

**FEDERATION FOR ULSTER LOCAL STUDIES**  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**DOWN COUNTY MUSEUM, DOWNPATRICK**  
**SATURDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2017**

**Introduction**

Forty-seven delegates and Guests attended the Meeting; Names and Societies are listed in Annex 1.

**1. Welcome**

Chairman, Pat Devlin, welcomed delegates and guests to the forty second Annual General Meeting of the Federation.

The Chairman reminded delegates that today was the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice and it would be proper for us to mark that momentous event. Therefore, at 11 o'clock there would be a two-minute silence and a recitation of the fourth verse of Robert Binyon's poem *For the Fallen*.

The Chairman then welcomed Councillor Roisin Murray, Chairperson of the Newry Mourne and Down District Council. Councillor Murray said it was an honour to be here in the Museum opening this event. The Council was fortunate to have within its area three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Lecale, Mourne and Gullion that were individually and collectively steeped in history, mythology and culture and very often history, mythology and culture that was intertwined. She acknowledged that while some might find our history a little uncomfortable, it was our shared history and we all needed to our bit to protect it. She wished the Federation well in its proceedings.

Josie Herbison presented Cllr. Murray with a gift on behalf of the Federation.

The Chairman said the Museum building had an amazing history. The gaol was built between 1789 and 1796 and its most famous prisoner was Thomas Russell, the Cork born United Irishman, friend of Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken, Jemmy Hope and other well-known United Irishmen. His gravestone is a plain slab with the words *Grave of Russell*, provided by Mary Ann McCracken, sister of Henry Joy.

Denis Cahill is a former teacher and keen student of those times. Many years ago, he had heard Denis recite the poem at a meeting of the Lecale Historical Society and was gripped by it in a way that made him keen to learn it by heart.

Denis began with a song *Who Fears to Speak of '98* by John Kells Ingram followed by a short biography of Thomas Russell. He then recited the famous Florence Wilson poem *The Man From God Knows Where*. To applause, the Chairman thanked Denis for his virtuoso performance.

On behalf of the Lecale Society, Berkley Farr welcomed Cllr Murray and the Federation to Lecale, an area steeped in history; St Patrick, the Vikings, the Normans, Plantations. The Society would be celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding in 2018. The Downe Society had been formed in January 1948 by a group of eminent citizens. The Lecale Historical Society had been formed in 1974 and the two merged in 2009. Starting in 1983, and published annually since then, the Society had published a journal

The formal business of the Meeting then began

**2. Apologies**

Julie Maxwell, Donaghadee Historical Society

**3. Minutes of 2016 AGM**

The minutes of the 2016 AGM were agreed. Proposed by Matt Herbison, Antrim & District Historical Society and seconded by John Bradley, West Tyrone Historical Society.

#### 4. Secretary's Report

The Secretary, Bridgeen Rutherford, rose to present her report but before doing so called on Doreen McBride to make a statement critical of other members of the Federation executive. She also alleged that nominations for the Executive Committee for this AGM had not been made in accordance with Article 31 of the Articles of Association since they had not been sent to the Secretary and were therefore invalid. Therefore, all nominations for the Officers and the Executive Committee should be resubmitted through the floor before being considered. The Secretary did not receive any nominations - they were sent to the Chair at his request.

The Secretary then delivered her report highlighting the role of the Executive Committee and the membership of the Federation -

The membership currently standing at 194 Societies and approximately 20 individual members.

Since last year's AGM there had been more exhibitions of the Hidden Gems and Forgotten People Project – at Ballymena from 21 November to 8 December 2016. Dr William Roulston, Research Director of the Ulster Historical Foundations said it was a privilege to be launching the Exhibition

The Derry Library Exhibition was launched on 9th February. George McLaughlin, of the Newbuildings & District Archaeological and Historical Society, welcomed everyone to Derry. TV Presenter and Producer, *Joe Mahon*, reflected on his experiences during the making of the programmes and illustrated how their impact was enhanced by the combination of place, artefact, narrative and personality. Joe talked about many objects that illustrated this truth, and recounted tales about other objects and their stories, all illustrating that without its historical context, a landscape is just beautiful scenery and a ruined castle is just a pile of stones.

The Downpatrick Exhibition was launched on 8 March 2017 running to 10 April. Berkley Farr, Chair of the Lecale and Downe Historical Society, welcomed everyone the Exhibition. Dr Brian Turner, President of the Federation, launching the exhibition, used one of the Gems to illustrate how this linked to other gems and places, and forgotten people that he had encountered personally throughout his life. It was a powerful illustration of the interconnectedness of people and places down the years and all over the island.

