

**FEDERATION FOR ULSTER LOCAL STUDIES
SECRETARY'S REPORT - AGM 2019**

Introduction

This report sets out the activities of the Executive Committee between the 2018 AGM and the 5 October 2019. I will update the AGM on any matters not in the Report that occurred after its completion and will answer questions on any of the matters in the report.

Governance

The attendance record of the members of the Executive Committee in between the 2018 AGM and 5th October 2019 is recorded in the following table.

Committee member	Possible	Actual
James Armour	1	0
Patrick Boner	9	8
Bridie Bradley	9	9
Patrick Devlin	9	9
John Dooher	9	9
Jonathan Gray	3	2
Robert Guthrie	7	4
John Hulme	9	9
Josephine Herbison	9	6
Joseph McCoy	8	7
Katie Orme	9	8

In January 2019 James Armour resigned from the Committee, as did Patrick Boner on 14 September. On 23 March 2019 Robert Guthrie, Roe Valley Historical Society, was co-opted to serve on the Committee as was Jonathan Gray, Killeeshil and Clonaneese Historical Society on 3 August 2019. Both new members were registered as Directors at Companies House and as Trustees with the Charities Commission NI.

The Committee's main meeting place was Belfast Central Library, who kindly provide it free of charge, for which we thank them. Two meetings were held outside Belfast, in Rascahan House, Ballykelly, Limavady on 6 July and Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey on 31 August 2019.

Planning Meeting

On 19 January 2019 the Executive Committee held a Planning Day at Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey. The purpose of the day was to review the Federation's purpose and place in the local history environment, what members' expectations and requirements from us were, what were the gaps that needed filling, where we should concentrate our efforts, how to work more closely with other agencies to achieve our aims and what were the deliverables over the next year.

New website

In February 2019 the Executive Committee appointed a Project Board to arrange for the design, development and delivery of a replacement website. The existing site was launched in 2007 and has been in constant use since then. It provides a continuous record of the Federation's activities since 2007, with illustrated reports of AGMs, Seminars and Workshops, trips to the RoI, Great Britain, and in Europe, and regular Newsletters. The Speaker's Register was introduced in 2010 and continuously updated over the years.

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However, the site required a major upgrade to a modern design with more flexible administrative processes, with features such as E-Commerce, and capable of being managed and updated by non-specialised individuals after suitable training.

The first task of the Project Team, Patrick Devlin, Patrick Boner and Joseph McCoy, was to review the existing website, identify the improvement and additions that were needed, and to develop a detailed specification for issue to prospective designers/ developers. This process took many months and involved seven iterations of the draft Specification, each more detailed than the previous one. As well as retaining most of the existing functionality, the new site will provide a range of e-commerce functions, including the ability to renew subscriptions and PL Insurance, recruit new members, book and pay for events and trips and purchase Federation publications. The specification included a request for a new design for the logo and colour scheme.

While this was going on the Team sought to identify suitable developers. This involved a widespread internet search and reviewing possible candidates based on the work they had already completed. We also wanted to select a platform that was widely used and relatively straightforward to administer. This pointed towards WordPress. Used by more than 60 million websites, including 33.6% of the top 10 million websites as of April 2019, WordPress is the most popular website management system in use. Based on an analysis of the web search, four potential developers were identified.

Following approval from the Executive Committee on 1 June 2019, the specification was issued to four selected designer/developers, with a response target date of 5 July 2019. Of the four invited, two responded with detailed proposals and costs, one did not respond, and the other, having initially indicated the intention to respond, subsequently declined to bid.

The Project Team, before meeting the developers, reviewed the websites they had nominated for reference for visual appeal, complexity of structure, any E-Commerce features, menu and navigation systems etc. The Team also compared the Specification with the bids, to establish the extent to which they met each one.

On 2 August the Project Team met the developers separately to review their proposals, clarify the technical issues involved, question their approach and discuss the proposed costs. Each interview lasted for approx. two hours and proved invaluable in clarifying a wide range of issues, including an improvement in the Teams understanding of the many technical issues involved.

The final selection, approved by the Executive Committee on 3 August, was to appoint Branding Bay, Donegall Square West, Belfast, to design and develop the new website and logo.

We hope to launch the new site at the AGM, but since the contract has been awarded only on 5 August, this may be a little ambitious. Thanks to the Project Team for the hard and detailed work that they put into developing the Specification, analysing the bids and interviewing the developers.

There are a small number of Societies that have a web sites maintained by the Federation that will be affected by the new website. The Committee will have discussions with those Societies about their future options.

Membership

The number of Society members remains at 94. During the year the Killowen Historical Society failed to renew membership and two new members; the Friends of FE McWilliam Gallery and Studio, and the Roe Valley Ancestral Researchers, were accepted into membership. The number of Individual Members stands at 20, including four new members since the AGM.

