

He extended a warm welcome to the new members and hoped they would find their membership helpful.

As a voluntary organisation the Federation's outgoings were modest because it doesn't carry the costs of staff and accommodation. So the modest surplus can be devoted to the growth of membership services that the Federation intends to develop over the next two years as would be seen from the Strategic and Action Plans that will be discussed later.

He recommended the acceptance of the Financial Report and Accounts and they were adopted on the proposal of John Bradley, seconded by Helen Meenan.

Chairman's Address (Johnny Dooher)

Mr Dooher presented his address as follows:

Greetings ladies and gentlemen and it is with pleasure that I address you at the end of another year when the Federation has continued to grow and strengthen. This has been due to yourselves as well as to the officers of the Federation and together we have helped fashion a stronger organisation to promote local studies throughout Ulster. The Federation has become stronger financially; it has a renewed vision for the future and a willing executive committee ready to carry out the agreed programme.

Much work this year has been done on reviewing the needs of the Federation and in planning for the future and this evaluation recognised the need to reach out to the member societies and to the general public. No body can afford to stand still and it must constantly strive to be in tune with its membership and to provide leadership.

There are officially 96 member societies in the Federation for Ulster Local Studies and each of them are autonomous in their day to day affairs. They are members of the Federation for a number of reasons - making contact with other like minded bodies, helping their own societies to grow, providing outlets for their members to participate in regional seminars and workshops, joining in fieldtrips and site visits and relying on the public liability insurance scheme provided through the Federation. The executive

committee of the Federation is the co-coordinating body for these local groups and is pledged to provide a service that meets some or all of their needs. It is important, however, that the members and the executive work together and thus the primacy of communications. How do the societies let the executive know about their needs? How satisfied are they with the level of support that they receive? Attendance at Federation events is certainly one way of keeping in contact and coming close to those who are in charge. Making your views known is important in helping to shape the future planning of the Federation.

Again we can look at the executive committee of the Federation. How representative are they of the local studies scene? Are they up to the task of leading the federation into the future? Once again the onus seems to come back to the members – the committee has to be elected annually and you must be prepared to play a pro-active role. Fresh faces and new ideas are always a challenge to any organisation and the Federation is no different. It is to be welcomed that there are more nominations than vacancies for the executive committee at this AGM and let us hope that this continues. It is less satisfying to note that one officer position has not drawn a single nomination and this for the third year running. We must hope that someone can be found to fill the vacancy from the floor at today's meeting – it would send out the wrong message if we again failed in this important position.

As I mentioned earlier much time was spent this year in reviewing how the federation operated and how services to the membership and the general public could be better planned and managed. Later in the meeting you will have an opportunity to examine and discuss some of the proposed initiatives that have resulted from this review and see how they can be used to help the development of local studies in general throughout Ulster as well as providing services for your society. Most of us bemoan the ageing profile of our active members at local level and it seems vital that we do something to address this problem. We must use the existing and new methodologies to help sell the relevance of local studies and local groups and reach out to others in the community. One such project that has been promoted enthusiastically in a small number of societies both in Ulster and throughout Ireland has recently been uploaded to the website and promises to reawaken interest about unknown people and places.

The *Hidden Gems and Forgotten People* project is something that all local societies could become involved with in order to raise their own local profile and help to sell their district. More details will be provided later in the programme.

There is no doubt that the role of local studies has been catapulted in recent times to the forefront of local consciousness with the production of television programmes like Lesser Spotted Ulster or the availability on the internet of historical sources like the 1911 Census or Griffith's Valuation. As local groups involved in heritage and history we must develop contacts with those interested in aspects of the past like family history, language development or reminiscences. We must develop closer contacts with the Library services, with education and with the varied heritage organisations that have more specific remits. There is a big market out there for local studies and we must make

contact with as much of it as we possibly can. The executive can help by providing training and pinpointing expertise as well as providing examples but much of the work needs to be done at society level. As you may have noticed from the secretary's report the executive has moved closer to working with other groups like the Ulster Architectural Society, the NI Remiscences Project, local libraries and PRONI as a means of furthering the opportunities for local groups and for the Federation in general. Those involved in local studies must be prepared to work together for the general good.

I hope you have all had the opportunity to read the Federation journal, *Due North* and trust that you found something of value in it. One executive member felt that it had too many articles from one region and not enough of a spread throughout Ulster. Unfortunately when we rely on contributions from people that can sometimes be the result. It would be our wish to make *Due North* representative of the best in local studies in Ulster and to do that we need contributions from all parts. Did a member from your society send in an article? Could you have sent in a report of a particular event in your area? Did you send in a review of a local history journal or a publication of relevance to local studies? There are numerous ways in which local people can make *Due North* more representative and we would ask that every society consider how they can contribute to future issues. A number of local societies publish regular journals and other publications but too often they fail to let the Federation know of their recent offerings. Executive officers would love the opportunity to attend launches of local publications but rarely do they get the opportunity. In this regard I wish to congratulate Carrickfergus society on their recent publication of the revised edition of McSkimmin's History of Carrickfergus and they had a most successful launch with a large attendance of members and visitors.