*The Omagh Exhibition was from 8<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> June 2017:* Introducing the Exhibition, Pat McGuigan of the Strabane History Society, spoke about its past and present projects, including the current project to document the impact of WW1 on Strabane and the surrounding area, and about some of the lessons learned in the process. Dr Brian Lambkin, Director of the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies at the Ulster American Folk Park, illustrated the impact of digitisation of historical information on local studies and the contrast with the position in the past where information was difficult to find and time consuming to retrieve. He commented favourably on the design of the Hidden Gems website in its use of the map of Ireland from which to launch enquiries about people and places. He described some of the new mapping software now available on the PRONI website.

The Letterkenny launch took place on 30 October and would remain until 18 November. The Exhibition was opened by Eddie O'Kane and the speakers included Helen Meehan and Joe Gallagher.

Some 50 travelers from FULS and FLHS spend an enjoyable and informative trip to North Wales from 30 April to 4 May 2017. The group travelled to Holyhead in the early morning the group visited Holy Island. The following day the group took a tour of the North Wales coast, visiting *Bangor, Conwy, Llandudno, Colwyn and Chester*. The group also visited David Lloyd George's museum, Bodnant Gardens and the walled town of *Conwy and Conway Castle*. The final morning of the trip saw the group visit *Caernavon Castle*, then heading for Holyhead Port and the *Maritime Museum*.

The FLHS AGM was held in the Ardilaun Hotel, Salthill, Co. Galway, from 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> May. The delegates came from 32 Societies with 16 FULS members also in attendance. The second day was devoted to the formal business and the rest provided an opportunity for the delegates to visit many of the historical places in and around the southern part of the County. An interesting feature of the AGM was the opportunity for Societies to provide some text highlighting their main activities over the year. Although not included in the formal presentation three of the FULS attendees were able to give similar presentations on behalf of their Societies; a fine example in friendship and cooperation in action.

There was a planned joint trip to Armagh on 2 July, for which more than 50 people, from all over Ireland, had booked a room, had to be cancelled because the hotel, the Charlemont Arms, arbitrarily reduced the number of rooms available from those that had been booked, and for which a deposit had been paid and accepted. The Federations plan to return to the City, but not the hotel, for next year's trip.

The final seminar was held in the Kilcronaghan Centre, Tobermore on 14 October. Forty-five people from sixteen of the Federation's member societies attended the Seminar. Anne Breslin from the Charities Commission NI gave a very interesting and extremely useful talk about the Commission's role and approach to registration. Mid-Ulster District Council's Sean Henry gave a detailed account of the many and varied grants (from £600 to £8,000) available from the Council. However, these were only available as reimbursements of expenditure, not in advance, thus limiting their usefulness to small organisations. Richard Doherty, historian and author, gave an illustrated talk on the Great War, focusing on The War at Sea. It was an excellent account from the opening shots of the war when HMS Pathfinder to the sinking of the Lusitania. The final session saw Johnny Dooher discussing the process of arranging and delivering a varied programme, John Hulme on how to seek out and recruit new speakers (and topics), James Armour of Maghera Historical Society on planning and executing a local project and Pat Devlin on using the federation as a resource in Society activities.

During the year congratulations have been extended to the Craigavon and the Ards Historical Societies on reaching the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of their founding. The Executive Committee was delighted to receive invitations to the celebrations and presented each with the gift of an inscribed gavel to show their appreciation and best wishes for the next 50 years.

Now unfortunately FULS/FLHS relationship seem to have ~~has~~ broken down and this has occurred in a dispute over minutes of the last meeting held in Dublin in June 2017.

As a result, there has been little communication between the Federations. Unfortunately, no representatives from the southern Federation is here today.

There were no questions arising from the Secretary's report and the chairman passed on to the next item on the agenda

## **6. Financial Report and Accounts**

Treasurer Bridie Bradley reported on the published Report and Accounts for the 2016-2017 Financial year. She said FULS was a charity, registered with the NI Charities Commission, and a limited company and had to proceed the accounts in the format laid down by Companies House. She explained the layout of the report. In the year income over expenditure had been £3,308. The closing bank balance stood at £19,116. In relation to income, the balance of £222 was part of the grant received in cash from the European Parliament towards the cost of the Battlefields Trip. Membership income was down on the previous year mainly due to the closure of some societies. Insurance income had increased by £2,300 and that from Excursions and Events had increased considerably. Income from publications had reduced from £361 to £243, while Societies received five copies of *Due North* as part of their subscription. In relation to expenditure the Federation had changed our Brokers and reduced the premium by 50%. For this, thanks were due to Matt Herbison of the Antrim & District Historical Society who negotiated a new deal with another Broker. Travel costs increased

from £528 to £975, reflecting the cost of the Hidden Gems & Forgotten People Exhibitions. This was also reflected in the increase in Office Expenses from £898 to £2171. Internet charges reduced from £856 to £231.

