

# **THE FEDERATION FOR ULSTER LOCAL STUDIES LTD.**

## **Minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Federation for Ulster Local Studies held on the 12 November 2011 at 11.00 am in the Tower Museum, Londonderry**

Prior to the formal business of the meeting Bridgeen Rutherford, Chair of the Federation, invited Doreen Corcoran to say a few words on the contribution of the late Annesley Malley to the Federation. Doreen spoke movingly of the contribution of a “courteous, considerate and scholarly man”, not only to the work of the Federation, but to the wider expansion and appreciation of local historical studies. A graduate of the Royal Agricultural College he was instrumental in setting up extra mural classes, was a founder member of the North West Society and became chairman of the Federation in 1978 later launching the Ulster Local History Trust. A minute’s silence was observed.

### **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cookstown Historical Society, Donaghadee Historical Society, Ballinderry Historical Society and Antrim and District Historical Society, George Beattie, Mrs Doreen McBride, Hugh Weir, Dr Murna Crozier and Dr Neil McGleenan.

### **In attendance**

A list of those who attended the AGM is recorded in the Appendix.

### **Minutes of 2010 AGM**

Acceptances of the minutes of 2010 AGM was proposed by Finny O Sullivan, seconded by Randal Gill and agreed as a true and correct record.

There were no matters arising.

### **Secretary’s Report**

In the absence of a Secretary, Johnny Dooher presented the Report as follows

Once again we can present a review of Federation activity that suggests a moderately successful organisation, achieving a satisfactory degree of success in some of its activities but with room for improvement in others. Recent attempts have been made at executive committee level to review the operations of the Federation and it is hoped that the incoming committee can take this evaluation a stage further into firm planning for the future.

#### *FULS Membership*

Membership of the Federation for 2009 –2010 stood at 98 and the figure for 2010-2011 was 97. Despite this apparent stability in membership it appears that there are quite a few local history groups that are not currently members of the Federation and we would welcome their inclusion if we knew how to make contact with them. How can we make contact with these hidden groups and bring them within the ambit of the Federation?

Memberships are currently being renewed and this is usually a long drawn out process despite the attempts made to provide for automatic renewal through a Standing Order system. Too many societies seem afraid of using this new system that would cut down on costs and work. Hopefully those not in the Standing Order system will soon see the light and sign up. Are all the societies represented here part of the Direct Debit system? If not, why not?

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Individual membership stood at 13 for 2009/10 and this appears to be the same for the current year. It is likely that more could be persuaded to take out this membership but the Federation has always prided itself on being an organisation of societies and will hopefully remain that way. There is provision also for associate membership from other organisations but this has now become defunct and is something that the executive committee could try to address in the coming year.

### *Executive Committee*

The executive committee held regular meetings during the year in Belfast at the Community Arts Forum offices and at the O'Fiach Library in Armagh. The position of Secretary remained unfilled and the thanks of all members are due to Pat Devlin for his continuing combining of the roles of secretary and treasurer. It certainly leads to a more efficient administration but at the cost of a very heavy workload for our overworked colleague. It appears that the position will once again remain unfilled at this AGM and it will be left to the incoming committee to grapple with this situation. Liam Devlin has over the past number of years helped out by volunteering to act as minute secretary and his role has been much appreciated in helping to relieve part of the secretary/treasurer's burdens; he is also registered as company secretary and is currently co-ordinating a programme to establish links with Europe –the Senior Volunteering Project - whereby exchange study visits between library/museum centres here in Ulster and in Europe can be arranged.

The committee has agreed to look again at how it operates and how it can do so more effectively and this will no doubt be given a high priority by the incoming chairman. Bridgeen Rutherford has been an exemplary chairperson in her two years in the post and her continued contribution on the committee will be highly valued. Pat Devlin has very effectively combined the roles of secretary and treasurer for a number of years and he is finding the workload stressful at times. Action must be taken now to relieve him of part of the burden and one starting point would be to fill the position of secretary, by co-option if necessary. Pat's work as treasurer and overall administration officer has been highly effective and long may it continue. Liam Devlin has acted conscientiously as minute secretary and Roddy Hegarty has very successfully undertaken the task of editor of *Due North* since its re-launch. The other committee members – John Hulme, Doreen McBride, Johnny Dooher, Neal McGleenon, Murna Crozier, Finny O'Sullivan and Malcolm Duffey – have contributed in various ways to the success of the Federation over the past year and we should express our appreciation of their involvement and commitment.