Another successful event attended by a number of Federation members was the Townlands seminar at Stormont in June when a programme of talks looked at the issue of place names and how traditional names might be preserved. This was for long a Federation campaign and something that local societies might re-engage with in the months ahead. The preservation of heritage, whether of buildings, books or place names is something that local history groups should be deeply interested in and be prepared to champion.

The Federation co-operation with the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society in the Seminar at Cushendall in April was a visible demonstration of how joint activity in heritage matters benefits both the local societies and the wider issue of safeguarding the past. What is happening in one area may well be duplicated in your district in the future.

The continued co-operation with the Federation of Local History Societies has resulted in annual get together and this September the focus was a visit to Stormont followed by a bus tour of landmarks in Belfast. As sponsors of the event the Federation had to put a cap on the number of participants from the southern federation and it was a little disappointing that we had only 30 taking part from the Ulster Federation. These are opportunities for making contacts and sharing ideas and too many of our societies appear to have limited interest in widening their horizons through such co-operation. Next year

the joint visit is planned for Naas in Co. Kildare in early July and it is hoped that the earlier date in July might be more attractive to our members.

An Annual general meeting is very much a review session and both the secretary's and the treasurer's reports have given a clear picture of Federation activities. The report on the strategic review will help to provide some idea of the future planning of the executive and there will be opportunities for member societies to highlight some of their activities over the past year. This should be educational for us all, and a stimulus to greater activity in the future.

In this my final report as chairman I feel that I must pay tribute to all those who have worked together so well over the last two years to re-establish the Federation following the withdrawal of government support. Many member societies gave their full support to the re-organisational work and were fully supportive of the efforts of the committee. And I must emphasise that future progress and development will depend on continued co-operation and communication between the executive and the member societies. But when looking at what has been done I must highlight the role of the committee members in going the extra mile in safeguarding the future. Attendance at the regular meetings was very good and all were prepared to carry out what was asked of them. A special tribute has to be paid to two members of the executive. Roddy Hegarty has been editor of *Due North* and was very much the man who saw it through to publication as well as playing a leading role in co-ordinating the strategic review programme. And then we have Pat Devlin, as treasurer, secretary, web-site manager and PRO as well as occasional minute taker. He is Mr Federation and deserves your fullest applause and appreciation.

The past year has seen the loss of a stalwart of the local history scene in the person of Pat John Rafferty of the Donaghmore society. Pat John was well known throughout mid Ulster for his writings and talks and much in demand as a speaker and as a contributor to historical journals as well as playing a leading role in the Carleton Summer School for a long number of years. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

And we have also some good news in that our former Federation chairperson and now honorary vice president, Doreen Corcoran, was awarded an OBE for her work in the heritage and community fields. We congratulate her on this well deserved award and trust that we will have many more years of benefit for her advice and support.

Finally I wish to pay tribute to the incoming officers and believe that they will continue the good work that has been set in motion. They will need your continued support and goodwill and ensure that by working together you can bring the Federation and its members to the higher plane that we all aspire to. We must believe in the American slogan 'Yes We Can' and strive to ensure that local history and heritage retains its rightful place in governmental and community planning.

Amendments to the Articles of Association

Pat Devlin said that the Federation members were aware that the Executive Committee had proposed a series of amendments to the Articles of Association in each of the last two years. He said that these were designed to simplify many of the complicated and often conflicting provisions. He advised that the one remaining area for consideration was the extent to which the Articles complied with the statutory provisions of the 2006 Charities Act. He said that the review concluded that for the most part the Articles did comply and that the one exception was in relation to the appointment of proxies. He said that the Articles are silent on proxies and as a result for this AGM Proxy forms were issued to all members. He advised that the amendment tabled for adoption was intended to bring the Articles into line with the Act and provide a rational process to it. He said that the amendment was intended to replace the existing Article 28 that provides for Societies to appoint representative to act on their behalf at Federation meetings; however, the article serves a different purpose and therefore the amendment would need to be an additional provision. He said that the Executive Committee wished to withdraw it with the intention of bringing it back next year as a stand-alone article and therefore sought Members' agreement to this course of action.

The suggested withdrawal was unanimously agreed.

Pat Devlin concluded by expressing his thanks to Johnny Doohar, on the completion of his term as Chairman, for work he had contributed to the revival of Federation and said that without his commitment, drive and leadership it might not have survived at all.

Strategic Plan 2010 –2013

Roddy Hegarty highlighted the following points in the above report:

- Vision
- Mission
- Aims and Objectives
- FULS Action Plan 2009 – 2011
- He also highlighted the following:
- Employment of staff from local studies group
- Encourage previous to return to the Federation
- Challenge voluntary organisations
- Burden of work on the Federation Committee
- Direct input into how the organisation is managed
- Attendance at AGMs
- Appointing new secretary
- Electing Executive Committee
- Strategies put in place to satisfy grant awarding bodies
- Previous Strategic Plan irrelevant

Roddy also highlighted the following points in relation to relation to the Executive Structure:

- Appointing Members with accounting/legal skills
- Positive/negative feedback and ways to improve if necessary
- Plan of action from elected Members
- Making the Federation more vibrant and appealing to Members

Johnny Dooher thanked Mr Hegarty on his report.