### **Chairman's Address**

The Chairman then addressed the meeting about the events of the year since the last AGM.

By tradition, the AGM is held in the home place of the retiring Chairman.

The last time the Federation held its AGM in Downpatrick was in May 1982. That event was held in the Teachers' Centre in Mount Crescent, just around the corner and Dr Brian Turner was on hand to show the participants around the jail and explain how the District Council planned to convert it to a local Museum. The work started the following year and delegates could see what an amazing transformation it had been. This final year of his term as Chairman had not been as hectic as the first one, although the programme of Hidden Gems and Forgotten People Exhibitions had been very time-consuming. Without the willing help and cooperation of the Executive Committee it would have been difficult indeed. Although it might seem unfair to single out individuals, because everyone on the Committee was fully committed to the tasks assigned to them, there were a few that he would like to thank for their help to himself or for other reasons.

First, Johnny Dooher, the longest serving member of the Committee (long before he joined 10 years ago), for his dedication to the annual production of Due North, now in a new format and for his wise council and friendship.

John Hulme has been on the Committee since it was reformed in 2007 following Federation's rescue from oblivion, after the abrupt withdrawal of statutory funding. He was dedicated to the development of the Hidden Gems and Forgotten People Project and had travelled far and wide to promote it over the eight years of its existence. He had been involved through the planning and delivery of the Exhibitions Programme throughout the province, meeting with local societies in advance to assist with their planning and publicity, and helping to set them up, and at each launch. John also looked after the Speakers Register, which was an invaluable help to Societies in planning their Annual Programmes. The amount of time and effort that he put into this was phenomenal.

Pat McGuigan chaired the Events Committee that draws up the Federation's Programme. This year he was handed the planning and delivery of the Autumn Seminar in The Kilcronaghan Centre in Tobermore. His hard work and dedication in arranging the event; finding the speakers, organising the Agenda, marshalling his colleagues to chair the Sessions and the smooth running of the event itself, was an outstanding success with high satisfaction ratings recorded in the Seminar questionnaire.

Thanks were due to Matt Herbison of the Antrim and District Historical Society who helped the Federation find a new Insurance Company to look after the Public Liability scheme. One disappointment this year was the collapse of the Joint Trip with colleagues from the Federation of Local History Societies to Armagh, planned for the first Saturday in July. The hotel had been booked and the booking accepted. Unfortunately, at the last minute the hotel reneged on the contract, leaving insufficient accommodation for everyone that had been booked.

Looking to the future, there was plenty of scope for local research in relation to the Decade of Centenaries as we approach the end of the Great War and the impact of the aftermath on the returning troops and on their families and communities. In many ways it would be a challenging task for Societies, to find ways to work together across boundaries of identity and often opposing narratives, in a spirit of openness and a willingness to listen, despite these seeming contradictions. The impact of those times had shaped who we are today and a fuller understanding of how we got here can only be welcomed.

How could the Federation help? Seminars and workshops for societies would be on a range of 'How-To' topics, bringing together expertise from a variety of resources to focus on different

aspects of research. The Executive Committee would explore ways to help societies to cooperate in joint projects; find funding for their projects and publish their results. Many societies don't have publications. The Federation, through Due North can do that, either for such societies or members of the societies.

The wealth of information available these days on the internet is unprecedented. He could recall when, back in the late 1990s and early 2000s he would travel at least once a week to PRONI, then in Balmoral Avenue, to use the microfilm machines and paper records to research the townlands of Creggan and Newtownhamilton, paying for some copies of the census and valuation information and recording the other information in notebooks. There are 57 townlands in Creggan and 26 in Newtownhamilton, so one could imagine the time and effort involved. The Valuation Records were in huge tomes and one needed to consult also the valuation revision books which recorded changes in ownership or tenancy over time. Maps had to be ordered from OS, cost £5 each and took a while to arrive.