### *Sub committees*

For the previous two years the sub committees on Education, Events and Publications have contributed to the overall success of the Federation, allowing for planning of initiatives and freeing up more time at executive committee meetings to enable more in-depth analyses of the overall operation of the organisation. For various reasons this good work has not been as successful during the past year and the executive committee have set themselves the task of reinvigorating the sub groups as part of the overall administration of the Federation. One issue appears to be the small size of the executive committee and the need for the sub committees to recruit more members from the general Federation membership.

In the Education sub committee, headed by Roddy Hegarty, some limited progress was made in developing contacts with the third level colleges and it is hoped that this will bear greater fruit in the year ahead, allowing local studies to become a component part of the school curriculum. Ongoing contacts were developed with the recently established Library Service and in some parts of the province local libraries were made available for the meetings of the local history societies. Concerns

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have been expressed at the dispersal of previously centralised local collections and it is important that the Federation continues to monitor what is happening to local history sections in local libraries.

The Events/Programmes sub committee was headed by Bridgeen Rutherford and they were responsible for the development of the seminar programme. Unfortunately this did not live up to the successes of the previous year and two planned seminars for the spring of the year - a Townlands seminar at Omagh and a Labour conference in Belfast – had to be cancelled just days before they were due to take place because of lack of interest. The executive committee sought to explain the failure of these two planned events and concluded that they were not sufficiently appealing to the membership. The problem now is that there will be a reluctance to plan future seminars unless there is an obvious market for such events and closer contact between executive and membership is the only way that future conferences can be planned. Meetings like the AGM should help guide the planning for the year ahead and suggestions would be very welcome on possible seminar topics. The large number of anniversaries in the years ahead will be a challenge for the Federation and for local groups in general and it might be worthwhile having a discussion on how the Federation and its member groups responds to requests for involvement in such commemorative planning or activities.

The Publications committee was headed by Johnny Dooher and the remit was to look at developing contact with societies and the wider public. *Due North* is now well established and under the editorship of Roddy Hegarty sought articles and reviews from the broad spectrum of Federation members. Once again it proved difficult to get the range of articles that might have been expected and the review/report section fails to adequately represent the wide range of local studies that is carried on throughout the province. Last year it was suggested that the name of the journal should be reviewed but no action was taken due to the lack of feedback and some other means will be necessary to get a consensus view on whether to change the name or retain it. We need reader views on how far *Due North* meets the needs of the local studies audience throughout Ulster and would welcome comment and suggestions following this latest number. The other role of the Publications committee was to develop the Speakers' list for the use of societies in drawing up their programme and the credit for this must go to John Hulme who spent considerable time and energy in contacting groups and verifying details of speakers for inclusion in the Federation list. An additional seven names were added to the Speakers List and a further 2 included in the Tour Guides. Less time was devoted this year to the promotion of the *Hidden Gems and Forgotten People* project but it too is one of the ongoing successes of the Federation that has a relevance to every society. Recently there has been a campaign to ensure that more of our member societies contribute to the *Hidden Gems* project and John Hulme will briefly talk about this during the latter stages of the meeting. The dedicated website linked to the FULS website is well worth a visit for any group interested in doing a project on local heritage and the inclusion of contributions from the Federation of Local History Societies in the Republic opens the possibilities for ongoing contacts and collaborations among local groups on both sides of the Border.

### *Joint Federations Programme*

Contact with the Southern Federation has continued with 4 joint meetings and a shared visit. This year there were no major highlights like last year's Belgium trip but the annual get together at Banbridge at the beginning of July proved highly successful and enjoyable, with much credit due to Doreen McBride for the local organisation. So successful was this that a group from the southern Federation paid a second visit to Banbridge in September and were again very complimentary about the reception they received and the attentive care and consideration of Doreen and her local team. Already planning is under way about next year's visits. One is a planned joint trip to York in late April, with the annual north-south visit in July possibly taking place to Belfast and the Titanic exhibitions. Places on each of

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these will be at a premium and society secretaries will need to distribute the information to their members as soon as it arrives. Details about the York visit should be available by February and numbers will be limited to 25 from each Federation.