Election of Officers

Outgoing chairman Johnny Dooher agreed to conduct the election of officers and scrutineers/tellers were John Bradley (West Tyrone), Michael Kennedy, (Strabane) and Gabrielle Dooher (Strabane)

On the proposal of Robert Guthrie, seconded by Liam Devlin, Bridgeen Rutherford was nominated as Chairperson.

On the proposal of Doreen McBride, seconded by Helen Meenan, Roddy Hegarty was nominated as Vice-Chair.

On the proposal of Bridgeen Rutherford, seconded by Felix Hagan, Patrick Devlin was nominated as Treasurer.

The vote for members of the committee was then brought in the scrutineers – John Bradley, Michael Kennedy and Gabrielle Dooher- and on the first count the following members were declared elected –

- Dr Murna Crozier
- Doreen McBride
- John Hulme
- Ruth Olphert
- William Devlin

There was a three way tie for the 6th position on the committee and a second vote was called to decide the last position – those involved were Dr Neil McGleenon, Finny O’Sullivan and Belinda Mehaffey. Following this vote Dr Neil McGleenon was declared elected.

Society reports on activities

Pat Devlin provided an illustrated talk on the **Hidden Gems and Forgotten People** joint project organised by both Federations within Ireland and demonstrated how the new website page would look when it becomes functional next month. He demonstrated how the content would be organised and the role of the map displayed – by clicking on the map the reader would be directed to the items from that particular county and could have

rapid access to the materials held there. He stressed that the website could be regularly updated and thus allowed more and more societies to join the project in the months and years ahead.

Pat also provided a short presentation on the new **Dictionary of Ulster Biography** launched by the Ulster History Circle on 17 November. This included the names of those who had become eligible for inclusion since the original dictionary was published 1993 and the list would be brought up to 2000. As it was a website rather than a book it could be continuously updated 'on the fly'. The web address for the dictionary was www.ulsterbiography.co.uk

Then next item was society matters and Doreen Corcoran spoke about the work of the Carrickfergus society in their reissue of the **McSkimmin History of Carrickfergus**, first published in 1802, amended in 1839 and reissued with an update in 1902. It had been a daunting task but with financial support from the Carrickfergus Scientific and Literary Society and the sale of a large number of pre publication orders the society had undertaken the project. The launch had seen a large attendance of supporters and sales had been very good. Professor Peter Roebuck from the University of Ulster had provided a witty and sensitive speech on the launch night and everything had gone very well.

Bridgeen Rutherford gave an illustrated talk on the **Newbuildings Society archaeological dig** in June when they had been excavating a souterrain built on the site of a ringfort. It had provided an opportunity for the whole community to join in the project and a special school programme ensured that the young of the village were brought on board.

Hazel Henderson from the West Tyrone Society expressed concern at the danger to the historic Henry Avery's castle from the projected work on the new A6 roadway, which was scheduled to pass very close to the monument. The Archaeological Survey office did not appear to care and claimed it was a matter for the Roads Service. It was agreed that the Federation committee would give their support to any action that the local society felt was appropriate

Doreen Corcoran referred to the comments by the chairman on the townlands issue and how the early Federation had fought a lonely campaign against the apathy of local government and the hostility of the Post Office in the 1970s and 1980s and felt that their efforts were now being rewarded. She stressed, however, that it would be necessary to continue to highlight this important heritage issue and asked for all societies to give it their support.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.30 with the Chairperson Bridgeen Rutherford thanking Strabane District Council for the wonderful facilities for the meeting.

Appendix 1

Attendance at the 2009 AGM

Carrickfergus and District Historical Society	John Hulme
Coleraine Historical Society	Jennifer Cunningham, Michael Jones
Cookstown Local History Group	Molly Dingley, Ruth Makenzie, Una Teague, Raymond McGarvey
Co. Donegal Historical Society	Helen Meehan, Belinda Mahaffy
Donaghmore Historical Society	Felix Hagan
Glenelly Historical Society	Rose Mary Murphy
Gortin Historical Society	Pat Griffin, Mary McCullough, Breda Toner
Lecale Historical Society	Patrick Devlin
Newbuildings & District Arch. & Hist. Society	Bridgeen Rutherford, Amanda Buchanan, Ruth Olphert
North Belfast Historical Society	Margaret Cartwright, Patsy Rainey, Roddy Hegarty
Roe Valley Historical Society	Robert Guthrie
Strabane History Society	John Dooher, Gregory Maguire, Michael Kennedy
The Trinity College Ass. Of NI	William Devlin
Ulster Archaeology Society	Ken Pullin
West Tyrone Historical Society	Una Timmony, Hazel Henderson, John Bradley
Honorary Vice President	Doreen Corcoran