Now however, all had changed. Most if not all the documentation mentioned is now available on-line and, in some libraries can be downloaded to laptops or memory sticks. This was a great incentive and opportunity for the involvement of more people in researching their own locality.

The Executive Committee, in planning its Events Programme for 2018, would include a possible seminar to help societies make full use of these resources.

The Hidden Gems and Forgotten Project was into its second year, with exhibitions in Derry, Downpatrick and Omagh Libraries. It was currently in Letterkenny, launched last week and running until 18 November. The exhibitions had attracted favourable comment wherever they were staged. There were a few more to run, until about March next year. There was plenty of scope for Societies to take the project on board. It was a great way to engage with local communities and a way of involving our historians of the future, our school children.

Engaging with primary schools (second level education is more problematic) was not easy, but equally it can be done, and there are examples of this being successful. The Donegal Society has been engaging with the education system successfully for many years now and the meeting would hear later of another initiative from the Lecale & Downe Society.

The Chairman thanked the members for giving him the opportunity to lead the Federation. The past two years have had their ups and downs, but he hoped that, in the round, he had been able to contribute something positive to the continuing development of local studies.

## **8. Election of Officers and Committee**

The Chairman vacated the Chair and asked Dr Brian Turner, President, to conduct the elections of the Officers, after which he would resume the Chair for the election of the Executive Committee.

The President declared the positions in the Federation vacant. He said he was the President of the Federation. That position was not vacant. He was present at the meeting in 1974 when the decision was taken to form the Federation and he had been Secretary and was subsequently involved in the Federation Committee and its events from that time. He asked the Secretary for the nominations received?

At this point there was an intervention from the floor asking to speak before the elections. The President allowed this. The speaker, George McBride of the Banbridge Society said that he had looked at what was termed as valid nominations for office. They were not valid. It had already been pointed out that all nominations for office must go through the Secretary – not the Chairman. That was point one. As a consequence of that all the nominations according to the articles, must go through the floor.

The President thought the essential point was that valid nominations need to be received by the Secretary. He asked the Secretary what valid nominations she received to which the Secretary

replied that she had not received any. John Dooher (Immediate Past Chairman and member of the Executive Committee) said that it had been the practice for a number of years that with the approval of the Executive Pat Devlin had been acting Secretary in processing the AGM papers.

Despite objections Dr Turner proceeded to rule that existing nominations were invalid and that new nominations would be taken from the delegates present at the meeting

He then called for nominations for the Chair.

There were two nominations, Doreen McBride, Banbridge and Johnny Dooher, Strabane. After the count John Dooher was declared elected

A similar process followed for the Office of Vice-Chairman. There was only one nomination, so Patrick Greer, West Belfast and he was declared elected.

Bridgeen Rutherford and Patrick Devlin were nominated for the Office of Secretary and Bridgeen was declared elected.

Bridie Bradley was nominated for the office of Treasurer and as there were no further nominations she was declared elected.

The President said that there were seven vacancies for the Executive Committee. He took nominations for all seven, as follows -

Florence Chambers - Banbridge

Josie Herbison – Antrim & District

Aine Ni Duibhne – Co. Donegal

Pat McGuigan – Strabane

John Hulme – Carrickfergus

John Bradley – West Tyrone

Elizabeth Hoy – Cullybackey

As no further nominations were received, all were declared elected.

## **6. Appointment of Auditor**

Johnny Dooher, as newly elected Chairman resumed the business of the AGM. He called on Bridie Bradley to propose the appointment of the Auditor. Bridie proposed that Roisin Shanks be appointed for the incoming year. This was agreed.

## **7. Election of Vice-President**

The Chairman then moved the resolution to appoint Professor Brian Walker as Vice-President.

*Pursuant of Article 82.2. of the Articles of Association, The Executive Committee recommends the appointments of Professor Brian Walker as Vice-President of the Federation*

The resolution was agreed by acclamation.

Professor Walker thanked the meeting and said how honoured and pleased he was to have been appointed.

## **8. Society Reports**

There were several contributions from Societies including Lecale & Downe Historical Society - a new schools project and the distribution of surplus journals to local care homes; the Donaghadee Society – publication of the photographs by an eminent photo restorer, a photo exhibition to mark

the sinking of the Princess Victoria, working with the local Heritage Society in restoring the Sir Samuel Kelly Lifeboat; Carrickfergus Society about a new partnership with the Museum; Flame Gas Works and the lifetime award to their Treasurer from the Heritage Angels; Lisburn Society on the completion of their project to restore the memorials to the Huguenots.