As mentioned earlier both Federations are seeking to increase participation in the joint *Hidden Gems and Forgotten People* project and a recent newsletter has sought to spread the word. Federation officers from each jurisdiction are prepared to provide short illustrated talks at member societies on what is entailed and it is hoped to have a majority of members involved in the programme by the end of the year.

### *Publications/Information*

*Due North* is once again available as planned and it is hoped that it will be widely read by the Federation membership. Sales from previous journals have been satisfactory and a substantial number of societies help to distribute the journal throughout the Federation membership. But not all societies purchase *Due North* and this is a disappointing response to the objective of having a Federation publication common to all the members and providing a service for the membership. It is one form of communication about what is happening in the wider field of local studies and should have a relevance to all that are interested in aspects of the past. There have been claims that *Due North* does not have articles from all areas and this is very likely true – there is little prospect of it being able to cater for items from each Federation member. But efforts are being made to make it broadly representative of the province of Ulster and appeals are regularly being made for articles and news items from under-represented districts. The editor would love to see it becoming more representative but is often constrained by lack of support from member societies and is in danger of becoming the platform for a small number of regular contributors. It is a Federation publication and only the support of Federation members will make it properly representative and appealing.

The periodic Newsletter is another important communications avenue for the Federation and is used to inform societies of forthcoming events and of wider developments in the local history scene. It would be good to see societies making more use of it to help publicise their events or report on what has happened. Increasingly a number of societies and other heritage organisation are using the Federation email system to publicise their forthcoming programmes and this is something that is to be welcomed. Opportunities to highlight society talks and other events is provided on the Federation website but once again is used by only a small percentage of members. This is where our organisation should be working for the good of the members but the members need to play an active role and become involved.

### *Conclusions*

So how do we define the past year? The administration of the Federation progressed satisfactorily and there were no major hiccups. The cancellation of the two seminars was certainly a setback and calls for a searching review of the level of interaction between the executive and the membership. How do member groups see the organisation called the Federation? Is it important to what they do at local level? Should they be more involved in common activities rather than concentrating solely on their local areas? Does the executive need to spend some time in reviewing its strategic plan to provide a greater relevance to the concept of a Federation of local societies? Such questions need to be addressed and an AGM provides the opportunity to initiate this process.

In conclusion therefore we can be reasonably 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 once again 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

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are being missed. Societies are the core elements of the Federation and their activities need to be highlighted as widely as possible. There is scope for new blood in the executive committee and it is recommended that societies or individuals should make contact with the chairperson or secretary if they feel someone from their area could contribute to the workings of the Federation; co-options and roles in the sub committees can be a useful way into the development of a more vibrant local studies scene within Ulster.

Adoption of the Secretary's Report was proposed by Roddy Hegarty, seconded by Jennifer Cunningham and agreed.

## **Trustees Report & Accounts.**

Pat Devlin, Treasurer, reported as follows

### *Introduction*

The Trustees Report for 2010-2011, which has been sent to every member society and individual member, is a statutory document that has to be presented to the membership at a general meeting. It sets out the Company Structure, Governance and Management arrangements, the Company's objectives and activities and its strategy and planning arrangements. In broad terms it records the Company's Achievements and performance in the year. It describes the Responsibilities of the Trustees and the application of Company Law to their activities.

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The accounts must be prepared in accordance with UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the surplus or deficit of the charity. The accounts must be subject to independent examination within the terms of the Companies Order.

These conditions have been met and the Report and Accounts have been approved by the Trustees and deposited with the Companies Register in Belfast as required by law. In addition to the copies issued to the membership, copies are available for inspection on the Federation's website.

A full account of the Federation's activities has already been provided in the Secretary's Report given by Johnny Dooher so there is no need to go into any detail here. This report is concerned with the financial statement contained in pages 9 to 12 of the Trustees Report.