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Hidden Gems and Forgotten People

The final Exhibition was held in Carrickfergus Library from 10 November 2018 to 8 December 2018. A full report of the launch event in the Museum can be found on the Federation's website at <http://www.fuls.org.uk/hgfexhibitioncarrickfergus101118.html>.

The Federation's programme of Hidden Gems and Forgotten People Exhibitions, supported by Libraries NI, has now been completed. However, the search for new Gems and People continues. The website is available at <http://www.hidden-gems.eu/hgevents.html>. The material accumulated during the programme has been preserved and is available for loan, in whole or in part, to any Society that wishes to make use of it.

Other Activities

During the year-

Three newsletters were issued, with news of planned events and enhanced services;

- The Speaker's Register, listing 150 speakers covering some 560 topics, continues to provide a valuable source of material for societies planning their annual programme of events. A new category Professional Genealogists has been added as an aid to those members that may be interested in getting professional help with their family researches. The addition of this new category implies no endorsement of the work of those listed.
- a new edition of *Due North* was launched in at the AGM on 17 November 2018;
- The Spring Seminar, attended by 30 people, was held in the Cardinal O'Fiaich Library and Archive on Saturday 30 March 2019. *Damian Woods*, Seanchas Ard Mhacha, spoke with passion and authority about the tragic events of the 12 June 1889 when some 80 people, one third of them children, perished on a train Excursion from Armagh to Warrenpoint. It was a convergence of circumstances of human error and ineptitude, compounded by inadequate safety processes. Yet no one was held responsible. *Prof. Brian Walker*, Federation Vice-President, gave a wide-ranging talk about the 1918 General Election after the end of the Great War. He sketched the development of better understanding between the traditions over the century since then and went on to describe the background to the election and the issues involved, including the question of widening the franchise. There were contributions from three people about improving the management of societies; *Jonathan Gray*, Killeeshil and Clonaneese Historical Society, on the development and content of the Society's website; *Josie Herbison*, Antrim and District Historical Society, on 'The Perfect Society' (some tongue-in-cheek advice about how improve service to the members); and *Patrick Boner*, Donegal Historical Society, on on-line sources for historical research. The final talk was by *James Kane*, O'Neill Country Historical Society, whose wide-ranging description of the death and destruction that flowed from the Spanish Flu of 1918-1919, and which killed more people in 11 months than died in the five years of the Great War, brought those terrible events into a clearer perspective
- the Federation's website continued to provide additional information about members' programmes and events of general interest and its news section provided updates of information since the last AGM. To comply with the new EU Data Protection law introduced in May 2018, a new Privacy Statement was added to the website, at <http://www.fuls.org.uk/privacystatement.html> .

Working with others

The Executive Committee continued to develop working relationships with other groups-

- Federation of Local History Societies in co-operating in joint events and programmes. Activities include joint membership trips in Ireland, joint seminars and workshops covering

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the whole of the island of Ireland; joint projects e.g. a joint website on Hidden Gems and Forgotten People. In the current year, these included –

- Continuing work on the joint Hidden Gems and Forgotten People project. A possibly major issue for the domain name for the Hidden Gems &c website, hidden-gems.eu, is that it could be adversely affected by a ‘no-deal’ BREXIT, since the ‘.eu’ extension could not remain registered in the UK. Either we would need to transfer the domain to the Federation of Local Histories for them to maintain the website or we would need to select another domain e.g. hidden-gems.uk. We will know more by the time of the AGM.
- Several meetings of the Joint Federation/FLHS committee were held in the period with the main focus of discussion was the joint trip to Armagh City on Saturday 28 September. Over 60 people, including twelve from FULS, visited a number of historic sites including both Cathedrals, the Robinson Library, No 5 Vicar’s Hill, the Cardinal O Fiaich Library and Archive and Armagh County Museum. This was followed by a reception in the Palace by the Mayor of the Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Council and a dinner in the City Hotel. The FLHS group stayed overnight as did some of the FULS members, some of who also stayed with the FLHS group for a visit to Navan Fort on the Sunday morning.
- Thirteen Federation members participated in a visit by the Federation of Local History Societies to Northumbria in April 2019.
- An Ulster Local History Trust Seminar, on the subject of *Borders and Boundaries*, is planned for 19th October in the Cardinal O’Fiaich Library and Archive.
- The Federation was invited to join a broadly-based group including environmental and heritage groups, local councils and museums, tasked with developing a strategic plan for historic and environmental protection.

Society Matters

Cavehill Conservation Campaign

Congratulations to Cormac Hanna and his committee on achieving the prestigious The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, the culmination of over thirty years dedicated work to preserve the Cave Hill as a natural and unspoiled environment. The award was presented by Her Majesty’s Lord Lieutenant for the County Borough of Belfast, Mrs Fionnuala O’Boyle CBE, at Belfast Castle on Tuesday 24 September 2019. The Federation Treasurer, Bridie Bradley and Executive Committee member, John Hulme, were guests at the ceremony.

Patrick Devlin

Secretary

5 October 2019