On Members treasures, Josie Herbison produced an old pistol, rescued from the thatch of an old cottage, that had links to the Battle of Antrim; Florence Chambers described an old bible that had been rescued from a house burned by the Crown Forces who were pursuing the rebels after the same battle, and a mysterious unidentified object from Lisburn.

## **9. Guest Speaker**

Local Historian and playwright, Philip Orr, addressed the meeting on the subject of the *Great War at Home- scanning the pages of the Down Recorder to uncover how the Great War was experienced at the local level.*

The Down Recorder founded in 1835 was well written and edited local paper and a valuable historical resource. Philip traced the changing use of the Museum from its original role as a jail where some of the revolutionaries of 1798 were imprisoned and Thomas Russell hanged. It was later an army barracks to which the recruits for the Great War came. There was also a connection with the Easter Rising. Francis Sheehy Skeffington had a strong connection with Downpatrick and his killer, Captain JC Bowen Colthurst, had had responsibility for the Barracks. Through the pages of the Down Recorder he traced the changing use of the Ballykinler Camp. Expanded in 1914 to house the new recruits including for the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division. By the end of the war it housed thousands of recuperating soldiers. By 1920 it was an internment camp holding such men as Sean Lemass, future Taoiseach, and Peadar Kearney, who wrote the *Soldiers' Song*. By the 1940s the camp had been used for American GIs, Hungarian and Maltese refugees and Italian POWs. The early part of the war had led to economic prosperity due to increased food production and catering for the soldiers. By the end of the war this had changed due to higher inflation and the effects of the German submarine warfare. The newspaper documented the adverse effects on local community relationships of the Easter Rising and its aftermath, with increasing discord associated with the rise of Sinn Fein. Philip gave many other examples from the Down Recorder of the value of good local newspapers.

Johnny Dooher thanked Philip for his excellent address and announced the AGM closed.

## **Launch of Due North**

The President launched the 2018 edition of Due North, which he said was a credit to Johnny Dooher and an acknowledgement of the hard discipline of producing an annual journal.

The meeting then closed, and the attendees made their way to lunch before touring the museum and visiting the Church

**Appendix 1**  
**ATTENDEES**

NAME	SOCIETY
George Beattie	Banbridge Historical Society
Doreen McBride	Banbridge Historical Society
George McBride	Banbridge Historical Society
Pat Hanna	Banbridge Historical Society
Florence Chambers	Banbridge Historical Society
Andree Mooney	Banbridge Historical Society
Georgina Andersen	Banbridge Historical Society
Laura Close	Banbridge Historical Society
Ella Brown	Banbridge Historical Society
Philip Blair	Lecale & Downe Historical Society
Patrick Devlin	Lecale & Downe Historical Society
Rodney Downer	Lecale & Downe Historical Society
Berkley Farr	Lecale & Downe Historical Society
Wendy Osborne	Lecale & Downe Historical Society
Dr Brian Turner	President
Prof Brian Walker	Vice-President
Elizabeth Boyd	Cullybackey Historical Society
Bridie Bradley	West Belfast Historical Society
Patrick Greer	West Belfast Historical Society
Olivia Kelly	West Belfast Historical Society
Ronald Hamilton	West Belfast Historical Society
Martha Lavery	West Belfast Historical Society
John Dooher	Strabane History Society
Pat McGuigan	Strabane History Society
Sean McManus	Society not identified
John Bradley	West Tyrone Historical Society
Frank Collins	West Tyrone Historical Society
Fred Finch	Donaghadee Historical Society
Ken Wilson	Donaghadee Historical Society
Jane Wright	Donaghadee Historical Society
Robert Guthrie	Roe Valley Historical Society

Josie Herbison	Antrim Historical Society
Matt Herbison	Antrim Historical Society
Katie Orme	Antrim Historical Society
Liz Walker	Antrim Historical Society
John Hulme	Carrickfergus & District Historical Society
Helen Rankin	Carrickfergus & District Historical Society
Valerie Stevenson	Carrickfergus & District Historical Society
Ian Montgomery	Western Front Association – Antrim & Down Br
Joseph McCoy	Maghera Historical Society
Marian McGreevy	Maghera Historical Society
Helen Meehan	County Donegal Historical Society
Aine NíDuibhne	County Donegal Historical Society
Finny O’Sullivan	Lisburn Historical Society
Rosemary Bunting	Lisburn Historical Society
Bridgeen Rutherford	New Buildings Archaeological and Historical Society
George Rutherford	New Buildings Archaeological and Historical Society