### *Financial Statement*

2010-11 was an uneventful year in terms of the Federation's finances

Total income was £14,815; total expenditure, £11,225; surplus £3590- making our total Funds at the end of the year £13,694.

Included in the income is a figure of £8,511 shown as "Excursions/ Events". This is the total of fees paid by participants in the events organised by the Federation. These were

1. The joint FULS/FLHS Trip to Naas in July 2010
2. The Townlands seminar in Armagh in October and
3. The Joint trip to Brussels in April 2011

The total figure includes £5,741 actually received in the previous financial year but deferred to the 2010-11 year in accordance with accounting conventions that relate the transactions to the year in which they occur. In this case the funds were for the Brussels Trip planned for April.

The membership fees and the cost of Public Liability Insurance remain as before and the Executive Committee has no plans to alter these.

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The Federation as you know is now funded solely by the Membership's fees and since we made the transition to a wholly voluntary funded body the membership has remained loyal and has participated well in the events we have organised.

As a voluntary organisation our outgoings are modest because we don't carry the costs of staff and accommodation. So our surplus can be devoted completely to the growth of our membership services.

The Trustees Report & accounts were proposed by Robert Guthrie, seconded by Finny O'Sullivan and carried. There were no matters arising.

## **Chairman's Address**

Bridgeen Rutherford reported as follows

I welcome and wholeheartedly thank you for attending this years FULS AGM. I am particularly delighted to welcome you to my home city.

As you will have heard from the Treasurer's report, the Federation is in a more stable position financial position that it was 5 years ago when I took on the position of Vice-Chair. Membership has grown over this period to its current figure of 97. We thank our member societies and 13 individual members for your loyal support. The Executive Committee continues to work tirelessly and give freely of their time and commitment to ensure the smooth operation of Federation business.

It has been a disappointing year in so far as we unfortunately had to cancel two planned seminars at short notice. On closer examination the committee concluded that the reason for the lack of interest and support might have been topic related. We would be delighted to engage with you and get feedback today as to:

1. What topics/category of seminar and workshops interest members?
2. Where is the best venue/ place to such seminars/workshops?
3. Are field trips/outings preferable?

I would also ask that you go back to your respective society members and let us know of any suggestions for future seminars and workshops. This will also play an importance in the review of our Strategic Plan and subsequent Action plan, which will be high on the agenda for the incoming Executive Committee.

On the plus side, Due North, of which the new issue will be launched by the Mayor later on this morning, remains a success due to the resounding commitment of editor, Roddy Hegarty. We welcome new articles for review at all times and stated endeavour to have an even spread of articles printed in Due North. We would encourage more Societies to purchase and distribute these as a small profit can be made and ploughed back into local Societies.

Hidden Gems and Forgotten People project has been growing steadily and we welcome additional contributions. This has been an extremely successful joint project with the Federation of Local History Studies in the South. As Johnny has said, details of the joint visit to York next year will be finalized by February and we hope this will be as successful as the joint trip to Belgium, without the Ash Cloud of course. The Banbridge joint trip in July was also a great success.

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ALL (The Armagh Leuven Links) project is currently underway and Liam Devlin will be talking about this later. I am delighted to say that I just made the lower age limit of 50 and have been successful in volunteering to participate in this. Never before was I happy about reaching the 50 landmark!

The Speaker's List has proven helpful to local societies in accessing speakers and tour guides. Again we thank John Hulme for all his efforts in getting this off the ground and keeping it updated. All feedback on this is very welcome.

On behalf of the Federation I would like to thank the Cardinal O'Fiaich Archive and Library in Armagh for allowing us to use their facilities for our meetings. We also held some meetings in the Community Arts Forum at St Anne's Square in an attempt to rotate meeting venues to suit everyone.

I wish to personally thank every member of the Executive Committee for their support and encouragement over the last couple of years. This has helped keep me focused and grounded through somewhat challenging times. As Johnny has rightly said, we owe a great debt to Pat Devlin who keeps us all right whether we like it or not!

I would like to thank Roddy Hegarty for his support as Vice-Chair over the last 2 years and wish him well in the role of Chairman.

We welcome co-options to the Executive Committee at all times and are keen to have input from our member societies and individual members. Again this year, we are without a nomination for secretary but if anyone here today is interested or knows of anyone who would be up for a challenge please get in contact with me or any member of the Executive Committee.

I hope you will enjoy the programme today. Following the business of the meeting Mary Delargey from the Derry and Raphoe Diocesan Library Project will speak to us about the successful work carried out by the project team. Following this we will have the launch of the new edition of *Due North* by the Major Alderman Devenney at the Mayors Parlour in the Guildhall. As Roddy pointed out at the last committee meeting, the Tower Museum is an appropriate venue to hold this year's AGM. You will see on the front cover of *Due North* is portrayed "La Trinidad Valencera" which sank off the Donegal Coast in 1588 and was rediscovered by divers from the City of Derry Sub-Aqua Club in 1971. The exhibition to this Armada shipwreck is here in the Tower Museum.

### **Election of Officers & Committee**

There were single nominations for Chairman (Roddy Hegarty); Vice Chairman (Doreen McBride), and Treasurer (Patrick Devlin). All were elected unanimously.

There were seven nominees for the six-committee posts. Finny Sullivan decided to withdraw and the following six were elected unanimously: William Devlin, John Dooher, John Hulme, George Beattie, Dr Maurina Crozier, Dr Belinda Mehaffy.

At this point Bridgeen Rutherford vacated the chair and handed over the chairmanship to Roddy Hegarty.

### **Report on Joint FULS/FLHS meetings**

The chairman invited Johnny to give a quick update on events. Johnny said that arrangements with regard to the proposed York visit and other issues would be clearer following the joint meeting on the 21 November.

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## Reports from Individual Societies

1. Liam gave an account of the European project: Armagh – Leuven Links, by which Senior volunteers from FULS would spend three weeks in Leuven in spring 2012 working in the Municipal Archives. In autumn a reciprocal number from Leuven would come to Armagh for a similar time. Visits to several Societies would be proposed. A short power-point presentation was employed.
2. Pat gave an update on the work of the Ulster history Circle aided by a power-point presentation showing examples of recent Blue Plaque commemorations.
3. Rosemary Murphy presented “Glenelly at Home” the history of 53 Townlands and of the interest the project generated at home and abroad.
4. Bridgeen gave an update on the “Rossnagallaigh School 1839-1977” project, which was gathering interest locally.
5. Declan O Carroll reported that the County Donegal Historical Society had published *Donegal Annual – The First seven Years 1948-1953* as a single publication and that this was now available for purchase at a discount price, for the AGM only, of £15.00.

## Talk by Mary Delargey

Following the conclusion of the formal business of the meeting Mary Delargey gave an interesting talk on the Derry & Raphoe Diocesan Library Project.

## AOB

There being none, the meeting closed at 12.50 p.m.

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## APPENDIX

Ballinascreen Historical Society	Graham Mawhinney
Banbridge & District Historical Society	Jennifer Mawhinney
Carrickfergus & District Historical Society	Norman Kerr
Coleraine Historical Society	Doreen Corcoran
County Donegal Historical Society	John Hulme
Glenelly Historical Society	Jennifer Cunningham
Killultagh Historical Society	Pamela Hutcheson
Londonderry Naturalists Field Club	Trevor Adams
Newbuildings & District Arch. & Hist. Society	Helen Meehan
North Belfast Historical Society	Sean Beattie
North of Ireland Family History Society	Declan O'Carroll
North West Archaeological & Historical Society	Rose Mary Murphy
Roe Valley Historical Society	Finny O'Sullivan
Strabane History Society	Florence McKinney
Trinity College Dublin NI Association	Mairead Brennan
Ulster History Circle	Dick Brennan
West Belfast Historical Society	Paul Haslan
	George McLaughlin
	Ruth Olphert
	Bridgeen Rutherford
	Roddy Hegarty
	Ann Robinson
	Ian Bartlett
	Roy Hamilton
	Robert Guthrie
	John Dooher
	Michael Kennedy
	Liam Devlin
	Patrick Devlin
	Bridie Bradley